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Poverty and environment in Africa: Which way ahead?

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Poverty and Environment in Africa: Which Way Ahead?

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July 1, 1991 - one of a series of regional NGO preparations for the United Nations Conference
Environment and Development, scheduled to take place in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992.
organised by the Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI) and ENDA, other NGO
meetings have taken place in Tunisia and the Dominican Republic. Two more are planned
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POVERTY AND ENVIRONMENT IN AFRICA: WHICH WAY AHEAD?

Africa is poor; that is the view from the North. But many Africans, when they consider its natural and human resources, refuse to accept poverty and Afropessimism as inevitable. At the same time however, this refusal means that one has to face the situation head-on and take measures to change it.

But the translation of this desire into policies comes up against a number of more or less rigid constraints, such as: debt repayment, reviving growth at all costs, and, at the same time, the capacity to manage environment-friendly policies...

Governments, their advisors and financial backers are forced to choose between a number of urgent problems and priorities, each jostling for position. They then come up against the burning question: *which way ahead, and how is one to improve the lot of the majority, while at the same time raising the standard of living of the most deprived and marginal?*

Even the outline of an answer sends one back to a number of basic questions:

1. what kind(s) of poverty?
2. what sort of relationships between the environment and poverty?
3. with what strategies and policies should these problems be faced?

1. WHAT KIND(S) OF POVERTY?

Apart from unpleasant overtones of charity, the concept of poverty has the added disadvantage of being a sort of catch-all, devoid of practical value. This study can only outline its essential typology.

1.1 A global poverty flows from the economic and political relations between North and South.

Within the world market, Africa hardly figures either as an outlet or as a supplier, or in the process governing the fixing of prices or the development of terms of exchange. Statistically, the economic weight of sub-Saharan Africa (South Africa excepted) is roughly equivalent to that of Belgium.

Submission to the dominant models — from consumption to economic thinking — further darkens the picture. And the standard of living and lifestyle that serve as points of reference are clearly inaccessible, at least for the next two decades, to all but 5% of Africans, the rest being often condemned to impoverishment and bitterness.

1.2 A distinction between objective and "subjective" types of poverty.

Objectively, many Africans live in impoverished circumstances. Children and adults suffer from malnutrition, as well as high morbidity and mortality rates, the situation of women

¹ A provisional document drawn up by Enda Tiers Monde, Dakar, May 1991, and presented at the workshop of the African Development Bank, Abidjan, on May 16th, 1991.

is often very difficult, and there is a large number of handicapped persons. Moreover, in terms of income, a significant proportion of the population is below or near the absolute poverty line. Ultimately, certain (fortunately few) human groups give up the struggle for life, and find themselves in desperate circumstances. However, depending on the area, these kinds of objective poverty are sometimes counterbalanced by solidarity and by certain dynamic cultural values.

Other kinds of poverty are evidenced by unequal access to the centres of economic activity and services, by more or less lively networks of bonded groups or clientelism, and people's varying degrees of disenchantment with a Western lifestyle that is, in practice, closed to the majority. In many countries and regions, socio-spatial disparities reflect a peripheral poverty: populations isolated from everything, feel abandoned and see no future except in migration.

1.3 "Diluted" (i.e. rural) types of poverty coupled with "concentrated" (i.e. urban) types of poverty.

Certain sorts of poverty may be analyzed in "pockets", especially in areas where there is a "lack of resources", or where disintegration is advanced. Such poverty evidences specific characteristics that are perceived differently by those who experience them on a day-to-day basis, and by those whose job it is to take them into consideration.

1.4. An ambiguous poverty, linked to overpopulation.

An excessively high demographic growth, an overpopulated continent: If certain experts who accuse Africans of irresponsible behaviour are to be believed, this is the root cause, and most obvious reason for poverty in Africa². However, isn't the real problem the *ratio of populations to resources* within each country and region?

In fact, the relationship between poverty and population can only be fully understood when set against other factors: local production capacity, trade, types of techniques, social organisation, culture, etc... And the answers vary widely from one area to another: too many people (and children) sometimes hamper development, while too few sometimes prevent it.

1.5 Politics and policies create different types of poverty.

Everyone is aware of it, although it has, for a long time, seldom been discussed. First of all, many policy *orientations* and *practices* over the last twenty or thirty years, and more recently, many aspects of adjustment policies have maintained poverty or made it worse.

And until the recent wave of democracy, various forms of economic, cultural, social, religious and political *oppressions* have survived or spread.

Finally, confrontations, and *armed struggles* persist: it is the most deprived who pay the highest price, and Africa is the continent with the greatest number of refugees.

There is thus a whole range of difficult situations that may be analysed in terms of deprivation, destitution, flagrant injustice or sometimes distress, each of which calls for measured and flexible responses.

² To put right this poverty, USAID is already planning to supply 203,254,000 condoms and 91,495,300 contraceptive pills by the year 2,000.

Of course, each of these situations belongs to its own peculiar environment, but it cannot be said that the only poverty that matters is that which is directly or essentially linked to events or situations related to the environment.

The fact is that most identifiable types of poverty have an environmental component, and the questioning of the historical symbiosis of particular societies and their environment constitutes the principal cause of the trouble and destruction that cost the mass of people most.

2. WHAT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ENVIRONMENT AND POVERTY?

Ultimately, one thing is certain: *poverty is often generated by the degradation of the environment, which, in its turn, often accentuates poverty.* We have yet to appreciate, through living examples, the overlapping of the process of environmental change and poverty or impoverishment.

2.1 Many major environmental threats are capable of generating or increasing poverty.

First of all there are unpredictable risks: drought, locusts, floods, cyclones, epidemics: AIDS and cholera provide dramatic illustrations of this type of relentless danger, which affects first and foremost the least educated, the least well informed, the most malnourished and the poorest.

Add to these, creeping dangers such as famine, endemic disease, certain kinds of pollution: human beings, along the length of rivers and coastlines, or in industrial zones, are drawn into processes that rob them of their livelihood, their health and their lives...

When these problems arise, it is always the most deprived who are the most affected and the least assisted, and who find it most difficult to regain acceptable living conditions.

2.2 A certain kind of environmental "protection" sometimes operates to the detriment of some the most deprived human groups.

This takes place on several levels. The IKS of Uganda are one of the best-known examples of a people chased from traditional lands that have been turned into a protected zone or park.

On another level, standards aimed at protecting the environment, consumption and health, block access to foreign or national markets, and *penalise African producers and traders.* The same is true of quotas, determined as they often are, by the self interest of the industrialised nations: thus, by claiming that the Third World is responsible for about half of atmospheric pollution, there is a danger that it will have forced upon it pollution quotas that will dangerously check any hopes of industrialisation.

The environment, as it is understood in the North, and especially what may be referred to as "ecologism" can harm the most deprived, and lead to disastrous measures and actions affecting certain groups or population types in the South.

2.3 In Africa, the overlapping processes of destruction of the environment and impoverishment are the vital link between environment and poverty.

2.3.1 A number of *historical exploitative mechanisms* affect African environments: tens of millions of people and a whole range of products and minerals. This process is perpetuated today through imposed techniques and more or less enforced monetarisation,

leading to *extractions* from the subsoil, water, biomass, etc., *without proper compensation*. Every kilo of peanuts takes away a little of the fertility of the Sahel.

This has created an accumulated, hidden, uncalculated *environmental debt* at the expense of the African environment, and is one of the factors responsible for poverty in Africa.

2.3.2 A number of sequences of *destruction of the sub-arid environment*, and of the reduction to beggary of pastoral communities may be reconstructed. This has been the experience of certain Peuls, Tuaregs, Somalian semi-nomads or Turkana. Drought and problems with the management of grazing lead to overgrazing, the sale or death of herds, social disintegration, exodus, and the breaking-up of the group and its values.

2.3.3 And there is another sequence: export crops → traditional land management in crisis → impoverishment.

In fact, cash crops and monetarisation disrupt crop rotation and farm management systems, and lead to excessive levels of land clearing, and to the excessive felling and sale of firewood; all of these factors create erosion and lower fertility.

The result is a "farmer poverty" that feeds migration from the countryside, so that there are times when a village no longer has enough men to cultivate, maintain or reconstruct the environment.

2.3.4 For its part, the *"infra-urban" sequence (environment → shanty towns → poverty)* affects an increasing number of children as well as men and women³. penniless migrants, and those forced out of city centres, have no alternative but shanty towns, where they are not only obliged to live with refuse, rats, and insects, but have little access to education, health care or public services in general, and are located far from the most economically active urban areas.

Such conditions give rise to malnutrition, disease, high mortality rates, few educational opportunities, and little possibility of finding well-paid, permanent employment.

The infra-urban environment both creates and helps to perpetuate poverty.

Surely, such an overlapping of processes that destroy the environment and generate poverty must lead us to consider common strategies for the future, aimed at achieving what one might call "environmental development".

3. WHAT STRATEGY AND WHAT POLICIES?

It is said that a better tailoring of structural adjustment programmes to the conditions for long-term growth, would make it possible to solve at a stroke both the problems of poverty and of the environment, often regarded as two sides of the same "social" reality. The classic economic view is that the only cure for poverty is growth, and the only cure for upsetting the environment, yet more growth.

Certainly, in the West, long-term growth has been accompanied by the gradual absorption of the greatest "pockets of poverty", while at the same time creating other social and environmental problems. But there is nothing to prove that such a growth

³ In ten years, half of Africa's population will be living in towns, and between 30 and 60% in precarious housing areas.

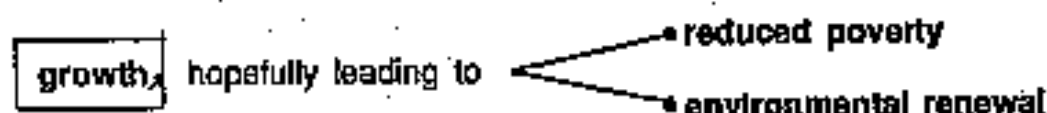
process on the African continent, assuming it were feasible to get it going, would, today, have similar effects, without transfer policies that are difficult and take a long time to put in place. What distinguishes the problems of poverty and the environment in Africa and a number of other parts of the world, is their *sheer scale* (in certain areas, it is a question of practically reconstructing the environment and society⁴) and extremely urgent nature.

However, such reconstruction comes up against the extreme difficulty of imagining — much less implementing — strategies and policies capable of providing quick answers, or even the beginning of answers to the problems of poverty and degradation of the environment, and which may, at the same time, stimulate long-term growth.

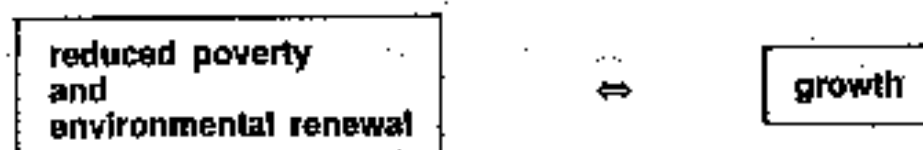
This is a major concern that marks the inevitable point of departure of some possible prospects.

3.1. Strategy outline

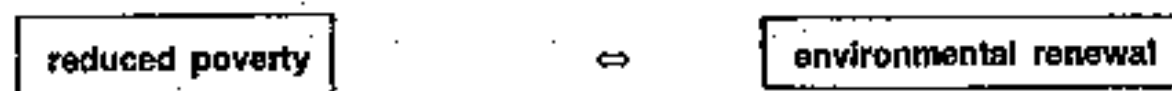
A strategy for sustainable development, turning the classic linkage on its head...



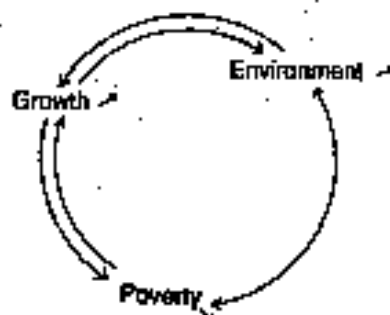
... and the pursuit and implementation of processes aimed at:



... all the while setting in motion a loop of complementary interaction:



All of which may be formulated thus:

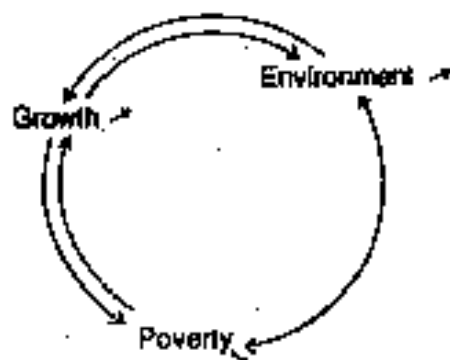


Such a strategy implies a whole series of secondary strategies, themselves the basis for defining policies.

⁴ Not dissimilar to the task of reconstructing Europe in 1945.

PRINCIPAL STRATEGIES

STRATEGIC AIM



1. Know and understand *"differently"* T
 - 1.1 Combine modern knowledge and popular wisdom.
 - 1.2 Always ensure the *"future"* dimension. T
 - 1.3 *"Turn back"* schools and universities towards environmental development. 2
2. Think and act through *cultures*, taking into account the diversity of peoples. 2
3. Ensure popular *"participation"* in decisions and action. 3
 - 3.1 Define the *"common good"* and life styles, and shared decision making. 1.1
 - 3.2 Several forms of on-going collaboration between the state and associations or groups. 1.3
 - 3.3 Popular involvement in evaluation and control.
4. Identify basic needs and *"kinds of poverty"* and make them the focus of research and action.
5. Maximise the mobilisation of human and other resources on the spot. 1.1, 2, 3
 - 5.1 Adjust demography locally according to resources.
 - 5.2 Reorient or remodel all research and action so as to maximise employment and task work.
6. Create *synergies*: growth/environment/fight against poverty. T,3
7. Pay careful attention to the *coherence* of local, national, continental and *international* orientations. 2
 - 7.1 Extend Third World international solidarity.
 - 7.2 Contribute to increasing the weight of the Third World in international negotiations.

* Mass education with the aid of teaching methods explaining ecology, economy technology and city culture .

T: Orientations extending to all elements of the schema.

1, 8, A, 3, 2 ...: Elements strongly connected with the stated orientations.

SECONDARY STRATEGIES

Educational strategy linking technology, economy, environment, *"the people's wealth"*, and diversified cultural development. 1.1



- A.1 Rural environmental organisations adapted to cultural and ecological areas. 2
- A.2 "Functional" mass literacy campaigns; environmental/technological material in African languages. 2
- A.3 Ecopoles in the cities. B.1, C, E

Strategy of "combined" and environmentally viable technologies. 1.1, 1



- B.1 Maximum increase of creativity and innovation. A.3, C
- B.2 Adaptation of "technological stocks" C.2
 - from 18th century industry
 - from local, traditional technology
 - from various parts of the Third World. 7.1
- B.3 A number of state-of-the art techniques (jointly promoted by several countries)

Strategy of evolutive "popular urban economy". 3, 5.1, A.3, B.1



- C.1 Self-build schemes, and self-run town planning. 3, B.2
- C.2 Encouragement of employment and of the development of small jobs. A.3, B.3
- C.3 Expansion of service activities (including certain high technology ones). B.2, B.3
- C.4 Better integration of industries into the urban economic fabric.

Strategy for environmental management of the countryside, and for the improvement of the standard of living of rural people by categories and areas. 3, 5.1, A.1.

Strategy for responding both to the most serious instances of "poverty" — particularly affecting women and children — and to major natural risks. 1.1, 5.1



- F.1 More vigorous coordinated planning between African and Third World countries; regional cooperation and integration.
- F.2 "Different" debt (Adjustment with a more human face). 2, 4, 6, A, B, C, D
- F.3 Environmental debt taken into account.
- F.4 Stable prices for agricultural produce (D, E) and other raw materials, as well as for energy.
- F.5 Flexible protection and policies vis à vis the multinationals. C.2
- F.6 Struggle against Northern models of consumption, lifestyles, and certain norms. 1.1, 1.3, 2, 3

to...

3.1.1 Both growth on the one hand, and, on the other, the struggle against poverty and for a positive development of the environment, must be considered *at the same time, as well as on the macro and micro levels*, even if the point of departure of effective action derives from one or the other of these levels. A brief illustration: if these policies were to be carried out, everyone agrees that farming should provide adequate income margins, which means that one must deal at once with the microeconomic conditions of production and markets, the macroeconomic conditions to that end (protection, currency parity...), and ecological conditions.

3.1.2 No one can doubt the need to achieve, at one time or another, higher productivity, GDP, etc. All the same, it has taken Europe two centuries, and considerable suffering to make the lives of the majority tolerable. One must confess that in Africa, the sheer weight of poverty is such that there seems little hope of a few privileged enclaves achieving, within a reasonable space of time, sufficient growth to "pull" the rest behind them. Essentially: *there will be no growth unless it involves the mass of people — i.e. the "poor".*

3.1.3 But the improvement of the situation, marked by the indicators, cannot be an end in itself. Isn't the collective aim rather to attain a certain style and quality of urban and rural life for the majority?

In short, the kind of growth that should be encouraged only makes sense if it leads to *living conditions acceptable to, and desirable for all*, to a collective lifestyle project that expresses the variety and dynamism of cultures, as well as the aspirations they nurture.

3.1.4 The democratic breeze beginning to blow through Africa means that there has perhaps never been a more propitious time for such a project, which the collective will can and should support.

The success of this project is no pipe dream: *Africa's poor are seldom "defeated"*. Their systems of economic and environmental reference may be disrupted, but they will work towards constructing new ones.

3.1.5 If *improving living conditions* becomes a basic concern of people, it will have a number of psychological and social repercussions, in terms of motivation and responsibility, which can only have a positive impact on production, productivity and "classic" quantitative growth⁵.

⁵ This prospect is credible within large-scale popular operations carried out mostly by young people, such as the "set-seta" in Dakar — engaged in cleaning and beautifying the town (cf.: "Soudain, les murs de Dakar fleurirent sous les fresques" ("Suddenly, the walls of Dakar blossomed with frescoes") in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 445, Paris, April 1991, p. 28).

Similarly, regarding the health environment, one must remember, as Malenbaum's study shows, that while a direct causal relationship between improved health and production levels cannot be proven, it is certainly true that better health has an indirect, positive impact on production by enhancing people's ability to carry out tasks, their sense of personal responsibility and their desire for greater well being. This would no doubt make a valuable contribution to the overall improvement of the environment. One can even anticipate that such motivation will have other favourable results, such as stimulating interest in birth control.

Thus the triple combined aim — greater growth, less poverty, a better environment — should become credible, and should serve as a point of departure for a series of strategies and policies: the schema found on pages 5-6 presents, among other possibilities, an idea of what could be a relatively coherent course of action.

3.2. Overall Implications of the strategic choice

It would be overambitious to attempt to cover completely in a very limited space, secondary strategies and the policies that should be implemented. The aim of this study is much more modest: it sets out to outline the main practical policies that seem to be the most essential to this approach, even if they may seem rather unorthodox.

3.2.1 The first policy implication of an environmental strategy for growth (or if you will, environment-development, or, simply, environmental development), is that considerations of growth and activities related to it, must form part of a coherent vision of space. In other words, what used to be referred to as *land management* should no longer be viewed as a mere appendage of the development programme, but rather as one of its essential and *permanent* components. This means, for instance, that all health or education policies must be seen in terms of ecological, economic and cultural "basins", or if you like, *ecocultural zones*. With a bit of luck, the first positive effect of such a policy would be a reduction of migration from the countryside to the towns; the second, would be to give people an added reason to fight for improved living conditions.

3.2.2 This leads inevitably to the need to base research on *new criteria* for decision making, and the identification of priority programmes and zones.

Economic profitability is no longer the central and only deciding factor: it is taken into account from the preliminary studies and before the decision-making stage, and on the same level of importance as *social and environmental profitability*. Each specific strategy or policy must therefore take into account from the outset the potential social and environmental impact.

3.2.3 Another implication of the new approach would seem to be both cultural and educative. The environment and its management, adapted technologies, the local and regional economy, living spaces and conditions must be organised differently, they must be intersected and take, both in teaching and research, the central place that is rightfully theirs.

The effects of such a policy may be seen on different levels:

- First of all, there are practices and knowledge in local cultures and environments (popular participation and management, traditional knowledge and know-how) that may be useful to the community as a whole, and, in particular, may reduce the cost of *economic and social integration*, or contribute to them being confronted differently. For instance, 40% of the most common illnesses can be cured with medicinal plants...

This approach is imperative, bearing in mind that the African continent's lack of competitiveness is in part due to the fact that it is obliged to manage systems of organisation imported without careful thought⁶.

⁶ Asia's essential comparative advantage is probably that it has been able to introduce more endogenous or better "combined" systems of organisation in the areas of health, education, town planning, and transport.

• The success of such a policy obviously depends on an intelligent educational programme countering imported or exclusively urban models of consumption or production. This does not preclude the use of "modern" techniques or goods, but it does mean refusing novelty for its own sake, as an intrinsically "satisfying" factor of social differentiation, and as a major consideration in decisions and investment. Social competition for foreign fashions is so costly in terms of imports that it must be curbed.

Moreover, active pressure against the dominant urban model only makes sense if it is coupled with urban alternatives, and with a very active land management policy — a balance in space, then, of health, education, sanitation and leisure.

3.2.4 There is an implication of another order — based on the adopted approach — that relates to production and techniques. Unless productivity is significantly and gradually improved, simply managing living conditions will come up against limits. If, for example, one wished to improve the health of one sector of urban or rural people, but failed to provide them with lasting income growth, rural people will neither be able to achieve the levels of sanitation necessary for preventative health measures, nor be able to afford to pay for care and medicines.

But one must regard the environment both as a constraint and a set of resources, a support of activities and innovations. More intensive farming methods do make for higher productivity and incomes, but at the same time, they must be seen as systems for replanning land. In many cases, a judicious mix of crops and composting boosts yields and reduces expenditure on fertilizers and pesticides, limiting the harmful effects of chemicals which are often dangerous both to the environment in the broadest sense, and to human beings.

• Such examples point one in the direction of today's international economic relations, which *themselves* need to be reconsidered. Failure to attempt to establish a fair price for raw materials and, no doubt, failure to maintain flexible protection of the most agriculturally fragile areas will mean that all policies aimed at defending the environment and fighting poverty — and in particular rural poverty — will have a limited effect. The idea behind the Uruguay Round, which should limit all agricultural safeguards and achieve a great unified market, calls for vigilance and some reservations.

3.3 Implications for the urban context

Urban environmental development policy should break the cycle: underemployment → shanty town → difficult day-to-day life → degradation of the environment by those who live there.

Rather than eradicating shanty towns (an unrealistic proposition) what needs to be done is to implement gradual change, the spread of sanitation and town planning in *collaboration* with the youth and the population as a whole. This must go hand in hand with an *employment* policy, particularly in the popular urban economy mistakenly referred to as "informal", and which is both the framework for activity and the livelihood of between 20% and 60% of the population depending on the city. This is achieved by *easing regulations* that hamper popular urban activities⁷.

Urban development policies, anti-poverty and pro-environment policies should not be confused either with the beautification of cities — for instance, squares in less well-off

⁷ Up to a point, of course, as long as human life and dignity or the functioning of the economy or society are not affected (e.g. drugs trafficking).

areas —, or with humanitarian aid, which is limited to a tiny number of people (down-and-outs, the handicapped...). The real aim is to change the basic concept of the city in the eyes of city dwellers, and to "build" the city with them. A beautiful city following the European or American model would encourage lifestyles incompatible with the development of cooperative management. Less money should be spent on prestigious buildings, perhaps less on construction, and more on the efficiency of services, the redistribution of health and educational means for the city as a whole, more on the support of local initiatives in terms of economic activities and those aimed at improving living conditions.

The new development policy can only succeed if it rests on new relationships between citizens, associations and the state — in particular youth and women's groups, which have a key role to play. It must show that it puts within reach of the poor some means of improving their daily living conditions, preserving current activities and finding new ones following this approach.

This alternative urban development policy is essentially *cultural and popular*. First of all, because it calls on African cultural concepts, such as communal responsibility for those of in need — including children and the handicapped —, and a solidarity through which the poorest survive. It is only by relying on these cultural references that the problem of street children can begin to be solved, changing their public image, giving them confidence and having confidence in them⁸, bringing about understanding and solidarity. The physical aspect of this policy is important, firstly because it makes a contribution to everyday life, and because it symbolises current efforts: anything that contributes to useful green spaces or urban agriculture is to be welcomed — in Lusaka, for example, urban agriculture produces up to one fifth of the food consumed by the most deprived; the manufacture from waste material of implements and tools, furniture, etc. for use by low-income groups is also a positive factor.

In spite of all the recycling activities in operation, one of the "woes" of African cities is the waste of human skills and human beings themselves. Reanimating under-employed or misemployed people, spaces and equipment, encouraging *creativity* of all kinds — now that would be a really profitable, long-term investment.

3.4. Implications for the rural environment

Firstly and most urgently, the *ongoing disasters* must be stopped. Any efforts made or money spent to help people and decision-makers to act differently is money well spent. Information and education against poverty and for the environment cost money, but they will certainly give a return.

The struggle against *desertification, deforestation and erosion* is aimed at rebuilding and enhancing the *life potential* of farmers and pastoralists. And it is not only living conditions per se, but also soil quality, useful vegetation, and the preservation of long-term working conditions that are involved. A policy attacking rural poverty also involves safeguarding or returning the means of production to the farmers themselves, improving the chances of those who continue to work the land, allowing them to regain maximum control of the management and organisation of their own land.

In many cases, efforts to effect this have thus far lacked input from *those directly affected*; their skills, ideas and *responsibility* have not been fully involved. If the fight against rural poverty is to be won, then it is crucial that means be found whereby

⁸ In fact, real juvenile delinquency is limited.

pastoralists and farmers may reappropriate the management of rural areas, land and villages, and these must go hand in hand with a flexible policy for agricultural prices.

If one uses as a point of departure the strategies and policies reviewed here — and there are others — this study is simply an attempt to discuss and define a common vision for the future, one that takes differences into account, that depends on the spontaneous dynamics of people and the various "actors", and which gradually invents and sets up a many-sided, "participatory" form of planning.

This social and environmental approach can only succeed if the bulk of it is undertaken by Africans, though they may need effective, long-term foreign assistance stamped by another "style".

Meanwhile, what Africa needs most, is in fact the thing that seems most unreasonable: it desperately needs to refuse to tag along, it needs to be more critical, and to challenge accepted ideas.

This young continent must call on the professionals and advisers of an aging, surfeited North.

We must turn our backs on Afropessimism, and seeking out new paths, invest in what emerges, in what moves away from the beaten track, and is carried by the wave of enthusiasm.

CONCLUSION

Twenty years ago in Stockholm, the world became aware of the environment and its importance. Tomorrow there will be a world conference entitled "Environment and Development": two key dimensions of the future — along with culture, that invisible, omnipresent, but mistakenly undervalued factor.

Africa can and must take a message to Rio, a message with a trenchant content, vigour and innovative character. It is in Africa that the world's priorities are being highlighted: and these are not reams of technical advice — however useful they may be —, not a new international order decided by a Northern club, but an international mobilisation for the environment and against poverty, in support of the strategies devised by those directly affected. It is the politicians who must grasp this nettle, but in the present context, will they commit themselves if they are not advised and followed?

Whereas the experts and bankers are supposed to be governed by reason and prudence, have we not reached the stage where, however mad it may seem, what is called for is imagination, innovation and audacity?

And backed by our African cultures, we call on universal culture in following Shakespeare's advice that we let the madmen have their way seeing where reasonable folk have led us.

iiED

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INSTITUTIONS

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The Drylands Programme aims to contribute towards more effective and equitable management of natural resources in semi-arid Africa. It has built up a diverse pattern of collaboration with many organisations. It has a particular focus on soil conservation and nutrient management, pastoral development, land tenure and resource access. Key objectives of the programme are to: strengthen communication between English and French speaking parts of Africa; support the development of an effective research and NGO sector; and promote locally-based management of resources, build on local skills, encourage participation and provide firmer rights to local users.

It does this through four main activities: collaborative research, training in participatory methods, information networking and policy advice to donor organisations.

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