

Will the Gap Between South and North Widen?

Number 8/12

Fact Sheet

Current North-South arguments over the world economy and the environment will increase, especially in such issues as trade, immigration and technology transfer.

Climate Change

The South - North conflict

If scientific predictions about climate change and its impacts are accurate, the current South-North arguments over the world economy and the environment will increase, especially in such issues as trade, immigration and technology transfer.

The South-North conflict would be strongly linked to industrial development, as emissions from industrial processes are a leading cause of climate change. Pressure should be imposed on all countries to reduce consumption of fossil fuels.

The South

Less developed countries in early stages of industrialisation will, however, be reluctant to reduce their rate of economic development. They will argue that the rich industrialised countries whose past emissions are mainly responsible for climate change should bear the burden of cutting back emissions of global greenhouse gases. The North, on the other hand, could pressure the South to stop clearing tropical forests and other ecosystems that act as "sinks" for absorbing and neutralising greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere.

Climate change may cause further conflict by imposing its most destructive impacts on the South. These impacts include:

- altering the relative distribution of food and water;
- pressure from faster population growth, widespread hunger;
- a crisis of refugees;
- countries unable to buy resources; and,
- declining natural resources.

The north

The North, however, will be better able to defend its resources and territories than the South should adverse consequences of climate change become a catastrophe.

Conflicts of interest over development and resources would raise issues of equity and responsibility between the North and South. The North has a little over 20% of the world's population, consumes about 80% of the World's resources and emits most of mankind's industrial pollution. This suggests that the South will expect the North to making sacrifices needed to respond to climate change.

Unfortunately, much time could be wasted on this conflict, so exacerbating the causes of climate change. This may result in little co-operation to global reduce the greenhouse gases that underlie climate change.

A paradox

Efforts to avoid North-South conflict might, on the other hand, also contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Agreements are required to accommodate the South's need to continue industrial development, which is the main cause of climate change.

This can be lessened by developing technologies with lower emissions but these will probably be developed in the North, raising the contentious issue of the South's dependence on the North for sharing and transferring these technologies at affordable costs.

□

