

# Sustainable development and the challenges to the environment essay

[Business](#), [Company](#)



Ladies and gentlemen, we live at a unique turning point in the history, not just of humanity, but of the planet. The internet and Twitter have transformed communications and made the world a smaller, more intimate place to live in; the power of the internet for good has been seen this year in the events of the Arab spring.

But, ladies and gentlemen, paradoxically, the internet, instead of bringing the world closer together, may help to create awareness of differences in material wealth and economic injustices. Such injustices have always existed, some might say, but they now exist in a world threatened with the destruction of critical ecosystems, rising population levels and climate change, while emerging economic powers such as India and China aspire to the material and economic success of the Western world.

And, ladies and gentlemen, this is the heart of the problem – how can we create a fair and just world which allows emerging economies to develop to meet the aspirations of their populations and which allows economically backward nations to develop in order to eradicate poverty, disease and violence, but in ways that are sustainable and which also protect the environment?

Let us be in no doubt, sustainable development in the First World may mean innovative ways of re-designing our cities through landscape architecture and urban agriculture, through creative ecological urbanism combined with renewable energy and a greater transparency about individual and corporate carbon footprints, but in the Third World sustainable development is a matter of life and death, and involves more pressing considerations, such as the daily need for food and water. Indeed, it is not hard to see many of the

armed conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa as the direct result of the need for the basic requirements of life, combined with the erosion of biodiversity and the destruction of grazing grounds or the drying up of rivers. Sustainable development, we might argue, can lead to peace. How many future conflicts around the world will actually be about precious natural resources – whatever rhetoric (be it political, ideological or religious) is used to justify them?

But, ladies and gentlemen, what can be done now, here and now, today to meet the challenges that the world faces. Most of us would agree that any future solution must lie in the hands of governments working in conjunction with private enterprise and with the United Nations – who could have a vital role to play simply in co-ordinating the ideas and innovations of the scientific community. Governments alone cannot act effectively without the support and active involvement of private companies – but governments across the world could do much more to regulate the activities of those private companies. A tiny, baby step might be to force companies to be transparent about the carbon footprints of all their business activities all over the world – with regulatory fines, perhaps, for those multi-national organizations whose approach to the developing world is counter-productive to development which is sustainable or which is environmentally harmful. At the same time, on a local level, grassroots organizations can do much to raise levels of public awareness and increase education about what sustainable development actually means; that it is not simply about green issues, but also is inextricably bound up with the economy, jobs and global equity; their local efforts might be co-ordinated by the United Nations who could act as a

conduit for innovation at grassroots level.

Ladies and gentlemen, will our grandchildren regret that in the early twenty-first century the global community of nations did not give the United Nations the powers that it needed to play a unique role at a unique moment in the history of our planet, our home, our spinning globe of dreams and tears?