

Summary of Julian L. Simon Memorial Lecture  
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## **Environmentalism and Sustainable Development: A Developing Country Perspective**

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‘Why is there so much erroneous thinking on the subject of the environment and development?’ This was the fundamental question Mr Louw sought to answer in his presentation. In doing so, he said, he was picking up where Julian Simon had left off due to his untimely death in 1988.

Why, for instance, is there such a fear about overpopulation, when past trends show that, despite rapidly growing population, the quality of life has only got better? Similarly, why is there is such a fear about resource scarcity, when resources have only got cheaper and more widely available? Mr Louw dwelt in detail on these issues and critiqued the new dogma of sustainable development.

### **Debunking the Concept of Sustainable Development**

The term ‘Sustainable Development’ comprises of two elements, he said: ‘sustainable’ and ‘development’. In approaching the issue, most policy-makers and environmentalists emphasize the former, erroneously believing that development must somehow be curbed if it is to be environmentally sustainable.

However, said Mr Louw, **it is not development, but lack of development, that is not sustainable.** The only alternative to development is stagnation, and this is definitely not

sustainable. We see from recent experience that **the more development there is, the more sustainable it is.**

Moreover, the concept of sustainable development places so much emphasis on conserving existing resources for future generations. This is an erroneous and misguided concern. Resources should be used to the extent they are needed *now*. Our forefathers did not think about us when they developed. This is fortunate, for we would otherwise not have the high standard of living we have today. Secondly, the **resources we consider so crucial may have no relevance to future generations.** Our forefathers did not preserve Europe's peat bogs for us and we are none the worse, for we now use more-efficient fuels. Similarly, future generations may have no need for the resources we rely on.

### **Sustainable Development Equals Eco-Imperialism**

Through the push for sustainable development, First World elites are launching an eco-imperialism that is far more insidious than any form of colonialism. At least colonialism brought benefits like technology transfer and infrastructure development. **By seeking to impose the thinking of First World elites on the entire developing world, eco-imperialism is holding back its economic development.**

The **eco-imperialism of sustainable development is also extremely racist.** Why is it, for instance, that when its advocates talk about overpopulation, they see it only as applying to the developing world? In fact, developed countries have much greater population densities than most developing countries do.

### **Freedom fuels development**

For decades, policy-makers have searched for the magic formula to economic growth and development. The formula is simple: freedom – political, social and economic -- fuels development. **Countries that are more 'free' are richer.** This pattern is very clear when national GDP figures are matched against a country's ranking on the international 'Freedom Index', which measures political and economic openness.

Similarly, when we match countries' rankings on the 'Freedom Index' with those on the international 'Human Development Index', we find that **freer countries fare better on all welfare indicators**, like health, literacy, and so on. The evidence is indisputable: free markets have always won in delivering all forms of development.

Ironically, **in countries in which the Government has taken it upon itself to deliver development, the poor have less**. This is because high government control and redistribution of GDP only slows growth. Countries with high government intervention also have greater economic inequality. Quite strangely, it is rich countries, which traditionally have less government, that can afford higher levels of government intervention than poor ones.

Looking at the data for the last few decades, unfree economies have always been poorer and freer economies richer. Moreover, rich countries have got richer and poor ones poorer. But not for the reasons Karl Marx cited. The fact is that **rich countries are getting richer because their economies and their societies are freer**.

Even small increases in freedom can bring a tremendous surge in development. We see this from the experience of India. Although India is a heavily state-controlled economy, and ranks low on the 'Freedom Index', the liberalization of the past few years has dramatically accelerated economic growth and per capita income.

### **Why is there so much global hyper-hysteria on the environment?**

As Julian Simon said, "There has been more improvement in the human condition in the past one hundred years" than ever before. Why, then, is there so much global hyper-hysteria on the environment. While there are legitimate concerns, they are minimal. How have environmentalists managed to so completely distort facts and create such a public scare?

Part of the reason is the vested interest of the scientific establishment, in saying to the public, “We know about a big danger facing you. Through your irresponsibility, you have caused it. If you give us money, we will save you.” The environmental movement’s tendency to make the public flagellate itself for the ills of the world and do penance to atone also fits very well with most religious thinking and practice.

But, said Mr Louw, **most of the global environmental hyper-hysteria is caused by humans’ basic survival instinct**, or the “**Rustle in the Grass**” syndrome. When standing in tall grass, all animals and humans will immediately go on full alert if they hear a rustle from within it. The instinct is to assume that it is a poisonous snake, although most often it is just a lizard. Yet, neither animals nor humans can afford to neglect the rustle, for it may lead to injury or death.

In making sustainable development policy, **Governments** must also apply the ‘rustle in the grass’ principle. That is, they **must be prepared for danger, but must look carefully at the facts so that they do not over-react.**