

Letter from the Editor

The term "sustainable development" was brought into common use in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission). Calling for development that "meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generations," the Commission highlighted the need to simultaneously address developmental and environmental imperatives. Since then, substantial work has been undertaken by the World Bank and others to draw out the operational implications of the concept of sustainable development. This, for example, was the main theme of the World Bank's *World Development Report 1992* and the focus of a number of articles that appeared in the December 1993 issue of *Finance & Development*.

The learning process continues and, against the background of the World Bank's Fourth Annual Environmentally Sustainable Development Conference, held in September 1996, it is timely to revisit the key challenges of environmentally sustainable development. Three particular issues stand out: food security and rural development; urbanization and pollution; and improvement of the living standards of the world's poorest inhabitants. Indeed, the poor tend to be the hardest hit by environmental degradation and the least well-equipped to protect themselves; at the same time, they cause much of the damage to the environment because of short-term necessity, ignorance, and lack of resources.

In his overview, "Sustainable Development: From Theory to Practice," Ismail Serageldin examines these challenges and provides an introduction to the other four articles featured in this issue that touch on environmentally sustainable development. It is encouraging that awareness of environmental issues is leading to action in many countries. As Serageldin notes, ". . . opportunities exist in all sectors to marry the forces of economic growth with those that support the foundations of sustainable development--wise resource management, equitable distribution of benefits, and reduction of negative effects on people and the environment from the process of economic growth."

Claire Liuksila
Editor-in-Chief