

BENCH MARKS PRINCIPLES - The Global Reality

The political, economic and technological influences

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC INFLUENCES

1. We live in a context of fierce and growing global competition, the over-accumulation of production and of capital, and the relentless search of capital for new profitable outlets. This has resulted in the dismantling of national boundaries and the sovereignty of nation states and the globalization of business and business opportunities. This is further exacerbated by technology improving processes in production, which increases competition between enterprises, exerting even more pressure on business to improve efficiency and cut costs to remain competitive.
2. Global competition has manifested itself in many companies transferring their operations from the North to the South as one strategy to increase profits. This results in broken communities and unemployment in the North and in deepening the crisis of weakened social institutions and environmental conditions in the South.
3. This is having consequences on both the people of the North and the South. The way that present competition has manifested itself negates social and environmental concerns, especially in the South. By transferring their operations to the South, companies increase their profits through the use of cheaper labour and easier access to raw and other naturally available resources and services.
4. This form of profit-driven investment impoverishes the quality of the lives of people and destroys their natural environment. Unemployment is increasing both in the North and the South. Moreover workers are deprived of their basic rights, suffer high job insecurity, with increasing labour informalization, and flexible labour standards, with a high risk of occupational hazards.
5. The unpayable foreign debt that consumes the economic product of the Southern nations and the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on the countries in the South worsen the situation. This situation is made worse by the dumping of waste from the North in the South, which severely affects people's lives and adversely damages the environment and the social fabric of local communities.
6. Migrant labour in and between countries directly breaks down family life, social relations and traditions. Migrant workers are deprived of their basic rights, freedom of association and basic organizational opportunities to defend their interests.
7. Through various multilateral agreements, governments, business and military industries join together to make up international treaties, which influence national legislation to suppress any dissenting voices. Suppression takes different forms, ranging from outright suppression to more subtle forms, depriving people of access to information and decision-making processes.
8. The existence of ecological debt historically incurred due to the misappropriation of the South's natural and cultural heritage, aided by means of unfair exchange mechanisms, and the unbearable external debt should be acknowledged, stopped and amends made.
9. The experience of market-driven development has impoverished local communities, limited their independence and ability to be responsible for their own self-determination,

local natural resources and culture. Civil society groups, organizations and communities have started to adopt the means by which the concept of sustainable communities can be achieved. Corporations need to analyze their programmes, policies and practices in the light of their impact on the sustainability of communities.

10. All human activity, including business development and expansion, impacts on the natural environment, the community, and future generations. There are over-riding considerations which ethically constrain this activity in respect of:
- zones of conflict;
 - ecologically sensitive environments;
 - no-go exclusion zones (e.g. wildlife reserves and sacred lands);
 - vulnerable populations (e.g. the impact of HIV/AIDS, the destruction of tribal identity);
 - endangered locations where irreversible impact would have significant consequences;
 - inappropriate exportation of military equipment;

In certain situations, respect for these considerations will necessitate the development of policies involving moratoria or the suspension of operations.

IMPACT OF MILITARISM

The implementation of the economic power of globalization depends on the militarization of the planet, which goes against the construction of sustainable society. The military industry is directly implicated in human rights abuse and the development of thermo-nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, which threaten the existence of life in all its forms.

The concentration of offensive military capacity in only a few countries undermines the sovereignty of other countries in making decisions concerning war and peace. The private sector commits to resolving the social, economic and environmental impacts originating from corporate activities in a peaceful manner and through measures that strengthen political and economic democracy, social and environmental justice and integrity of all creation.

TECHNOLOGICAL IMPACTS

Today's capital markets have fallen prey to the allure of new technologies and their potential for the development of entirely new forms of products and product lines, but the decisions to develop and use such products are not always ethically appropriate nor socially responsible.

Communication and Internet services, cloning and genetic engineering - to name a few - in our fast-paced and rapidly changing world are revolutionizing the market place. Ethical and social considerations lag far behind, to the point where new product development and sales become ends in themselves rather than means to improve the quality of life or enhance care for the environment.

As many technological developments are moved around the globe their production processes, product distribution patterns, accessibility and affordability occur with striking variations. The degree of disparity among communities in the South and North in accessing their benefits raises yet another ethical concern. Moreover, the ownership structures within the technology sector, the

retained manufacturing controls practised by industry leaders, and the patent protections granted by governments, have further created situations where skills transfer is severely limited, where risks transfer is often one-sided, where the dignity of human labour has been diminished if not lost, where job displacements occur unabatedly, and where new patterns of economic dependence have reached unacceptable levels.

This is not to say that new technologies have not created social and environmental benefits, but the great hope for humanity with which modern technologies were once greeted has already been called into question. Technology, whether advanced by the microchip or by gene splicing, must in all cases meet the demands of sustainable community and be conditioned by ethical, social and environmental criteria.

The global corporate responsibility expectations, as outlined here, have not in all cases been made specific to various of the emerging new technologies. Nevertheless, many of the Principles, Criteria and Bench Marks in the text would easily apply by implication.

As an overriding principle for consideration among others, we believe that the potential for profitability gained by bringing new technology products to market, must be weighed against the potential for social and environmental harm and rejected when the impacts of such new products would negatively affect the lives and livelihood of vulnerable populations already under threat from conditions of poverty, deprivation and exclusion.

We insist that people are always the focus in any human activities, including in business and financial expansions. Governments, international institutions and companies should try by all means to create spaces for the emergence of civil society groups for the public good. Global forums should narrow the gap between the rich and the poor, internationally, regionally and locally.

Cognizance must be taken of greed and the relentless pursuit of the accumulation of wealth for a few. Rather, economic activity should focus on enhancing the quality of people's lives and protect the natural environment by promoting policies around investment that promote sustainable livelihoods and which contribute to the growth of sustainable communities.