Chapter 4

THE MUTUAL FEEDBACK BETWEEN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS: ADDING RESPONSIBILITY AS A CATALYST

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I. The need for integrative approaches to sustainable development and human rights

The additional value which human rights-based approaches and sustainable development projects can bring to each other remains largely unrealized. To mobilize the positive mutual feedback between sustainable development⁴ and human rights more effectively, the international community must “operationalize awareness”, as Adnan

⁴ The most well-known definition was provided by the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) when it described sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) at 43; see also Experts’ Group on Environmental Law of the World Commission on Environment and Development, Environmental Protection And Sustainable Development: Legal Principles and Recommendations (Report adopted June 1986), UN Doc. WCED/8623/Add.1 (1986) (London/Dordrecht/Boston: Graham & Trotman/Martinus Nijhoff, 1987).
Amin has pointed out. While he was mainly referring to awareness about the much acknowledged need to integrate the ‘three pillars’ of sustainable development – economic development, social development and environmental protection – his observation applies with just


4 The ideas for this paper were originally presented at a Panel on “Human Rights and Economic and Social Development” of the 2004 Summer Institute of UN Studies at Columbia Law School. In light of the well-recognized need for integration, the topic was approached in an integrative fashion as well. Thus, the observations in this paper extend to sustainable development and all its pillars, including environmental protection. The drawback of disregarding environmental protection was again quite vividly expressed by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan in a message on the occasion of the International Day for Biological Diversity: “Biological diversity … is now recognized as crucial to sustainable development, the eradication of poverty and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals … The consequences of failing to stop the loss of biodiversity are too awful to contemplate.” UN Press Release, SG/SM/9289, ENV/DEV/780, OBV/420, 3 May 2004. – At the same time, the interaction between human rights and environmental protection is not explored in this article in an extensive fashion, since another panel was specifically dedicated to that subject. For the recognition of the concept of sustainable development...