

# Development as if the World Mattered

## Article Summary

By L. Hunter Lovins

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In the West Central Highlands of Afghanistan an empty diversion canal for a micro-hydro electric power plant is emblematic of what's wrong with international development and what needs to be done.

Abandoned since the Soviets stripped the turbines from it, the diversion could supply a megawatt of power to the city of Bamiyan and to the thousands of rural people around it. It could sustainably bring power, critical for development, to that region of the poorest country in the world outside of Africa. Instead, the U.S. is funding a multi-million dollar powerline from the north to Kabul. Other proposals call for spending billions to build coal plants across the north of the country to feed more power into that tenuous line. Clinics are built with U.S. tax money with no regard for solar orientation, and no energy budget. The doctor borrowed a diesel generator but has no money to buy fuel.

Most of the world's people are stuck in poverty, and all major ecosystems are in decline. Spending more money, however, will not by itself solve the problems. The answers must include fundamentally rethinking international development so that it implements world best practice in sustainable development technologies in ways that promote the creation of locally controlled, viable businesses.

In 2000, the Millennium Development Goals set targets for eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowering women, improving maternal health, reducing child mortality, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership for development by 2015. Jeffrey Sachs, the Director of the Millennium Development Project, a recent Time magazine article called for the wealthy nations to meet their development pledges as the recipe for meeting the Goals.

But more money, alone, will do little good. Unless there are changes in how development money is spent, and how development is done, such increases will not decrease poverty.

Around the world, aid money tends to create perverse versions of a welfare society, dependent on big western contractors and foreign NGOs. When the money runs out and the westerners leave, the people struggle on in poverty. Each "crisis du jour" repeats the process—money pours in to aid the afflicted people, but winds up in the pockets of developing country contractors.

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*L. Hunter Lovins 2005*

Natural Capitalism and a growing array of other books prove how the rapidly emerging best practice in sustainable technologies can meet basic human needs around the world and solve most of the environmental problems facing the planet at a profit.

Imagine, a world in which no family needs to burn smoky dung or wood or oil lamps for light, where wireless digital communications are available to everyone, and where women and young people have illumination to become literate, to be able to see a brighter future reflected in the solar cells that power this vision. This model of development starts its business planning from the bottom up. It asks how much does a farmer have to spend? What will your product do to increase an urban dweller's income? In India, SELCO is showing how, without subsidies, even poor families can afford solar electricity. In China "Eco-machines" of living plants are cleaning the water in polluted canals, while creating habitat and beautiful community parkways. SEKEM, in Egypt, is using private enterprise to lift thousands of people out of poverty, deliver quality organic food to European markets, and now, to create a University.

Collectively, the array of sustainability practices such as efficient and renewable energy supplies, green building technologies, efficient water treatment and delivery systems, and sustainable approaches to providing food and health care can do a better job of meeting development needs in Afghanistan and other developing countries than the conventional approaches offered by the western consulting firms with whom USAID typically contracts.

Our tax dollars are funding the current system of "development done wrong." We deserve better, and the rest of the world desperately needs it.

*The world  
desperately  
needs a new  
model of  
development.*

*L. Hunter Lovins is president and founder of Natural Capitalism, Inc. (<http://www.natcapinc.com>), a consulting agency, and Natural Capitalism Solutions (<http://www.natcapsolutions.org>), a 501(c)3 research and education non-profit. She is a Professor of Business at Presidio World College in California, consultants to some of the world's largest companies, and is currently in Afghanistan advising the government and others on sustainable ways to reconstruct the country.*

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