



THIRD ESSAY CONTEST
Fifth Summit of the Americas

OEA/Ser.E
III-CE/VCA-4/09
3 March 2009
Original: English

PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY FOR OAS MEMBER STATES
AT THE FIFTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

(David Robinson - United States of America)

**Promoting Environmental Sustainability for OAS Member States
at the Fifth Summit of the Americas**

David Robinson

Abstract

This paper examines the recommendations for promoting environmental sustainability with the Organization of American States (OAS) at the Fifth Summit of the Americas and the solutions for policy changes toward environmental sustainability within the Western Hemisphere. It identifies three assumptions that exist which are 1) sustainability development is disparate within OAS member states; 2) multilateralism is needed for hemispheric cooperation however a one size fits all approach is not the solution to sustainability obstacles; 3) environmental sustainability should have both a regional and a hemispheric focus in the form of sub-regional inter-governmental partnerships.

Introduction

One of the missions of the Organization of American States (OAS) is to confront shared problems on the western hemisphere through a multilateral forum; in this case environmental sustainability concerns affect all OAS member states. However with the recent election win in the United States of President Barack Obama on a global change platform, and the momentum of a global shift towards research in sustainable development in alternative energy sources, as seen in the case of biofuels in Brazil, environmental sustainability is at the forefront of most global agendas. The adoption of the Draft Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain presented by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago at the Fifth Summit of the Americas, with the over arching theme of “securing our citizens future by promoting human prosperity, energy security and environmental sustainability” a greater emphasis has been placed on strengthening and promoting hemispheric cooperation in sustainable development.

Sustainable development is a necessary challenge to many nations within the western hemisphere. It is important in providing access to clean water and sanitation; combating poverty through economic development; finding solutions for climate change which requires a long term global response; and alternative energy research, such as ethanol research in biofuels. Recommendations for a solution in sustainable development is dependent upon the following three assumptions; 1) sustainability development is disparate within OAS member states; 2) multilateralism is needed for hemispheric cooperation however a one size fits all approach is not the solution to sustainability obstacles; 3) environmental sustainability should have both a regional and a hemispheric focus in the form of sub-regional inter-governmental partnerships.

Disparities in Sustainable Development

In terms of sustainable development disparities exist within OAS member states, wealthier nations with more natural resources do better off economically than poorer nations with less available resources. Both rich and poor nations alike have their own sustainability issues that are specific to their nation and/or region. For example, the U.S. has played a dominant role in shaping the agenda for environmental sustainability within the western hemisphere due to its high energy consumption

and its growing dependence on oil however they have shifted toward a renewed focus on achieving energy independence through ethanol production to sustain. The environmental sustainability needs of the U.S. are in stark contrast to that of Brazil that has already begun to move toward energy independence through ethanol production which now provides approximately 40 % of the country's motor vehicle fuel (Weintraub 2007). The goal of energy independence has been an integral part of the Brazilian sustainability model. Both countries however have different levels of environmental sustainability desired.

Misconceptions exist between OAS member states concerning the perceived levels of sustainability. It is the perception of wealthier nations that environmental sustainability is expensive to implement in poorer nations due to the lack of infrastructure and their incapacity to integrate sustainability programs into their development planning. On the other hand, the perception is that of skepticism with wealthier nations on their commitment to sustainable development programs and the demand for a more equitable sharing of environmental cost and responsibilities from less wealthier nations (Shah 2005).

Regionalism to Address Sustainability Goals

The product of the 1996 Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia was a Plan of Action signed by all governments that participated in the summit, 64 initiatives addressed the urgent need of the OAS member states to “advance toward sustainable development by strengthening social awareness by promoting public participation, integration, hemispheric cooperation, social justice” and equitable access to healthcare (OAS 1996). The 1996 conference on sustainable development was a follow-up to the 1992 Rio Earth Summit where 152 world leaders combined to set a plan of action agenda on sustainability (Shah 2005). This one size fits all approach used at both conferences focused on the overall hemispheric plan of action that left out the intricate regional sustainability needs of several OAS states.

The Fifth Summit of the Americas agenda in sustainable development can no longer neglect the regional focus of the OAS member states. It is imperative that an agenda focus on both regional and hemispheric initiatives. In the case of the host state of the Fifth Summit of the Americas, Trinidad and Tobago, they are on track to reach their sustainability goals to achieve “developed world status” by 2020, for their government-owned water and sewage authority system (WASA) program that

gives 92% of their 1.3 million population water and sewage treatment access (Grimes 2005). This program has decreased the overall amount of energy use within the country, while successful for the island nation of Trinidad and Tobago, it is not a sustainability objective for the much larger nations like the U.S. because their sustainability agenda's are different.

The WASA program however is an attainable and legitimate sustainable development program that can be implemented for the CARICOM island nation-states that have similar regional sustainability concerns. This regionalism is necessary to properly address sustainability needs identified within the hemisphere. Trinidad and Tobago should regionally partner with the CARICOM nations to provide insight into technological advancements made in obtaining water treatment and sewage success.

Each OAS member states should focus on their country's vision concerning environmental sustainability and on setting a national environmental plan of action. This plan should then be combined with OAS member states regionally to address prominent sustainability concerns. The first Summit of the Americas held in 1994, focused on creating partnerships with OAS member states between their economies, environmental protection and social justice. Similarly, the Americas Environmental ministers met in 2001 in Montreal to commit to maximizing support for policies that support economic and environmental protection (Segger et al 2002). Within the western hemisphere, there are five sub-regional free trade agreements that have created partnerships for trade with OAS member states that have existing agreements on the environment that are beneficial for sustainable development partnerships.

The following are the regions identified under the free trade agreements and their environmental partnerships that can be used to target regional sustainability challenges; Mercosur and the Mercosur Framework Agreement of the Environment; The Andean Community (ANCOM) and the Comité Andino de Autoridades Ambientales (CAAAM); the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP), the Central American Common Market (CACM) and the Central American Commission for the Environment and Development (CCAD); and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the North American Agreement for the environmental Cooperation (NAAEC). These sub-regional partnerships exist under environmental management initiatives that are aimed at preserving the environment and promoting sustainable development (Segger et al 2002).

Environmental Sustainability Initiatives for the Hemisphere

In relation to sustainability policies focused on the hemisphere, all OAS members should focus on the following initiatives to promote environmental sustainability some of which is highlighted by the Energy and Environment Group - United Nations Development Programme; reducing the environmental impact of agriculture by pursuing sustainable farming practices; improving freshwater resources through utilizing more efficient uses of water in agriculture; combating climate change through stabilizing green house gas emissions in the atmosphere; strengthening institutions and governance with the western hemisphere through the training and recruitment of environmental experts; and the creation of inter-hemispheric university exchange programs needed to promote cooperation in environmental technology curriculum and study; lastly the promotion of the eradication of poverty through economic development (UNDP 2006).

Conclusion

In conclusion, initiatives at the Fifth Summit of the Americas that promote environmental sustainability such as the ethanol program in Brazil should be supported in that it has transformed their country's sustainability focus toward energy independence and has identified a vast potential for economic development. Since levels of sustainability desired by OAS member states are disparate it essential that a one size fits all approach to policy should not be implemented due to increased regionally specific concerns.

The collaboration of inter-governmental sub-regional and hemispheric partnerships to promote cooperation in environmental sustainability should be promoted through multilateral OAS policies that will have a stream-lined focus on actively combating changing sustainability needs. Finally, hemispheric programs should be implemented that will attempt to face the challenges of improving water uses in agriculture, reducing green house gas emissions, identifying the long term effects of climate change and promoting environmental technology through inter-hemispheric university exchange programs.

References

Grimes, Errol. "Environmental Sustainability in Trinidad and Tobago - Ensuring Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation." UN Chronicle Online Edition. 2005.

Organization of American States. "Summit of Americas on Sustainable Development." 07 Dec. 1996. Summit for the Americas Information Network. 02 Feb. 2009 <www.summit-americas.org>.

Segger, Marie-Claire C., Maria L. Reynal, Nicole Borregaard, and Ana Gonzalez. A New Mechanism for Hemispheric Cooperation on environmental Sustainability and Trade? Fundacion ECOS. International Institute for Sustainable Development. April 2002.

Shah, Anup. "Global Issues - Sustainable Development Introduction." 26 May 2005. 02 Feb. 2009 <www.globalissues.org>.

"Sustainable Development." 07 June 1996. Organization of American States. 02 Feb. 2009 <www.oas.org>.

UN News. "Climate Change Raises More than Environmental Issues - Ban Ki-moon." UN News Service [New York, NY] 4 June 2007: 1.

United Nations Development Programme. Making Progress on Environmental Sustainability. Rep. New York: UNDP - Bureau of Development Policy - Energy and Environment Group, 2006.

Weintraub, Sidney. "Promising Ethanol Developments." Issues in International Political - CSIS Economy 87 (Mar. 2007).

Weintraub, Sidney. "The Energy Situation in the Western Hemisphere." Foreign Affairs - CSIS July 2007: 1-12.