



Press Release

12th January 1995

Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Development

Volume 2: Human potential - transformation and values

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL ?

A most challenging topic of the moment on the international scene is sustainable development, with much discussion of "Agenda 21".

Can the individual "sustain" his or her own development in the mental, psychological, spiritual sense ? While humanity is frantically attempting to redress the mistakes of its own and previous generations in over-exploitation of the earth's natural resources, whether due to greed, ignorance or economic necessity, and to build on the resources that remain in such a way as to avoid further depletion, has it lost sight of the depletion of psychological and spiritual resources ? While applauding attempts to maintain biodiversity is it in danger of pulling up by the roots and leaving to decay its own multitude of traditions, values and moral codes ? Is it picking the attractive fruits of many cultures and religions without the necessary input to ensure next season's harvest ? Does the universalization of the media, when one individual's interpretation of a situation can be broadcast as gospel truth to the whole world capable of tuning in to a television set, endanger the critical faculties and destroy cultural sensitivity ? And can sustainable development even at the material level succeed when disaffected individuals are destroying their own minds by escaping into brain-destroying drug-addiction or destroying their own social, cultural and physical environment in frenzy of violence and self-indulgence ?

The Human Potential volume of the Encyclopedia attempts to draw together the threads of human inheritance - ancient and modern, east and west, north and south. It makes no value judgment nor does it cover up differences and inconsistencies. Instead, it describes the values that humanity has held or holds, it describes the means by which individuals and societies have attempted to grow at the mental, psychological and spiritual level and the modes of awareness arising in these attempts. It recognizes 20th century techniques and approaches on the same level as those of antiquity. Particular chapters deal with drawing together different fields in an integrative knowledge approach to society's problems, the use of patterns and metaphor as essential to fuller understanding and the use of approaches which are capable of transforming rather than simply developing a situation.

The international community has largely failed to see beyond development at the material level. In particular, United Nations bodies, when faced with the concept of individual development, shy away from an in-depth commitment and instead focus on practicalities (ILO - employment, WHO - health, overwhelmingly now AIDS, contraception, abortion, UNESCO - education and such emphasis on fringe or localized cultures that a community already unsure of its own traditions is in danger of losing its identity and finds itself in greater confusion). The Human Potential volume of the Encyclopedia addresses the wider implications of development.

The editors, although aware of personal inadequacy when faced with this formidable task, are confident that the resulting volume will trigger unaccustomed trains of thought in its readers, challenging them to question and develop their own interpretations of existence and, even where their response may be critical, causing them to develop in themselves and in their interactions with others.

Union of International Associations (ed). Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential. Munich, K G Saur Verlag, 1994, 3 vols (ca. 3,000 pages), Price for set (or single volumes): DM 1,200 (DM 548.00); USA \$725.00 (\$245.00); UK £615 (£280). CD-ROM version in preparation.