

5.持続可能な開発

「持続可能な開発」の概念は比較的古い。数世紀を超える歴史のある漁業、林業等の生物資源関係の分野での「sustained/sustainable yield」の概念はともかく、国際政治の分野においても、1960年代からの「自国の自然資源に対する開発途上国の恒久主権」の主張の中で、1970年代の前半に既に明確に現れた。国連総会に最初に現れたのは、1974年の国連総会において、米国、英国、西ドイツ等6ヶ国が反対し、日本、フランス、カナダ、オランダ等10か国が棄権する形で強行採択された「各家の経済的権利及び義務に関する憲章」の第30条である。この時の「持続可能な開発」は、途上国側が先進国の干渉を排除する動きの中に位置付けられる自国の天然資源に対する開発途上国の恒久主権の主張を、1972年の国連人間環境会議の議論を踏まえて補強する意味合いがあった。実際、UNEPとUNCTADの共催でメキシコのココヨクでこの決議の採択の直前に行われた「資源の利用のパターン、環境及び開発戦略に関するシンポジウム」が採択した「ココヨク宣言」は、持続可能な開発の考え方を包括的にまとめたが、そこでは、まず、今日の問題は、主として地球の収容力の絶対的限界によるものではなく、それぞれの国の中及び国々の間にある経済・社会構造、まことに分配及び誤った使用にあるとした上で、将来の世代の必要と両立可能な生産を確保しつつ生活の質を確保することを目指すべきであるとしている。

持続可能な開発の言葉そのものも、1970年代半ばには使用されている。その最初のものは、1975年の第3回UNEP管理理事会決定20(III)である。しかし、その定義は、既に「生物圏が人間のもぐろみに対して課した限界を超えることなくベーシック・ヒューマン・ニーズを満たすこと」、「現在の世代の利益と同時に将来の世代の利益のためにも、環境を改善し守ること」と、直接には、南北対立という背景を窺わせないものとなっていた。1980年に国際自然保護連合(IUCN)が作成した「世界自然保全戦略(World Conservation Strategy)」においては、この言葉に、自然資源の保全と開発の不可分性の意味合いが付け加えられた。

このような経緯の後、1987年のブルントラント委員会の報告書「Our Common Future」において、環境と開発の課題に南北が一致して取り組むための概念として主張された。ブルントラント委員会の意味付けは、1970年代の「持続可能な開発」の意味付けと同じく、国際政治上のものである。しかし、70年代には、途上国側が先進国の干渉を排除しようとし、また、先進国に要求を突きつける南北間の対立的なものであったのに対し、ブルントラント委員会では、対照的に、南北の協調のための概念としている。

砂漠化条約は、前文で2回「持続可能な開発」に触れた後、条約の究極の目的を「砂漠化の影響を受けている地域における持続可能な開発の達成」としている(第2条第1項)ほか、これを含め、本文の計8か所で「持続可能な開発」との言葉を使っており、「持続可能な開発」を前面に押し出した条約である。しかし、その定義は行わず、単純に「持続可能な開発」を多用しているに過ぎない。つまり、砂漠化問題は南北の政治的な課題であるという利用のされ方としては効果を生じていても、その概念や実現方法が砂漠化との関係において明示されているわけではない。従って、その具体化は、今後の締約国の実践を通じて行われる必要がある。

図み 5.1. ココヨク宣言(1974 年)

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<p>The Cocoyoc Declaration adopted by the participants in the UNEP/UNCTAD Symposium on "Patterns of Resource Use, Environment and Development Strategies" held at Cocoyoc, Mexico, from 8 to 12 October 1974 ¹</p>		
<p>Thirty years have passed since the signing of the United Nations Charter launched the effort to establish a new international order. Today, that order has reached a critical turning point. Its hopes of creating a better life for the whole human family have been largely frustrated. It has proved impossible to meet the "inner limit" of satisfying fundamental human needs. On the contrary, more people are hungry, sick, shelterless and illiterate today than when the United Nations was first set up.</p>		
<p>At the same time, new and unforeseen concerns have begun to darken the international prospects. Environmental degradation and the rising pressure on resources raise the question whether the "outer limits" of the planet's physical integrity may not be at risk.</p>		
<p>And to these preoccupations must be added the realization that the next 30 years will bring a doubling of world population. Another world on top of this, equal in numbers, demands and hopes.</p>		
<p>But these critical pressures give no reason to despair of the human enterprise, provided we undertake the necessary changes. The first point to be underlined is that the failure of world society, to provide "a safe and happy life for all" is not caused by any present lack of physical resources. The problem today is not primarily one of absolute physical shortage but of economic and social maldistribution and misuse; mankind's predicament is rooted primarily in economic and social structures and behaviour within and between countries.</p>		
<p>Much of the world has not yet emerged from the historical consequences of almost five centuries of colonial control which concentrated economic power so overwhelmingly in the hands of a small group of nations. To this day, at least three quarters of the world's income, investment, service and most of all of the world's research are in the hands of one quarter of its people.</p>		
<p>The solution of these problems cannot be left to the automatic operation of market mechanisms. The traditional market makes resources available to those who can buy them rather than those who need them, it stimulates artificial demands and builds waste into the production process, and even under-utilizes resources. In the international system the powerful nations have secured the poor countries' raw materials at low prices - for example, the price of petroleum fell decisively between 1950 and 1970 - have engrossed all the value-added from processing the materials and sold the manufactures back, often at monopoly prices.</p>		
<p>At the same time, the very cheapness of the materials was one element in encouraging the industrialized nations to indulge in careless and extravagant use of the imported materials. Once again, energy is the best example. Oil at just over a dollar a barrel stimulated a growth in energy use of between 6 and 11 per cent a year. In Europe, the annual increase in car registrations reached 20 per cent.</p>		
<p>Indeed, pre-emption by the rich of a disproportionate share of key resources conflicts directly with the longer-term interests of the poor by impairing their ultimate access to resources necessary to their development and by increasing their cost. All the more reason for creating a new system of evaluating resources which takes into account the benefits and the burdens for the developing countries.</p>		
<p>The over-all effect of such biased economic relationships can best be seen in the contrast in consumption. A North American or a European child, on average, consumes outrageously more than his Indian or African counterpart - a fact which makes it specious to attribute pressure on world resources entirely to the growth of third world population.</p>		
<p>Population growth is, of course, one element in the growing pressures on world supplies. The planet is finite and an indefinite multiplication of both numbers and claims cannot be endlessly sustained. Moreover, shortage can occur locally long before there is any prospect of a general exhaustion of particular resources. A policy for sane resource conservation and for some forms of management of ultimately scarce resources within the framework of new economic order must soon replace today's careless rapacity. But the point in the existing world situation is that the huge contrasts in per capita consumption between the rich minority and the poor majority have far more effect than their relative numbers on resource use and depletion. We can go</p>		

¹ Circulated in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee at the 1622nd meeting on 1 November 1974.

further.

Since a lack of resources for full human development is, as the Bucharest Conference on Population clearly recognized, one of the continuing causes of explosive population growth, to deprive nations of the means of development directly exacerbates their demographic problems.

These unequal economic relationships, contribute directly to environmental pressures. The cheapness of material has been one factor in increasing pollution and encouraging waste and throwaway economy among the rich. And continued poverty in many developing lands has often compelled the people to cultivate marginal lands at great risk of soil erosion or to migrate to the physically degraded and overcrowded cities.

Nor are the evils which flow from excessive reliance on the market system confined to international relationships. The experience of the last 30 years is that the exclusive pursuit of economic growth, guided by the market and undertaken by and for the powerful elites, has the same destructive effects inside developing countries. The richest 5 per cent engross all the gain while the poorest 20 per cent can actually grow poorer still. And at the local as at the international level the evils of material poverty are compounded by the people's lack of participation and human dignity, by their lack of any power to determine their own fate.

Nothing more clearly illustrates both the need to reform the present economic order and the possibility of doing so than the crisis that has arisen in world markets during the last two years. The trebling of the price of food, fertilizers and manufactures in the wake of world inflation has most severely hit the world's poorest people. Indeed, this winter the risk of a complete shortfall in supplies threatens the lives of millions in the third world. But it cannot be called absolute shortage. The grain exists, but it, is being eaten elsewhere by very well-fed people. Grain consumption in North America has grown per capita by 350 pounds largely in meat products, since 1965 - to reach 1,900 pounds today. Yet this extra 350 pounds is almost equal to an Indian's total annual consumption. North Americans were hardly starving in 1965. The increase since then has contributed to super-consumption which even threatens health. Thus, in physical terms, there need be no shortage this winter. It requires only a small release from the "surplus" of the rich to meet the entire Asian shortfall. There could hardly be a more vivid example of what one might call the overconsumption of the wealthy nations contributing directly to the underconsumption of the world's poor.

The quadrupling of oil prices through the combined action of the oil producers sharply alters the balance of power in world markets and redistributes resources massively to some third world countries. Its effect has been to reverse decisively the balance of advantage in the oil trade and to place close to 100 billions a year at the disposal of some third world nations. Moreover, in an area critical to the economies of industrialized States, a profound reversal of power exposes them to the condition long familiar in the third world - a lack of control over vital economic decisions.

Nothing could illustrate more clearly the degree to which the 'world market system which has continuously operated to increase the power and wealth of the rich and maintain the relative deprivation of the poor is rooted not in unchangeable physical circumstance but in political relationships which can, of their very nature undergo profound reversal and transformations. In a sense, a new economic order is already struggling to be born. The crisis of the old system can also be the opportunity of the new.

It is true that, at present, the outlook seems to hold little but confrontation, misunderstanding, threats and angry dispute. But again, we repeat, there is no reason to despair. The crisis can also be a moment of truth from which nations learn to acknowledge the bankruptcy of the old system and to seek the framework of a new economic order.

The task of a statesmanship is thus to attempt to guide the nations, with all their differences in interest, power and fortune, towards a new system more capable of meeting the "inner limits" of basic human needs for all the world's people and of doing so without violating the "outer limits" of the planet's resources and environment. It is because we believe this enterprise to be both vital and possible that we set down a number of changes, in the conduct of economic policy, in the direction of development and in planetary conservation, which appear to us to be essential components of the new system.

1. The purpose of development

Our first concern is to redefine the whole purpose of development. This should not be to develop things but to develop man. Human beings have basic needs: food, shelter, clothing, health, education. Any process of growth that does not lead to their fulfillment - or, even worse, disrupts them - is a travesty of the idea of development. We are still in a stage where the most important concern of development is the level of satisfaction of basic needs for the poorest sections in each society which can be as high as 40 per cent of the population. The primary purpose of economic growth should be to ensure the improvement of conditions for these groups. A growth process that, benefits only the wealthiest minority and maintains or even increases the disparities between and within countries is not development. It is exploitation. And the time for starting the type of true economic growth that leads to better distribution and to the satisfaction of the basic needs for all is today. We believe that 30 years of experience with the hope that rapid economic growth benefiting the few will "trickle down" to the mass of the people has proved to be illusory. We therefore reject the idea of "growth first, justice in the distribution of benefits later".

Development should not be limited to the satisfaction of basic needs. There are other needs, other goals, and other values. Development includes freedom of expression and impression, the right to give and to receive ideas and stimulus. There is a deep social need to participate in shaping the basis of one's own existence, and to make some contribution to the fashioning of the world's future. Above all, development includes the right to work, by which we mean not simply having a job but finding self-

realization in work, the right not to be alienated through production processes that use human beings simply as tools.

2. The diversity of development

Many of these more than material needs, goals and values, depend on satisfaction of the basic needs which are our primary concern. There is no consensus today what strategies to pursue in order to arrive at the satisfaction of basic needs. But, there are some good examples even among poor countries. They make clear that the point of departure for the development process varies considerably from one country to another, for historical, cultural and other reasons. Consequently, we emphasize the need for pursuing many different, roads of development. We reject the unilinear view which sees development essentially and inevitably as the effort to initiate the historical model of the countries that for various reasons happen to be rich today. For this reason, we reject the concept of "gaps" in development. The goal is not to "catch up", but to ensure the quality of life for all with a productive base compatible with the needs of future generations.

We have spoken of the minimum satisfaction of basic needs. But there is also a maximum level, there are ceilings as well as floors. Man must eat to live. But he can also over-eat. It does not help us touch to produce and consume more and more if the result is an ever-increasing need for tranquilizers and mental hospitals. And Just as man has a limited capacity to absorb material goods, we know that the biosphere has a finite carrying capacity. Some countries tax it in a way that is far out of proportion with their share in world population. Thus they create environment problems for others as well as for themselves.

Consequently, the world is today not only faced with the anomaly of under-development. We may also talk about overconsumptive types of development that violate the inner limits of man and the outer limits of nature. Seen in this perspective, we are all in need of a redefinition of our goals, of new development strategies, of new life styles, including more modest patterns of consumption among, the rich. Even though the first priority goes to securing the minima we shall be looking for those development strategies that also may help the affluent countries, in their enlightened self-interest, in finding more human patterns of life, less exploitative of nature, of others, of oneself.

3. Self-reliance

We believe that one basic strategy of development will have to be increased national self-reliance. It does not mean autarky. It implies mutual benefits from trade and co-operation and a fairer redistribution of resources satisfying the basic needs. It does mean self-confidence, reliance primarily on one's own resources, human and natural, and the capacity for autonomous goal-setting and decision-making. It excludes dependence on outside influenced and powers that can be converted into political pressure. It excludes exploitative trade patterns depriving countries of their natural resources for their own development. There is obviously a scope for a transfer of technology, but the thrust should be on adaptation and generation of local technology. It implies decentralization of the world economy, and sometimes of national economy to enhance the sense of personal participation. But it also implies international co-operation for collective self-reliance. Above all, it means trust in people and nations, reliance on the capacity of people themselves to invent and generate new resources and techniques to increase their capacity to absorb them to put them to socially beneficial use, to take a measure of command over the economy, and to generate their own way of life.

In this process education for full social awareness and participation will play a fundamental role and the extent to which this is compatible with present patterns of schooling will have to be explored.

To arrive at this condition of self-reliance, fundamental, economic, social and political changes of the structure of society will often be necessary. Equally necessary is the development of an international system compatible with and capable of supporting moves towards self-reliance.

Self-reliance at national levels may also imply a temporary detachment from the present economic system; it is impossible to develop self-reliance through full participation in a system that perpetuates economic dependence. Large parts of the world of today consist of a centre exploiting a vast periphery and also our common heritage, the biosphere. The ideal we need is a harmonized co-operative world in which each part is a centre, living at the expense of nobody else, in partnership with nature and in solidarity with future generations.

There is an international power structure that, will resist moves in this direction. Its methods are well known: the purposive maintenance of the built-in bias of the existing international market mechanisms, other forms of economic manipulation, withdrawing or withholding credits, embargoes, economic sanctions, subversive use of Intelligence agencies, repression including torture, counter-insurgency operations, even full-scale intervention. To those contemplating the use of such methods we say: "Hands-off. Leave countries to find their own road to a fuller life for their citizens". To those who are the - sometimes unwilling -tools of such designs - scholars, businessmen, police, soldiers and many others -we would say: 'refuse to be used for purposes of denying another nation the right to develop itself'. To the natural and social scientists, who help design the instruments of oppression we would say, 'the world needs your talents for constructive purposes, to develop new technologies that benefit man and do not harm the environment'.

4. Suggestions for action

We call on political leaders, governments, international organizations and the scientific community to use their imagination and

resources to elaborate and start implementing, as soon as possible, programmes aimed at satisfying the basic needs of the poorest peoples all over the world, including, wherever appropriate, the distribution of goods in kind. These programmes should be designed in such a way as to ensure adequate conservation of resources and protection of the environment.

We consider that the above task could be made easier by instituting a new more co-operative and equitable international economic order.

We are aware that, the world system and the national policies cannot be changed overnight. The major changes which are required to answer the critical challenges facing mankind at this turning point of history need some time to mature. But they have to be started immediately, and acquire a growing impetus. The Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations on a New Economic Order has given the process a right start and we fully endorse it. This, however, in a very, preliminary step which should develop into a great tide of international activities.

The Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States, proposed by the President of Mexico, Lic. Luis Echeverría, and now under discussion at the United Nations, would be a further important step in the right direction. We urge that it be adopted as early as possible.

In a framework of national sovereignty over natural resources, governments and international institutions should further the management of resources and environment on a global scale. The first aim would be to benefit those who need these resources most and to do so in accordance with the principle of solidarity with future generations.

We support the setting up of strong international régimes for the exploitation of common property resources that do not fall under any national jurisdiction. We especially emphasize the importance of the ocean floor and its subsoil, possibly also the water column above it. An oceans régime has to be established with all countries of the world represented, favouring none and discriminating against none, with jurisdiction over a maximum area of the oceans. Such a régime would gradually develop the type of resource-conserving and environmentally sound technology required to explore, develop, process and distribute ocean resources for the benefit of those who need them most.

The uses of international commons should be taxed for the benefit of the poorest strata of the poor countries. This would be a first step towards the establishment of an international taxation system aimed at providing automatic transfers of resources; to development assistance. Together with the release of funds through disarmament, international taxation should eventually replace traditional assistance programmes. Pending the establishment of these new mechanisms, we strongly recommend that the flow of international resources to third world countries should be greatly increased and rigorously dedicated to basic needs of the poorest strata of society.

Science and technology must be responsive to the goals we are pursuing. Present research and development patterns do not effectively contribute to them. We call on universities, other institutions of higher learning, research organizations, scientific associations all over the world to reconsider their priorities. Mindful of the benefits deriving from free and basic research, we underline the fact that there is a reservoir of under-utilized creative energy in the whole scientific community of the world, and that it should be more focused on research for the satisfaction of fundamental needs. This research should be done as far as possible in the poor countries and thus help to reverse the brain-drain.

A rejuvenated United Nations system should be used to strengthen the local capabilities for research and technology assessment in the developing countries, to promote co-operation between them in these areas and support research in a better and more imaginative utilization of potentially abundant resources for the satisfaction of the fundamental needs of mankind.

At the same time, new approaches to development styles ought to be introduced at the national level. They call for imaginative research into alternative consumption patterns, technological styles, land-use strategies as well as the institutional framework and the educational requirements to sustain them. Resource-absorbing and waste creating over-consumption should be restrained while production of essentials for the poorest sections of the population is stepped up. Low waste and clean technologies should replace the environmentally disruptive one. More harmonious networks of human settlements could be evolved to avoid further congestion of metropolitan areas and marginalization of the countryside.

In many developing countries the new development styles would imply a much more rational use of the available labour-force to implement programmes aimed at the conservation of natural resources, enhancement of environment, creation of the necessary infrastructure and services to grow more food as well as the strengthening of domestic industrial capacity to turn out commodities satisfying basic needs.

On the assumption of a more equitable international economic order, some of the problems of resource maldistribution and space use could be taken care of by changing the industrial, geography of the world. Energy, resource and environmental considerations add new strength to the legitimate aspirations of the poor countries to see their share in world industrial production considerably increased.

Concrete experiments in the field are also necessary. We consider that the present efforts of the United Nations Environment Programme to design strategies and assist projects for ecologically sound socio-economic development (eco-development) at the local and regional level constitute an important contribution to this task. Conditions should be created for people to learn by themselves through practice how to make the best possible use of the specific resources of the ecosystem in which they live, how to design appropriate technologies, how to organize and educate themselves to this end.

We call on leaders of public opinion, on educators, on all interested bodies to contribute to an increased public awareness of both the origins and the severity of the critical situation facing mankind today. All people have the right to understand fully the nature

of the system of which he is a part , as a producer, as a 'consumer, as one among the billions populating the earth. He has a right to' know who benefits from the fruits of his work , who benefits from what he buys and sells, and the degree to which he enhances .or degrades his planetary inheritance.

We call on governments to prepare themselves for action at the 1975 Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly so that the dimension and concepts of development are expanded, that the goals of development be given their rightful place in the United Nations system and the necessary structural changes initiated. We affirm our belief that since the issues of development, environment and resource use are essentially global and concern the well-being of all mankind, governments should fully use the mechanisms of the United Nations for their resolution and that the United Nations system should be renewed and strengthened to be capable of its new responsibilities.

5. Epilogue

We recognize the threats to both the 'inner limits' of basic human needs and the 'outer limits' of the planet's physical resources. But we also believe that a new sense of respect for fundamental human rights and for the preservation of our planet is growing up behind the angry divisions and confrontations of our day.

We have faith in the future of mankind on this planet . We believe that ways of life and social systems can be evolved that are more Just, less arrogant in their material demands , more respectful on the whole planetary environment. The road forward does not lie through the despair of doom-watching nor through the easy optimism of successive technological fixes. It lies through a careful and dispassionate assessment of the 'outer limits', through co-operative search for ways to achieve the 'inner limits' of fundamental human rights, through the building of social structures to express those rights, and through all the patient work of devising techniques and styles of development which enhance and preserve our planetary inheritance.

図み 5.2. 地球環境問題

砂漠化問題は、主たる原因も主たる結果もローカルであって、ローカルな取組みが重要な課題である。しかし、国際社会の相互依存が深化したことに伴い南北が国際政治のレベルにおいて関心を持つに至った課題という面から「地球環境問題」であり、地球的次元で考え、行動する必要のある課題である。

砂漠化対処条約中には「地球環境問題」という言い方ではないが、「global」という言い方が、次の通り、前文に 2 か所登場し、砂漠化問題が「地球環境問題」と受け取られる表現をしている。

砂漠化及び干ばつは、世界のすべての地域がその影響を受けること及び砂漠化に対処し又は干ばつの影響を緩和するために国際社会の共同行動が必要であることにおいて、地球的規模の問題であることを確認し、

最初の段落においては、(砂漠化と干ばつは)「世界の全ての地域に影響を及ぼす」としている。これは、砂漠化と干ばつは「世界の全ての地域に広がっている」あるいは「世界の全ての地域で起こっている」といった表現を避けたもので、砂漠化と干ばつの現象自体の広がりが地球的であるとしているのではなく、地球レベルで考えるべき課題であるとしているものである。2 つ目の段落で「国際コミュニティ及び国家コミュニティが直面している地球的な問題」としているのも、この表現に連なっている。このようにして、これらは、砂漠化がアフリカだけの問題ではなく、地球レベルで対応する必要があるとの政治的な意図表明であると言える。

砂漠化と国際社会及び国内の社会が直面する他の地球的規模の環境問題との関係に留意し、

日本では、「地球環境問題」という言葉がしばしば曖昧に使用され、地球的規模で現象の生じる環境問題が「地球環境問題」であると言われることが多い。しかしながら、南北が国際政治のレベルにおいて関心を持つに至った結果、地球的次元で考え、行動する必要のある課題こそが「地球環境問題」である。この点については、国際法の観点から桑原幸子氏(桑原幸子、1991)が、科学論の観点から米本昌平氏(米本昌平、1994)が論じている。国際政治の観点からも、Gareth Porter, Janet Welsh Brown 両氏(Gareth Porter and Janet Welsh Brown, 1991, 1996)が論じている。

また、環境基本法においては、「地球の全体又はその広範な部分」という、現象の広がりにより「地球環境問題」を定義付けているが、「地球環境の保全」に加えて「開発途上にある海外の地域の環境の保全」及び「国際的に高い価値があると認められている環境の保全であって人類の福祉に貢献するとともに国民の健康で文化的な生活の確保に寄与するもの」の 2 種の概念を追加導入している。これら 3 種の概念を、同法の規定に基づいて決定された「環境基本計画」の記述をも参考に検討すると、「全人類的な課題」との共通の認識が背景にあることを読み取ることができ、かつ、これら 3 種は、ほぼ

一体に取り扱われている。従って、環境基本法においても、「全人類的な課題」という国際政治的な観点から3種類の課題を取り扱うことで、一般に「地球環境問題」と呼ばれるものを取り扱っているのである。実際、環境庁地球環境部の著作による「地球環境キーワード事典」では、環境基本法で「全人類的な課題」との認識の下に取り扱われている諸課題すべてを一括して「地球環境問題」として取り扱っている。

「地球環境問題」が現象の地理的広がりにより定義されるものでないことは、個々の現象の確認された歴史を見ても明白である。つまり、現在典型的な「地球環境問題」として扱われている地球温暖化は、既に1972年の国連人間環境会議で採択された行動計画において明確に認識されているし、砂漠化問題も、1973年に採択された国連環境計画(UNEP)のプログラム分野の一つとして明確に位置づけられている。このような問題の存在することが広く認識されていたにかかわらず、1970年代には、「地球環境問題」という概念は存在せず、その概念の登場は、国家の主権を超えて協力すべき複合的相互依存の深まる時代を待つことになるのである。

このようにして、少なくとも国際協力の課題としての「地球環境問題」は、地理的な広がりよりは、国際社会或いは国際政治上の課題として捉えられる環境問題である。この点からは、地理的に全地球に広がる環境問題とともに、地理的に全地球に広がらなくても、地球社会全体として取り組むべき環境問題も、「地球環境問題」に含まれる。砂漠化問題は、必ずしも全地球的に広がっている問題ではないので、特に、地球社会として取り組むべき課題としての重要性から、「地球環境問題」として扱われるものである。

この地球社会として取り組むべき課題に取り組む時、南北の関係がとりわけ重要になる。地球温暖化のような、これまで主として「北」の国々が原因を作ってきた問題においても、その解決には南北関係が重要な要素となっているが、砂漠化は、主に「南」の国が原因者であり被害者であるので、とりわけ、「南」の国々が、対外的にも国内的にも抱える様々な問題が重要な要素となる。しかも、この場合、「南」の国々の置かれた自然地理学的な要因も常に絡むが、しかし、より重大な問題は、その社会にある。ここに、砂漠化問題の、「地球環境」問題としての特殊性と解決の一つの鍵がある。