



In Pursuit of Sustainable Development: Social and Political Efforts to Effectively Embrace the Principles Underlying International Environmental Law

Erica Lavecchia

Abstract:

This paper asks how sustainable development can be fostered using the principles underlying international environmental law effectively. A definition of several key terms employed, as well as a brief description of several main principles underlying international environmental law, will first be provided. The latter portion of this paper will attempt to demonstrate that certain social requirements and political efforts must be undertaken at both the national and international levels to actively promote sustainable development and effectively engage the principles currently articulated in international environmental law. This, more specifically, seems to require a decreased disparity between the rich and poor as well as increased national and international cooperation. Such efforts, it will be argued, are inextricably interlinked and, like the concept of sustainable development itself, cannot be achieved without the provision of the other.

Résumé :

Ce travail se demande de quelle façon le développement durable peut être facilité efficacement en utilisant les principes du droit environnemental international. Une définition de plusieurs termes clés utilisés ainsi qu'une brève description de plusieurs principes de droit environnemental international seront d'abord fournis. La dernière partie de ce travail tentera de démontrer la nécessité d'entreprendre certains prérequis sociaux et certains efforts politiques aux niveaux tant national qu'international afin de promouvoir le développement durable d'une manière active et d'engager les principes articulés par le droit environnemental international d'une manière efficace. Ceci requiert, d'une façon plus spécifique, un écart diminué entre les riches et les pauvres ainsi qu'une augmentation de la coopération nationale et internationale. Il peut être articulé que ces efforts sont liés inextricablement et, tout comme le concept du développement durable, ne peuvent être accomplis sans la provision de l'autre.

Definition of Key Terms

This section will provide a definition of several of the key concepts that will be employed throughout this paper. “International law,” for example, is to be understood as the body of rules (legally) binding and impacting states’ interactions with one another.¹ “International environmental law” thereby encompasses the substantive, procedural and institutional rules of international law which have, as their primary objective, the protection and conservation of the environment.² By extension, the “environment” will be interpreted as “the objects or the region surrounding anything,” thereby taking into consideration the features of the natural world as well as the products human civilization.³ “Effectively” embracing the principles underlying international environmental law will refer to the actualization or realization of the intent and objectives which the principles were designed to achieve.

First formally emphasized at the 1972 UN Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment, the concept of sustainable development is based on three pillars, namely economic growth, social development and environmental protection and seeks to meet the development needs of the present without compromising future generations’ needs. As such, advocates of sustainable development seek to ensure equitable consideration is given to the environment in projects designed to promote economic development, while simultaneously taking into consideration the social-dimension of such initiatives.⁴ It is interesting to note that, within the literature reviewed for this paper, it was almost unanimously agreed that the multi-dimensional framework of sustainable development has prevented the formulation of a comprehensive definition of sustainable development. As a result, the concept is generally used and applied as an

¹ Philippe Sands, *Principles of International Environmental Law I: Frameworks, standards and implementation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 103.

² *Ibid.*, 17.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Sumudu A. Atapattu, *Emerging Principles of International Environmental Law* (Ardsey: Transnational Publishers, Inc., 2006), 77, 108.

umbrella term that encompasses two components, chiefly: 1) substantive components (which outline the rights of future generations, the sustainable and equitable use of natural resources as well as the integration of the environment and development) and 2) procedural elements (which consider individuals' rights to have access to information regarding the environment, individuals' rights to participate in the decision-making process and individuals' rights to seek remedies to current issues).⁵ Fundamental to the concept of sustainable development, it is worth noting, is development within the framework of human rights, which includes the right to development and the right to a healthy environment.⁶ "Impoverished individuals" will be broadly defined to include those who face "subpar" or "substandard" health conditions, "inadequate" living standards and/or lack the basic necessities essential for survival.⁷ It should be noted that this definition, however broad, is not meant to disregard or make light of the contestable conditions that necessitate "impoverishment".

Lastly, the practice of "good governance" will be understood as the practice of transparency and accountability by a governing body or institution exercised over a given jurisdiction or mandate.⁸ In terms of practical efforts, good governance can be exercised by having an independent judiciary body, following democratic decision-making models, pursuing "sensible" economic and social policies, creating a market-friendly environment that is conducive for development and by installing measures within the governance system that are designed to combat corruption.⁹ Notwithstanding, good governance may not necessitate democratic-styled governance and this paper should not be interpreted as a call for societies to embrace democratic principles. This interpretation of good governance is, however, only meant to highlight the

⁵ Ibid., 93, 95, 129.

⁶ Ibid., 108-9.

⁷ Atapattu, 111.

⁸ Ibid., 179.

⁹ Ibid.

system of “checks and balances” often upheld in democratic institutions that generally are (or have historically proven to be) absent in undemocratic systems.¹⁰

Key Principles Underlying International Environmental Law

Prior to providing a concise description of several key principles underlying international environmental law, a brief historical overview of these principles will be given. For example, it may be relevant to highlight that the traditional principles of international environmental law (such as the Principle of Sovereignty) are primarily based on the notions of territorial sovereignty and state responsibility, as international environmental law is rooted in attempts to solve cross-border issues.¹¹ In order to accommodate “second generation” environmental issues (such as ozone depletion and global warming), new principles and tools to address these concerns (namely the Polluter Pays Principle, the Precautionary Principle, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and the concept of sustainable development) have more recently emerged.¹²

International human rights are a fundamental element of international environmental law. That of particular concern for this paper is the non-binding, widely accepted declaration supporting an individual’s right to a clean environment.¹³ First formulated at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1968 and later reiterated in the 1972 Stockholm Declaration, it has been argued that the preservation of a clean environment is a prerequisite right necessary to the achievement of all other (recognized) international human rights.¹⁴

The Principle of Harm Prevention, as it was formulated in Principle 21 at the Stockholm Declaration, reiterated at the Rio Declaration and later endorsed by the International Court of

¹⁰ Ibid., 180.

¹¹ Ibid., 5; Sands, 183, 186.

¹² Atapattu, 5-6.

¹³ Sands, 222.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Justice (ICJ), creates a general obligation of states to respect the environment of other states as well as the environment of the global commons.¹⁵ Sometimes referred to as the Principle of Preventative Action, this principle requires states to take preventative action (in the form of reducing, limiting and controlling activities which might cause environmental damage) at early stages before (more) harm has the potential to occur.¹⁶

The Principle of Good Neighbourliness and International Co-operation, as enunciated in Article 74 of the UN Charter, calls for the development and application of rules that promote co-operation between states in social, economic and commercial matters.¹⁷ In particular, techniques designed to assure information sharing and increased participation in decision-making amongst states are key practical measures for the realization of this principle.¹⁸

A final key principle of international environmental law is the Principle of Equity, which encompasses considerations of justice and fairness in the establishment, operation or application of the rule of law.¹⁹ In order to ensure that future generations are provided with an environmentally clean and safe environment, the Equity Principle gives rise to several branching notions; namely the Principle of Sustainable Development and its sub-concepts of intra- and inter-generational equity.

Arising from the polarizing debate on environmental protection versus economic development, the Principle of Sustainable Development seeks to encompass elements of both inter- and intra-generational equity in development projects.²⁰ These two notions of equity call for the preservation of resources for the benefit of future generations (intra-generational equity)

¹⁵ Atapattu, 3-4.

¹⁶ Sands, 194-5.

¹⁷ Ibid., 197.

¹⁸ Ibid., 197-8.

¹⁹ Ibid., 124.

²⁰ Ibid., 199; Atapattu, 77-8, 95; Anita Margrethe Halvorsen, *Equality Among Unequals in International Environmental Law: Differential Treatment for Developing Countries* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 42.

and for states to “equitably” use current resources so that the present needs of other present countries and individuals are taken into consideration (inter-generational equity).²¹ As a relatively new principle of international environmental law, it is interesting to note that the Sustainable Development Principle, unlike its predecessor principles, does not make reference to environmental protection, but seeks to embrace, integrate and merge concerns for the environment with economic development.²²

In order to achieve sustainable development, several offspring principles have subsequently been established or have become practiced norms. These mainly include the Precautionary Principle and the Polluter Pays Principle, with EIA as a national tool used to uphold these principles.²³ Reflected in Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration, the Precautionary Principle calls for caution in areas where there is scientific uncertainty regarding potential harm or damage that certain acts may have on the environment.²⁴ In addition, the Polluter Pays Principle insists that the “cost” of pollution be borne by those responsible for causing the pollution.²⁵ Finally, EIA is a systematic process for the examination and evaluation of the environmental effects of proposed activities that are considered to likely have a significant impact on biophysical and social environments.²⁶

²¹ Sands, 199; Ulrich Beyerlin and Thilo Marauhn, *International Environmental Law* (Oxford: Hart Publishing Ltd., 2011), 77.

²² *Ibid.*, 73, 79; Atapattu, 78; Sands, 199; Halvorssen, 42.

²³ Atapattu, 129.

²⁴ Sands, 208; Lynda Collins, “Are We There Yet? The Right to Environment in International and European Law,” *McGill International Journal of Sustainable Development and Policy* 3, no. 2 (2007): 151.

²⁵ Sands, 213.

²⁶ Michael Kidd, “EIA and the Four Ps: Some Observations from South Africa,” in *Land Use Law for Sustainable Development*, eds. Nathalie J. Chalifour et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 181; Michael I. Jeffery, “Environmental Impact Assessment: Addressing the Major Weaknesses,” in *Land Use Law for Sustainable Development*, eds. Nathalie J. Chalifour et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 451.

Efforts at the National Level

Social Efforts Targeting Poverty Minimization or Eradication

In order to promote sustainable development, the minimization (if not eradication) of poverty may be a social directive that allows for the effective practice of the principles underlying international environmental law. For instance, it has been observed that increased levels of poverty (within a given state or region) not only impede sustainable development, but further allow for the violation of other human rights (such as the right to development and the right to a clean environment).²⁷ These findings are rooted in the likelihood that those living in impoverished areas (where it may be difficult for individuals to satisfy their basic needs) are less likely to have great concern for environmental protection and the social impacts of economic development projects.²⁸ In other words, impoverished individuals may allow environmental and social concerns to play a subsidiary role in resource use and project construction, especially if they are under the impression that economic development would ameliorate or improve their current conditions.²⁹ This assumption, however, contradicts the multi-dimensional framework of sustainable development. Thus, in order to fully embrace the notion of sustainable development, poverty reduction (if not total eradication) at the national level may be imperative in generating equal concern and attention to economic, environmental and social factors underlying (development) projects. By extension, this may call for a framework of collective responsibility, possibly requiring more inclusionary (global) participation and co-operation.³⁰

²⁷ Jeffery, 111, 175.

²⁸ Ibid., 175; Louis J. Kotzé, "The Judiciary, the Environmental Right and the Quest for Sustainability in South Africa: A Critical Reflection," *Review of European Community and International Environmental Law* 16, no. 3 (2007): 311; Edith Brown Weiss, "Environmental Equity: The Imperative for the Twenty-First Century," in *Sustainable Development and International Law*, ed. Winfried Lang (London: Graham & Trotman Ltd., 1995), 23.

²⁹ Atapattu, 175; Kotzé, 311; Weiss, "Environmental Equity: The Imperative for the Twenty-First Century," 23.

³⁰ Atapattu, 113.

Given the above, reducing national poverty levels may not only assist in the promotion of sustainable development, but may further reiterate and reinforce those human rights articulated in and principles underlying international environmental law. More specifically, the right to development and the right to a clean environment may be (more) effectively and fully realized (especially in the sense of being applicable to a greater number of individuals) following successful efforts of poverty reduction. Moreover, a decrease in poverty may also have positive implications in terms of improving inter- and intra-generational equity; as such efforts arguably have the potential to raise the “well-being” or living standards and conditions (especially in terms of economic growth, the provision of a clean environment and social development) for individuals in the present and future.

Political Efforts Toward Integrated Decision-Making

It has been argued that, in the pursuit of achieving sustainable development, there are specific “positive” attributes associated with and derived from integrated decision-making models. Given the inclusionary nature of such models (whereby both an increased amount of individuals as well as contrasting views from various disciplines are represented), integrated decision-making may allow for environmental considerations and social goals to be better incorporated into formal or institutionalized decision-making processes concerning economic development projects.³¹ Under this consideration, integrated decision-making may more effectively respond to the multi-dimensional nature of environmental stresses and issues as well as the core relationship between the environment, economic development and social factors underlying sustainable development.³²

³¹ Ibid., 131.

³² Ibid., 132.

As such, integrated decision-making, appears to effectively embrace the Principles of Cooperation and Equity articulated in international environmental law. Firstly, decision-making processes that call for a wider array of participation amongst individuals (including experts in a given field and the common public) may allow for a greater number of voices and opinions to be heard. In particular, widespread participation may more effectively operationalise sustainable development (as well as ensure individuals' procedural rights are upheld) as it is translated into law and policy tools simply because of the broad scope of the debate.³³ Consequently, aspects of economic development, environmental considerations and social issues, which must be given equal consideration in sustainable development projects, may be less likely to be treated as distinct and separate issues and instead become more effectively integrated throughout the decision-making process. Of course, such participation as a mechanism of fostering sustainable development implicitly assumes that all individuals are willing and prepared to actively and meaningfully participate in such processes. Further, some may be inclined to suggest that a wider spectrum of differing viewpoints may give rise to strife, inefficiency and ultimately fail to reach a final decision. However, it must be acknowledged that the very act of bringing together these (dissenting) views may at least allow for others to understand and appreciate the concerns of dissenting parties. An optimal outcome would, of course, involve parties to compromise and to ultimately reach the "best" decision.

Secondly, integrated decision-making that takes into consideration contrasting viewpoints from a variety of disciplines, has a temporal quality. In other words, there may be a greater probability that final decisions take into account the long-term impact of projects or activities and thereby incorporate inter-generational equity.³⁴ Here, one may argue that it is often difficult for

³³ Ibid., 93.

³⁴ Ibid., 134.

humans to know, let alone predict, the long-term consequences of their actions, so that any decisions are limited to a certain extent by scientific uncertainty.³⁵ One may also suggest that humans exemplify or tend to lack a willingness or ability to plan for events in the near or far future.³⁶ This, of course, places into jeopardy the extent to which integrated decision-making approaches can be “practically” applied. As a response to the above concerns, certain “tools”, such as model of good governance and EIAs may be adopted in order to maximize the effectiveness of integrated decision-making approaches.³⁷

The practice of good governance may be closely intertwined with the success of integrated decision-making if corrupt institutions do not uphold principles of transparency and accountability and so, in turn, do not provide a conducive environment for active citizen participation.³⁸ As argued above, the multi-dimensional nature of sustainable development does, however, call for the voices of differing views to be heard. Thus, it may be the case that the successful practice of good governance is not only a prerequisite for the promotion of individual procedural rights, but is further required in order to foster sustainable development.

EIAs may be seen as an additional tool whereby integrated decision-making can be actualized in order to foster sustainable development. From a public policy perspective, the very use of EIAs represents a significant change from the general retrospective and punitive nature of traditional “command and control” methods of (environmental) regulation.³⁹ EIAs can therefore be thought of as a distinct tool (relative to past forms of environmental regulation) because they

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 135.

³⁷ Ibid., 134.

³⁸ Ibid., 93, 170 179.

³⁹ Jeffery, 451.

adopt a preventative approach and so embrace the Principle of Harm Prevention and the Precautionary Principle.⁴⁰

A well-informed and educated citizenry may play an important role in the decision-making process in order for EIAs be effective, as increased public participation may better embrace the multi-dimensional nature of sustainable development. In addition, if decisions concerning land use and natural resource development are inherently public and political acts (rather than merely processes of technical evaluation), this may imply that any and all decisions involve the allocation of public resources and competing individual priorities.⁴¹ As discussed above, a more integrated decision-making approach has at least the potential to allow for the interests, needs, values and concerns of those (in)directly implicated by a project to be heard and considered, so that traditional and ordinary forms of knowledge are recognized.⁴² Consequently, a broader array of concerns and voices may not only allow individuals to feel empowered and promote social equity, but increased participation within the assessment process may further allow for the “true” social, economic and environmental impacts of a given project to be given due consideration.⁴³ For such a model to be truly effective, a more active, better educated and well-informed public may be required, so that individuals can come to understand and appreciate the multi-dimensional goal of sustainable development as well as meaningfully participate in deliberations.⁴⁴ This, in turn, may demand for reduced national poverty levels in order to place all members of the public at an “equal” playing ground where they are in a position to appreciate, consider, understand and partake in the pertinent debates surrounding the economic, environmental and social impacts of a given project.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 453.

⁴² Ibid; Kidd, 188.

⁴³ Kidd, 188; Jeffery, 453-4.

⁴⁴ Jeffery, 454.

Efforts at the International Level

A Call for Greater and More Effective International Co-operation

Attempts to effectively engage the principles underlying international environmental law with the intent of promoting of sustainable development may be barred at the international level by minimal, or a complete lack of, co-operation amongst the relevant international bodies. Although countries may share a commonality of interests in maintaining the robustness and integrity of the planet, it cannot be denied that there are deep differences among their ideologies and policies over the (equitable) allocation of the burdens of addressing such issues as well as the manner through which these issues should be addressed.⁴⁵ Moreover, states may not always agree on individual and common short- and long-term goals or priorities; specifically whether to satisfy immediate needs of poverty alleviation to pursue policies that prevent or minimize environmental degradation.⁴⁶ These “clashes” of interests, ideologies, perceptions and priorities have the potential to intensify, especially as countries attempt to reach a consensus on what is “equitable” in the context of sustainable development.⁴⁷

Thus, in order to more effectively achieve sustainable development, it can be argued that such conflicts and disparities should be minimized.⁴⁸ As an underlying principle of international environmental law, co-operation is, without doubt integral for effective and efficient decision-making between states. More specifically, given that sustainable development encompasses economic development, social and environmental considerations, international co-operation in

⁴⁵ Edith Brown Weiss, “International Environmental Law: Contemporary Issues and the Emergence of a New World Order,” *Georgetown Law Journal* 81, no. 3 (1993): 710.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

these three key areas may prove to yield more effective policies and agreed upon norms regarding sustainable development.⁴⁹

By extension, increased and effective international co-operation may demand that the general norm of sustainability and an objective of sustainable development become the basis for state and non-governmental activities.⁵⁰ Although the importance and primacy of the state's role in international affairs and discussions regarding sustainable development is beyond the scope of this paper, the potential for the state to play an active role may be considered; which itself would likely entail for greater international co-operation between states and other relevant actors, such as the private sector, the scientific community and other relevant non-governmental institutions and actors.⁵¹

As a tool whereby discussion is facilitated, differing views are sought and listened to, and consensus or agreements are (hopefully) achieved, international institutions may also play a significant role in fostering sustainable development. It has, however, been suggested that it may be necessary to reform current institutions so that a more holistic and coordinated approach (that more appropriately conforms to models of sustainable development) is promoted.⁵² In addition, certain environmental issues, especially those (unaddressed) issues experienced by developing countries (such as desertification and soils, shelter and urbanization, management of wastes, food security and sustainable agriculture, environmental emergencies and other problems arising from poverty) may need to be emphasized and given equal attention relative to the concerns held by industrialized countries.⁵³ That is not to say that problems experienced by industrialized nations

⁴⁹ Atapattu, 122.

⁵⁰ Nico Schrijver, *The Evolution of Sustainable Development in International Law: Inception, Meaning and Status* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2008), 225.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Atapattu, 128.

⁵³ John Ntambirweki, "The Developing Countries in the Evolution of an International Environmental Law," *Hasting International and Comparative Law Review* 14, no. 4 (1991): 926-7.

should be ignored or minimized or that these issues are not as relevant; rather, this is strictly a call to ensure that the environmental problems faced by developed and developing states are given equal attention by international organizations.

Should sustainable development become an integral aspect of international institutions' mandate or their primary focus, a reformation of several current international institutions may be necessary.⁵⁴ Firstly, realigning current institutional priorities, if truly embraced, may prove to be more effective in promoting sustainable development practices. Moreover, better co-ordination of duties and responsibilities between present international environmental, economic and development institutions (such as the UNEP, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank) may be required.⁵⁵ This is not to say that overlap of activities can be minimized completely, but effective co-operation and meaningful dialogue between key institutions, as a principle underlying international environmental law, has the potential to more efficiently integrate the multi-dimensional nature of sustainable development.

Social Efforts to "Bridge the Gap" Between Industrialized and Developing States

As at the national level, increased disparity between rich and poor states may bar effective implementation of the principles underlying international environmental law as well as impede the pursuit of sustainable development. To reiterate, "impoverished" nations tend to place more focus and emphasis on projects and policies intended to allow for economic growth; thereby placing environmental and social concerns and consequences of initiatives to play secondary and

⁵⁴ Atapattu, 129.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 180-1.

tertiary roles.⁵⁶ Again, such behaviour is not only contradictory to the practice of sustainable development, but may further fail to embrace certain principles and rights (especially the right to a clean environment and the Principle of Equity) articulated in international environmental law. Thus, it can be suggested that, in order to foster sustainable development on a global scale, social efforts designed to decrease the disparity between rich and poor nations may be essential.

Certain (legally binding) provisions designed to provide “technical assistance” (namely technology transfers from industrialized to developing countries) may prove to be a specific international co-operation initiative whereby the current disparity between rich and poor states may be reduced.⁵⁷ Understood as all forms of international co-operation and collaboration other than purely commercial relations between states, technical assistance, it can additionally be suggested, may a keystone requirement to help “bridge the gap” if it allows developing countries to give the environment due consideration in development projects designed to contribute to the acceleration of economic growth and social development.⁵⁸ This, in turn, may ultimately call for increased international co-operation amongst states and other international actors with regards to the agreement or design of (formalized) arrangements declaring or providing these transfers. As demonstrated in several international agreements and conventions (such as the Basel Convention, the Vienna Convention, the Montreal Protocol, the Long Guidelines for Exchange of Information and Chemicals in Trade as well as the legal instruments within the UNEP), the manner through which technical assistance is provided is, of course, likely to differ amongst legal instruments.⁵⁹

Above all, (increased) technology transfers may be imperative in order to minimize or extinguish present inequalities and disparities between current generations. Technology transfers

⁵⁶ Weiss, “Environmental Equity: The Imperative for the Twenty-First Century,” 23.

⁵⁷ Ntambirweki, 916.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 916, 918.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 916.

may additionally allow for a more effective actualization of the Principle of Equity as it concerns standards of living and “well-being” of current and future generations.⁶⁰ Reducing the amount of disparity may also contribute to efforts aimed at promoting sustainable development, as it may allow decision-makers and the public at large to (have the means to) become (more) concerned, involved and aware of the multi-dimensional aspects of a given project.

Concluding Remarks

Following this discussion, it appears that increased co-operation, along with decreasing the disparity between the rich and poor, are integral to the promotion of sustainable development at both the national and international levels. Not only would such social and political action allow for more effective implementation of the main principles underlying international environmental law, but they further seem to be inextricably and inversely interlinked. At the national level, increased, active and meaningful participation of individuals requires a well-educated and well-informed (or, less impoverished) population that is able to equally consider and make sense of economic, environmental and social concerns. Additionally, increased co-operation between different players on the international stage appears to be imperative to ensure that the various needs and issues faced by industrialized and developing countries are equally met and addressed.

In order for such initiatives to be realized, the reduction of poverty (thereby reducing social and financial disparity) between individuals and states may prove to be imperative for the wide-spread and meaningful participation and co-operation that is required. In other words, the disparity between the rich and poor appears to be inversely related to increased and meaningful co-operation aimed at achieving sustainable development; the greater the disparity, the less potential there is for such co-operation. Tools or initiatives that may foster sustainable

⁶⁰ Ibid., 924.

development by making effective use of the principles underlying international environmental law may include processes of “good governance” and increased EIAs at the national level, as well as reformed roles of international institutions and the provision of (increased) technical assistance at the international level.

Overall, this paper sought to outline certain social and political efforts that may actively promote sustainable development and effectively engage the principles underlying international environmental law. After defining a number of key terms and briefly describing several main principles articulated in international environmental law, it was suggested that social action aimed at decreasing the “gap” between the rich and poor, along with the extent and level of co-operation amongst various actors, are inextricably and inversely interlinked. To foster sustainable development and effectively uphold certain principles underlying international environmental law may therefore call for a reduction in poverty levels and increased co-operation in decision-making processes on both the national and international stage.

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