

Framing the Question :

POVERTY AND ITS IMPACT ON ENVIRONMENT AS VIEWED FROM ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

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Poverty is commonly defined as inability to meet one's basic economic needs. The World Bank defined it as an annual income of less than \$ 370 per year or less than \$ 1 per day. Based on this definition 1.4 billion people in developing countries or one of every four people in the planet are estimated to live under poverty line. The most distracting picture of poverty is the widening gap between the rich countries and the poor countries. The average income in the 20 richest countries is 37 times the average income in the 20 poorest countries¹. The number of poor people in developing countries is increasing due to local, regional, and global factors. Some of them can be mentioned such as : the tendency of the poor to have more children, the decreasing carrying capacity of the degraded environment where the poor live, the failures of the economic development policies implemented, the corruption of the poor countries' governments, the discrimination and distortion of the global markets, the imbalance of global income distribution among countries, etc. The causing factors are interconnected among each others. There is no way to stop it except by taking a new approach. The trickle-down approach is over. The question are : **“What kind of new approach can we work with ? Can it be called a holistic approach, social-justice approach, sustainable development approach, or other name? Will we choose this new approach in the light of anthropocentric kind of ethics or a biocentric kind of ethics?”**

The impact of poverty on environment is taking place in the form of involution process. It is a process described by Clifford Geertz as self-destructing². It pushes the poor people to use the available renewable resources more intensively and less sustainably just for survival. The carrying capacity of the environment will decrease and the opportunity of the young generations to live and work upon it will be limited. As a result the young people prefer to migrate to urban areas to look for other jobs. Because of the huge migration of poor people from rural to urban areas, poverty is becoming increasingly urbanized. The farming system in the rural areas will be maintained traditional or unchanged. Very few young people want to be involved in farming. If there is a change it comes from the development policies of the government supported by the World Bank. But in fact, it creates more dependency of the rural farmers on the outside resources than in-dependency on their own resources. The only way to get seeds, fertilizers, technology, and capital is from outside resources through loaning system. Yet it even pushes strongly the farmers to exploit their land more intensively to meet the targeted production. They don't care about the limited fertility of their land. Soon the land will be over exploited and its sustainability will decrease rapidly. Then the poor farmers will be falling into powerlessness, marginalized, and locked in the corner. The questions that are interesting to raise: **How far have the development policies of the governments in the developing countries as supported by the World Bank been changed? Is the new**

development paradigm named “sustainable development” reliable enough to take the place of the old development paradigm? How can we make it more reliable?

There is no doubt that poverty can be reduced and slowly eliminated. All people agree on this idea. Globalization can play an important role for reducing poverty if it is managed wisely. It can be a force that brings all good things available for helping the poor³. The reason is clear : poverty hurts our human conscience. It is unjustifiable to allow fellow human beings live in inhuman situation while through globalization resources needed to change it can be provided easily. Reducing poverty can be done together with improving the environmental quality. Both should be done together to get the optimal result. But the ironic thing is that although the cost to reduce the poverty as estimated by the UNDP is relatively small compared to the other costs such as military spending, cost spent for cigarettes, etc., significant effort and concrete actions to make it done are beyond expectation. The economic policy makers at the regional and global levels are rather reluctant to pursue it. There is a lack of motivation or a tendency to put the poverty issue of the developing countries in a lower priority. Reducing poverty can be done simply through an economic bottom-up approach by providing poor people the access to basic services such as rural employment, small credit, education, health, nutrition, family planning, reproductive health, safe water, and sanitation. It costs about \$ 40 billion a year. Such a cost is much less than \$ 800 billion per year spent for military needs and \$ 50 billion per year spent for cigarettes. The questions are : **What factors make those economic policy makers reluctant to take necessary actions to reduce poverty? Do they still wait the result of the trickle down approach as a top-down approach they implemented? Is there something wrong in the decision making system for the respective policies?**

Johannesburg Summit 2002 with its discussion topic on sustainable development was over. Since then sustainable development has been adopted globally as a legitimate and ethically justified vision to bring the necessary changes. A new platform named “Plan of Implementation” for global collaborations was established. Partnership was perceived as a major leap achieved by the Summit and it was chosen as the spirit that should motivate further collaborations. “The Summit represents a major leap forward in the development of partnerships, with the UN, Governments, business and civil society coming together to increase the pool of resources to tackle global problems on a global scale”, said the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his closing speech. A principle set out in the Rio de Janeiro Declaration on Environment and Development which is the principle of common but differential responsibilities has been accepted as a basic principle for bringing the collaboration plans among countries into concrete actions. It means that concrete actions can be undertaken soon to implement many plans that had been agreed on by all participants. The questions are : **Can the new platform established by Johannesburg Summit 2002 be used by the Society of Jesus for developing collaborations? What partners should the Society of Jesus choose to collaborate with? Are there some criteria that should be taken into account by the Society of Jesus in choosing partners for collaborations?**

¹ See G. Tyler Miller, Jr., *Living in the Environment : Principles, Connections, and Solutions*, Wadsworth Group, 2002, pp. 706 & 708.

² The whole concept can be found in Clifford Geertz, *Agricultural Involution : The Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia*, Berkeley : University of California, 1963.

³ See Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents*, W.W. Norton & Company Ltd, 2002, p. ix.