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**The Global Thematic Consultation on Environmental Sustainability
In the Post-2015 Development Agenda
(Review and Commentary)**

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The process of developing a consensual Post-2015 Agenda is a refreshing idea encompassing a diversity of views from dedicated leaders in different parts of the world on the concept and deliberation of sustainable development, commonly considered as the integration of environmental sustainability and human development. That also poses considerable confusion and challenges for us at large in that contemporary understanding of development and natural environment remains to be diverse and antagonistic in concept and practice. It is well documented and commonly understood that economic development has transformed natural lands into human inhabitation for the last half of the 20th Century, the memorable period of technological century. In the process natural environment including biodiversity and earth ecosystem in many parts of world was badly destroyed and completely replaced with anthropocentric buildings and related urbanization by human development. That process expanded the human ecosystems, which accelerated biodiversity loss and environmental destruction contributing to the pollution of air, water and land, thus our life-support system, which led to global warming causing rapid climate change for the last six decades to this day. At the same time The Global Thematic Consultation on Sustainable Development could help readers better understand the contents of sustainable development if a glossary is attached for standard definitions of these key words related to human development and environmental sustainability (Morelli, J. 2011. Environmental Sustainability: A Definition for Environmental Professionals. *J. Environmental Sustainability* 1: 19-27).

What We Have Done

Sustainable development is anthropocentric terminology to overcome the environmental destruction by human development, well demonstrated and documented since 1950. As Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" (1962) enlightened us, technological advancement in food production and other businesses destroyed ecological balance of nature and likewise human development has mercilessly overtaken nature and natural resources by development for industrialization, urbanization, and economic advancement along with rapidly growing human population. They ultimately resulted in massive destruction of biodiversity and ecosystem functions. Started with the Rio-1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) the world community was awoken, for the first time, by learning how badly we abused our environment on the

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planet Earth for the last six decades, which led to the concept of sustainable development for today.

With over five decades of human development we are now challenged to repair the damaged environment and find a way to use the nature and natural resources for supporting human development accrued with rapidly growing human population of 7.1 billion people (2012). Now, we live in the transformed human environment that is already crowded but still with contemporary anthropocentric paradigm and tunnel vision. Sustainable development still is in the same framework of contemporary development mode for taking on shrinking biodiversity and ecosystem services in the name of “environmental sustainability” that allows more diverse political and social interpretations and applications to justify their individual enterprises and purposes. My concern over the Post 2015 Thematic Consultation on Environmental Sustainability is that it could easily fall to this concern and become a contrasting model as it becomes the matter of human development versus nature, the ecosystem with focus on all other economic, political or social interests rather than sustainability of natural environment with healthy biodiversity and ecosystems. There is no easy way out of our paradox with rapidly growing human population.

What We Want to Do

As we finally realized and proclaimed from UNCED 1992, biological diversity or biodiversity is the foundation of life including human species on this planet and what biodiversity loss means to humanity and human sustainability. Biodiversity is the totality of all living organisms/species and their interactions that provides the foundation of life. Biodiversity loss became the first global environmental problem so recognized because it is an ultimate detriment to our life-support system on the planet. The UNCED certainly stimulated public interests worldwide with excitement and determination for global resolution for the protection of global biodiversity (Convention on Biological Diversity) through the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. After two decades, the state of world environment has gotten much worse with biodiversity loss continued without much protection and added global warming and its climate change without much resolution, which brought us to the RIO+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 which missed the broadly-based public support with predicament for sustainability, unlike the UNCED 1992.

For the last two decades contemporary resolutions to global environmental problems have not advanced much and two global issues, namely biodiversity loss and global warming with its climate change, are remained unresolved with limited commitments by member nations beyond talks and procedural agreements, which now are put aside for sustainable development. The cause for the mischief is however, much more complicated than many critics proclaimed for the Rio+20 UNC on Sustainable Development in 2012. In this context the Global Thematic Consultation on Environmental Sustainability offers an idealistic model for the collection and synthesis of individual consultation prevailed in the summits of global leaders each representing individual nation almost as if playing a card-game without definitive economic and

financial commitments. The global problems concerning biodiversity and ecosystems are fundamental to human sustainability and also universal to humanity involving every one of 7.1 billion people living on the planet, whereas biodiversity loss and climate change are concurrently facing us for resolution irrespective of individual human needs or economic and political conditions of all nations. The RIO+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development brought about the massive international movements for sustainable development that led to today's breath-taking efforts to come up with consensus plan and implementation to meet the goals of "What We Want" slogan. We are at the crossroads toward "Universal Post-2015 Agenda."

What For: Interlinking Environmental Sustainability and Human Development

Catchy terminology does not make any easier to understand what environmental sustainability and human development are meant to be, even if thematic consultation may somewhat help facilitate consensus generation. It is completely necessary for all readers, particularly stakeholders, to clearly understand what human development and environmental sustainability are and what they are meant to be, which must have been clearly defined by The Consultation on Environmental Sustainability for the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Otherwise, it would not be meaningful to have many specific new ideas and suggestions if sustainable development presented in a contemporary sense. Schematic dogma in this undertaking is that this draft document does not remind the stakeholders of what clearly today's problems are and what caused and accumulated for the last five or more decades, with practically the same goals and purpose. Through my research and experiences in social media and the last RIO+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (2012) I have realized that most of these global declarations and plans have served the purpose of new ideas under rather euphemistic titles and slogans but in implementation failed to reach those people at the grassroots who are the core of labor force for implementing the stated goals and objectives.

As Morelli (2011) pointed out, the term "sustainability" has been widely abused to the point that the concept of sustainability and its definition is subjected to individual economic, political and even philosophical interpretations rather than scientific definition. When we consider the environment for living things at individual, population or community level, natural environment refers to both physical structure referring to ecological system of air, water, soil and inclusive of weather and biodiversity meaning the totality of living organisms or species and their interactions, which bring about ecosystem functions and services. Therefore, when we speak of human environment, we are talking about two different ones, natural environment and another one made by humans. Nevertheless, human development is relatively clear because development is used in the context of something exploited or transformed for humans or humanity which in other perspectives means the destruction of nature: biodiversity and ecosystems. Naturally, environmental sustainability of human inhabitation is immediate concerns of humans residing in the spatially defined site, whereas environmental sustainability of nature refers to biodiversity and ecosystems of the defined site for all leaving organisms – now, of course, we are talking about the global biodiversity and climate change. It comes down to humans versus natural environment in the context of Morelli's 15 guiding

principles. Therefore, it is of paramount importance in developing the Post - 2015 Development framework and careful synthesis of thematic consultation on environmental sustainability.

Unprecedented Engagement in Shaping a Universal Post-2015 Agenda

It is remarkable that the United Nations is succeeding in engaging world community via a series of consultations for sharing ideas, priorities and solutions concerning environmental sustainability, so far involving 87 countries, 11 global thematic consultations, and a global on-line platform for consultations. At the same time, it is a great task to all these ideas for inclusion in the universal Post-2015 Agenda for sustainable development. The Consultation Report should provide scientific synthesis and integration of all those inputs and come up with new approaches to how environmental sustainability and human development can be interlinked for resolving humanistic paradox towards sustainability of humanity and ultimately for survival of human species.

The paradox we presently faced with is the outcome of what we have done to nature, particularly the natural environment, since the middle of the last Century with the rapid advancement of science and technology we never knew possible, from atomic bomb to cell phones through moon landing, Human Genome Project, computer and information technology, and above all rapidly built human population to 7.1 billion people crowded on the surface of the planet Earth. Through the process of little over 60 years we have destroyed habitats for living life-forms: plants, animals, fungi and microorganisms in many parts of the world which led to massive biodiversity loss and damage to our life-support system, the environment, by human hands through industry and technology, due to unique characteristics of human species, namely anthropocentric zeal with tunnel vision, to no end.

In thematic consultations many called for the interlinkage of environmental sustainability and human development in which inherent socio-political principles for human equality, respect of human rights and resilience of world community are emphasized in discussion on sustainable development. In the summary of consultation statements it is hard to understand how social and economic dimensions heavily occupy in the context of environmental sustainability, as humans and humanity are the cause of global environmental problems but not the other way around. If sustainable development is to be successful, environmental education should come first for people at the grassroots to minimize the repetition of environmental destruction made by humans in the developed and developing countries for the last six decades (see Page 4 and 5).

To succeed in developing environmental sustainability we must clearly understand that:

- 1) Human environment is already badly damaged throughout the world;
- 2) Global environmental concerns, namely biodiversity loss and global warming with its climate change, is the cause of today's environmental problems, the bad outcome of our merciless development continued for the last six decades irrespective of all social, political and cultural justice which is surely major aspects of human development;

3) Sustainable environment would not come back overnight but human development must include carefully designed environmental sustainability program to correct the past mistakes and rebuild the damaged by highly trained people that require skill-building education;

4) Economic, social and cultural issues that are urgent and must continue to grow in their own important programs but not to be buried in the process of building environmental sustainability which certainly require four basic principles: integration, equality, human rights, and resilience. If it is successful to maintain environmental sustainability, local economy would be developed and poverty could be gone, and also one can design the project for environmental sustainability including local economy and self-helped food production (Pages 5-12);

5) Local Action and Empowerment: Once environmental sustainability is correctly understood and developed into a doable program with tools and manual and with some financial assistance following well-defined and directed policy and implementation guidelines. It certainly would be successful. Again, all good programs like the one we are discussing are well developed and procedural details are produced to connect must be well connected to implementation at the grassroots for success. This process should enlighten local people by necessary educational programs for environmental sustainability and hence sustainable development.

6) Education: Education is certainly one of the most important and powerful tools and process for enlightened sustainable development at the grassroots. Local biodiversity and biodiversity assessment could provide the foundation and teaching material for local sustainable development that enlighten the people's spirit and hope for their sustainable future.

7) Economic Transformation and Sustainable Life: Environmental sustainability could certainly be a vehicle to carry local people at the grassroots towards economic development with environmental education based on local/backyard biodiversity and ecosystem services that provide curricular syllabus and materials for sustainability at home.

Conclusion

Global thematic consultation is one of the people-based intellectual contributions to shaping the Post-2015 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Global environmental problems we are faced with today are truly critical for sustainability of human species. It is a great challenge and ultimate resolution for humanity derived from the RIO+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (2012). That was built on the failed resolutions and commitments for Biodiversity Convention and proclamation for biodiversity and environment linked to humanity from the RIO-1992 UNCED and UN's MDGs. It is urgent that the Post-2015 Agenda must succeed for future of human species for which all the brains from around the world must come up with a series of resolutions, principles and defined implantation guidelines for sustainable development linking human development and environmental sustainability. Success for this venture is in the hand of humans, particularly those dedicated to perpetual future of human species.

(Ke Chung Kim, Draft prepared on August 3, 2013, State College, PA)