

Sustained development requires contributions from all of us

By: Seth Baum

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Sustainable development is the progression of humanity. It is a long-term vision of progress in which future generations' well-being are held equal to the current one's.

This contrasts significantly with many current development trends, such as fossil fuel consumption, over-fishing and exploding population growth, all of which take place at rates suspected to be too high to be maintained indefinitely.

At this rate, sooner or later — within our lifetimes on many fronts — resource shortages will occur and our population may catastrophically crash.

Concerned for humanity's future, a sustainable development movement has grown worldwide.

It merges environmental and social justice, calling simultaneously for decreases in resource consumption and environmental damage and for increases in economic and physical well-being. And it asks humanity to act in unison towards its goals.

Unfortunately, international cooperation on sustainable development has been largely futile. 1992's Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1997's Kyoto Protocol, and this past August's Sustainable Development Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, either failed to write strong resolutions on sustainable development or failed to lead to the actions needed to meet the goals. Much of the dispute lies between richer and poorer countries, with the United States being among the least cooperative.

Richer countries insist that poorer countries be held to the same standards on costly environmental regulations and are reluctant to offer the poorer countries the financial support they would need.

Poorer countries insist that richer countries lead the way, and claim that they need to be exempt from certain regulations in order to develop their economies.

The U.S.'s resistance to sustainable development initiatives also stems from its culture which consumes resources at an alarming and unparalleled rate.

Our automobile-dominated transportation system not only require huge quantities of

petroleum, but it also destroys huge tracts of forest and farmland, pollutes our air, and is our largest contributor to greenhouse gases, which cause global warming.

Our meat-based diet and factory farming system depletes topsoil and freshwater reserves, uses tons of pesticides, fertilizers, and other harmful chemicals, and is our second largest contributor to greenhouse gases.

And our throw-away consumer culture wastes resources, clogs landfills, and pollutes whatever area makes our products, which are often overseas.

All of these unnecessary cultural phenomena further prevent our ability to provide developmental aid to poorer countries, although our generosity is not great as it is given how wealthy we are.

Meeting the targets of sustainable development would require significant changes in these and other aspects of our lifestyle.

Our leaders shy away from accepting these targets because it is politically infeasible for them to ask Americans to make such lifestyle changes.

Therefore, we must take it upon ourselves to make the necessary changes.

Each step taken by each person reduces the damage we inflict on future generations and makes it that much easier for our leaders to cooperate internationally on sustainable development.

There are several things you can do to help the effort, and there are several UR groups that can help you.

Avoid driving as much as possible by walking, bicycling, taking the bus, or carpooling. If you must buy a car, choose the most fuel efficient car you can purchase.

Grassroots, UR's environmental group, can help you with this and other things.

You can cut back on your meat consumption, although be careful to continue to meet all of your nutrition needs.

The new UR Vegetarian Education Group can help you in this transition. Don't buy more than you need, and buy used goods where possible.

A new group discussing voluntary simplicity may be able to help you with this. And you can contribute money to poorer countries.

On campus, the World Education Fund for Women raises money to send to school girls in poorer countries that otherwise couldn't afford it.

If you are interested in getting more information, contact Baum.

Baum is a senior and can be reached at sbaum@campustimes.org.