

“RETAIN A
SENSE OF
URGENCY
AND
ENCOURAGE
DIALOGUE
BETWEEN
THE NATIONS”



Warren Evans is the Senior Advisor for Sustainable Development at the World Bank, USA. This new role follows seven years after holding the position of World Bank Environment Director, which includes overseeing the implementation of the bank’s Environment and Climate Change strategies. As a US national, he joined the World Bank in July 2003. From 1988 to 2003, he held technical and managerial positions at the Asian Development Bank (ADB) based in Manila, Philippines—his last ADB position was Director of the Environment and Social Safeguards Division. Prior to that, Evans worked on environmental issues in developing countries that included serving as Advisor to the Thai National Environment Board from 1978–81 and as Managing Director of an international environmental consulting firm based in Asia from 1982–87. *Swati Prabhu* from *TerraGreen* caught up with him during the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit earlier this year.

What is your definition of sustainable development?

Sustainable development for me is quite in line with the conventional definition given by the Brundtland Commission. It really is about being able to achieve poverty reduction and economic growth in a manner that leaves the next generation at least as much quality, natural resources, to be precise environmental quality, equity as benefitted by the current generation. So, obviously it also has to do with economic sustainability in a way that you are able to generate economic returns on the development that one is undertaking. But, it is really not sustainable if you are degrading the environment and harming the natural resource base which is used to generate the wealth that is lost.

“20 years Post Rio”, the theme of DSDS 2012, how far do you think the world has been successful in protecting its global commons?

Quite frankly, not very far. I think it does not take a rocket scientist to look at the situation and review the assessment of

the millennium ecosystem from the IPCC or from any of the analytical work that is being done by looking at the quality of the environment and the actions that societies are taking to either improve or degrade it. But frankly, we are losing the war. We have won some important battles but we are losing the bigger war. The quality of the ecosystems, the services they provide in many cases are going down, not up. Part of the problem and maybe also one of the biggest failures, I think has been the lack of ability to measure and value ecosystems and to account for that. So, lot of the work that we are doing right now is focussed on how to overcome those shortcomings because if you do not measure means you are not managing it.

Instead of playing the blame game how do you think the developed and the developing nations work together towards sustainable development?

Well, you know on the climate front what I see is a tremendous amount of progress by many developing countries and developed nations as well. They are doing

that in spite of what we see and hear about the negotiation process. The demand from our partner countries, i.e., developing countries for support regarding climate action has grown so rapidly and large and this is because those countries, in part I am sure, because they are looking at it as a global public good but primarily because they know they have to make these investments for achieving their own sustainable development. The key now is to bring like-minded countries together, to share lessons because a lot of lessons are being generated that are not being sufficiently conveyed to others for example lessons on the impacts of policy reforms, regulatory reforms, intuitions, investments, etc. There is a real need for like-minded countries to come together and share these lessons. So, together they will be a force that will help, hopefully the negotiation process move forward and lead to rapid progress. I think on the other issue about accounting of valuing ecosystem services and incorporating that into national accounts, we have started a new programme called the





'WAVES'—Wealth Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services. It is very encouraging to see the number of developing and developed countries because this is not just a developing country issue, it is a global issue which involves all the countries. The number of developing countries, in particular as we mainly work with them that want to participate and understand what their resource base is and what the options are for them to get the economic benefits, poverty reduction benefits but in a sustainable way. There is a momentum now and we must use it adequately. We hope that Rio+20 will help to push that momentum. Hence, there are lots of things which are positive that is happening whether or not we are going to see enough action to actually achieve a two degree world. However, I am less optimistic. So, I think we have to start thinking about a three degree world or a four degree world, the impacts of that on the natural resource base, agriculture, and urban systems are huge. I do not think we have yet given enough thought on how to deal with that. In my opinion, the challenge is just going to get greater. We have already lost a number of years on this and we cannot afford to delay it any further to take real actions because the problems are going to catch up with the societies soon.

In your opinion, how do events like the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit (DSDS) help in promotion and protection of the environment?

Well, I think DSDS is unique in many ways. It is unique, primarily because it brings together private sector, civil society, and government. Most summits are either government, or private sector, or civil society. So, this is one of the few summits that integrate all and this is extremely important. We need much more of that because no government is going to solve these problems; they cannot. Also leaving it to the private sector is not going to solve the problem and expecting the civil society to devise solutions is also not the way out. But all of them have major roles to play, so if they get together, such as this event DSDS then you really get an opportunity to come up with innovation on how to address the problem. Another challenge we got and I think DSDS is good at raising awareness and the challenge we have is really going to scale. There are lots of interesting things being done by many organizations but we do not have that level of scale required to address the problem and that is why we are losing the ecosystem. The awareness-raising activities that you get in events like DSDS are very important. This is because it is credible, it is not something

false. When you look at the speakers, you find that they are serious speakers who are credible. So when the alarm bells ring from these discussions, their alarm bells have credibility. This is really important. So, I think we need more of DSDS. What I would like to see is a DSDS of each regional world because the other thing is that it is very natural to have a fairly strong Asian or South Asian focus here, which it does and it is international. There is a good reason because a lot of the issues are right here but I think the other regions do not benefit enough. I would really like to see this kind of dialogue take place in other parts of the world.

Finally, a message for the young readers of our magazine.

I think the main message is to retain a sense of urgency. I fear that in a situation with the global economy the way it is, we lose our attention to longer-term, but much bigger issues that affect sustainability. And so, I think we have to be proactive and retain that sense of urgency. That is my encouragement and message because we cannot wait any longer to take action on these issues. ■