# INTERFACE BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIETY: THE ADVENT OF THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY-RHETORIC OR A REALITY

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## ABSTRACT

*"Knowledge is the real wealth of the nations". And the present century witnesses in a very real sense the advent of a knowledge society. To say it in the words of Karl Marx: At once, initially in the Primitive civilizations muscle power and the simple stone tools were a reflection of strength, in feudal society the land became an essential commodity reflecting power, possessions and might. In the capitalist society it is the capital, ownership of surplus that creates the difference between the bourgeoisie and the prolitrate, the haves and the have-nots. But the present century as the post modernist argue, sees the coming of the knowledge as the defining power of our society. Knowledge permeates the essence of governance of the nation states. It has led to the emergence of the new knowledge commons. The knowledge base of the society facilitates policy formulation, Implementation, monitoring and evaluation and also promotes the shared participation of people in the governance processes.*

*The Globally shared knowledge of sustainable development paradigms and models have fastened the pace of development in the countries of the third world, from microcredit, to sustainable agricultural practices, rainwater harvesting and green movements, this shared knowledge base must evenly benefit the nation states.*

*So, in this respect, has the flat world become a reality? Yes if I'm standing at the part of the world that is west, and so also developed, which taps the investment and market opportunities in the countries of the third world by its instruments of domination, aid and influence.*

*The author argues that a flat world is more a rhetoric than a reality. As many of the sub-Saharan African countries still are at the far end of the human development Index, where poverty malnutrition, deprivation, inequalities, exclusion, high mortality, poor standards of education are still a major concern.*

*And so has a knowledge society truly emerged? Yes, again for the developed countries where the knowledge base of the society fructifies into tangible development. And only partially in the least developed, and some developing countries where the penetration of knowledge is superfluous and the literacy rates are low.*

*So, what needs to be done to create the World that ought to be? This paper has something to suggest and throw light upon.*

"The open society, the unrestricted access to knowledge, the unplanned and uninhibited association of men for its furtherance - these are what may make a vast, complex, ever growing, ever changing, and ever more specialized and expert technological world, nevertheless a world of human society." [i]

- J. Robert Oppenheimer

The socio-economic cultural and technological transformation in societies in the greater part of the world in the twenty first century shall depend in large proportions on knowledge, for knowledge shall provide the foundation for an inclusive society, the essential opalescent of which is to improve the wellbeing of people, ordinary people.

The present times almost without doubt reflect the transition of our societies into the knowledge society. This in a significant way, a radical departure from the Marxian "Materialistic conception of History" which saw all social institutions as being determined and conditioned by economic circumstances, and

especially the conditions of production. These economic circumstances change with developments in technique, inventions, discoveries, and the like, while institutions become fixed and thus lag behind. It remained for Marx, to develop the idea that all social changes have their ultimate causes in the modes of production and exchange, or that economic factors dominate all history and determine social organization, classes, and class interests.[ii]

Some of the most emphatic arguments on the question who veiled power in society came from the Marxian materialistic conception, which argues that in the primitive communism the muscle power was of the greatest significance, and those who possessed it were considered powerful. Besides the possession over simple tools, like bows, arrows, sharp stones for hunting too were a ramification of power in primitive societies, yet however there were no classes in such societies. Further in agrarian societies the possession of land, ownership of surplus, and control over slaves was seen as the reflection of power in society, and thus the class of masters & slaves emerged.

Leading further, in the Feudal mode of production the possession over territories was seen as the basis of power and thus emerged the class of the Feudal lords, clergy as the Haves and the class of the have-nots: serfs. These classes were again essentially economic.

In Capitalistic mode of production, the Bourgeoisie emerged as the Haves based on their ownership of capital, possession of the factories, the control over surplus and also the control over the have-nots i.e. the prolitrates or the class of the workers, which were exploited and oppressed by the haves.

However, in socialism the society is conceived to be having only the workers class and the state is predisposed with the responsibility of the distribution of surplus and also the wealth. The underlying philosophy in socialistic society is: "To each according to the need and from all according to their ability."

Finally, in the communist mode of production a classless society emerges and there is enough of surplus for all to be satisfies and contented, this in a way is the realization of the "Total man". There is no competition amongst individuals, and all live in a perfect harmonic equilibrium in society.

The communist society however still remains an unrealized utopian conception, yet many of the post modernist critics argue that the advent of the knowledge society is the realization of "The Communist Manifesto" under which the capital is available to all, is diluted & is well within the easy reach of all, owing to the liberal market ideologies, and the magnification of the financial markets that entrepreneurship has been promoted[1]. Yet what really wields power in our present-day society is "The power of Knowledge" and those who possess it are all powerful.
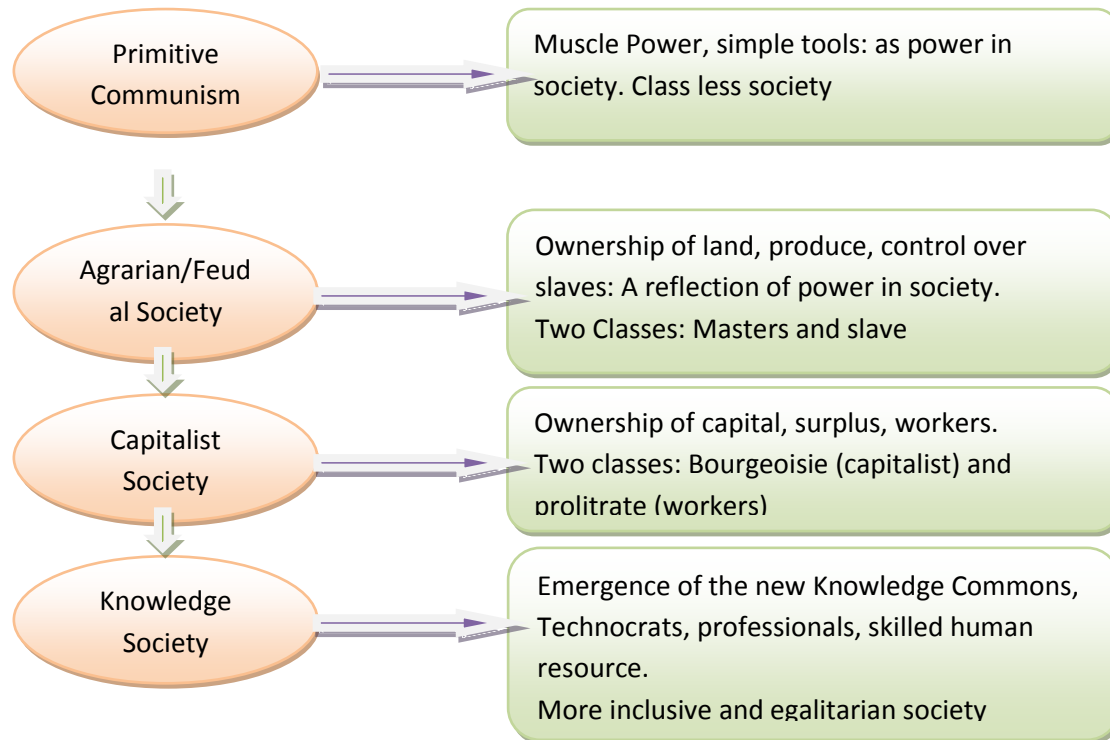
Knowledge in present society is largely dissipated and the present is the age of knowledge, wherein knowledge is power, it the knowledge that rules, it is the age of technocrats, of specialists in IT, Pharmaceuticals, Healthcare, Education, Space Technology who rule the roost.

However, the Postmodernists also have a very varying definition of what is called as knowledge. The postmodern understanding of learning is founded upon the assertion that there is not one particular kind of learner, nor one particular goal for learning, nor one way in which learning takes place, nor one particular environment where learning occurs, learning is a widespread phenomenon and widely dissipated. (Kilgore, 2001).

Kilgore (2001), in his monumental works on "Knowledge society" makes significant assertions about the postmodern view of knowledge:

1. Knowledge is tentative, fragmented, multifaceted and not necessarily rational.
2. Knowledge is socially constructed and takes form in the eyes of the knower.
3. Knowledge is contextual rather than "out there" waiting to be discovered.[iii]

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[1] Marx Heinrich Karl, The Communist Manifesto Pamphlets, 1848. United Kingdom, February 1848.

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Primitive           →    Muscle Power, simple tools: as power in
Communism                society. Class less society

Agrarian/Feud       →    Ownership of land, produce, control over
al Society               slaves: A reflection of power in society.
                         Two Classes: Masters and slave

Capitalist          →    Ownership of capital, surplus, workers.
Society                  Two classes: Bourgeoisie (capitalist) and
                         prolitrate (workers)

Knowledge           →    Emergence of the new Knowledge Commons,
Society                  Technocrats, professionals, skilled human
                         resource.
                         More inclusive and egalitarian society
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**The Interface between public policy, knowledge and society:** Emerging Policies: Creating New Commons There ought to be a close unison between the knowledge of the public policy and the knowledge of the society. The policies need to address the "felt needs of the people" and thus should be based upon a careful analysis and close knowledge of the societal context within which the policy is to be implemented. All the same, the society too should possess the knowledge of the policies which are being implemented within its framework; this shall highlight the effectiveness of the policies so being implemented. As it may be said:

""A Public policy without the knowledge of the society shall be rootless, and the society not possessing the knowledge of the policies being implemented within its framework shall render such policies to be fruitless.""

The 21st century has presented new challenges to policymaking. There is now a better appreciation of the complex and interlinked nature of the policy process and an increasing shift from creating new policies to the process of policymaking, from a rigid prescription of right policies to creating architecture of participation and consultation of stakeholders and of learning together. In India civil society organizations and social movements have played major roles in shaping public policies through initiatives such as the NREGA and RTI.

They have demonstrated the potential of people's involvement in policy making by creating new knowledge commons where the views of the laborer, a common citizen has found voice and has created a demand for effective service delivery from the State. Translating the potential into a policy framework or guideline requires a better understanding of people's knowledge and how it contests and dialogues with the knowledge of the expert.

As India prepares its 12th Five Year Plan with greater focus on inclusive growth it is time to assess as to how much of this thinking from the field and debates on the commons is likely to find place in the planning process. Would such voices get drowned as the conversations move towards more formal planning processes that privileges the expert over the common man? Are there better experiences that India could learn from in dealing with different knowledge systems? Should the knowledge commons go beyond its current emphasis on digital commons? How would new commons translate in the Indian context where there is simultaneity of worldviews, times and ways of being? How can these talk to each other?

Are there new (human created) commons emerging that have used the potential of open source philosophies to create new dialogues on knowledge and democracy? How can these be mediated? Are the current frameworks on understanding commons such as the IAD sufficient to understand new commons in

pluralist societies? What more would be needed? Can the ideas of Gandhi's 'oceanic circles' and *Hind Swaraj* be reinvented in today's context? How would such a re-invention help in the commons debate? Can the questioning of expertise and professions in *Hind Swaraj* create newer ways of exploring and enacting expertise?

The policy agenda on commons has often been on the issue of rights, largely understood within the frame of access – for and against – people. What would it mean to have a right view on knowledge? How can ideas of cognitive justice be worked in practice? How can some field level ideas lead to policy insights for the 12th plan but also the inclusive innovation agenda of the National Innovation Council? Can India learn from some Dutch experiences in knowledge dialogues on health and nano-technology on the way they seek to deal with different kinds of expertise? How can local and international commons work to mutually benefit and strengthen each other? All these and many more such questions need to be answered by our contemporary knowledge on society, to further develop it and to establish a truly empowered society.iv

Evaluation has a lot to offer to policy makers, but policy makers not too often base new policies directly on evaluation results. Partly this is because of the competing pressures of interests, ideologies, other information and institutional constraints. Partly it is because many policies take shape over time through the actions of many officials in many offices, each of which does its job without conscious reflection. Despite the seeming neglect of evaluation, scholars in many countries have found that evaluation has real consequences: it challenges old ideas, provides new perspectives and helps to re-order the policy agenda. This kind of 'enlightenment' is difficult to see, and it works best when it receives support from policy champions. Many channels bring evaluation results to the attention of policy makers, and they listen not only because they want direction but also to justify policies, to show their knowledge and modernity, and as a counterweight to other information. Openness of the political system and a thriving evaluation community tend to make some nations more attuned to evaluation-than others. Such a policy evaluation is essentially based upon the shared knowledge & perceptions of the society regarding the policy initiatives of the government.

Thus, the shared knowledge that prevails in the society helps the Policy process at every stage:
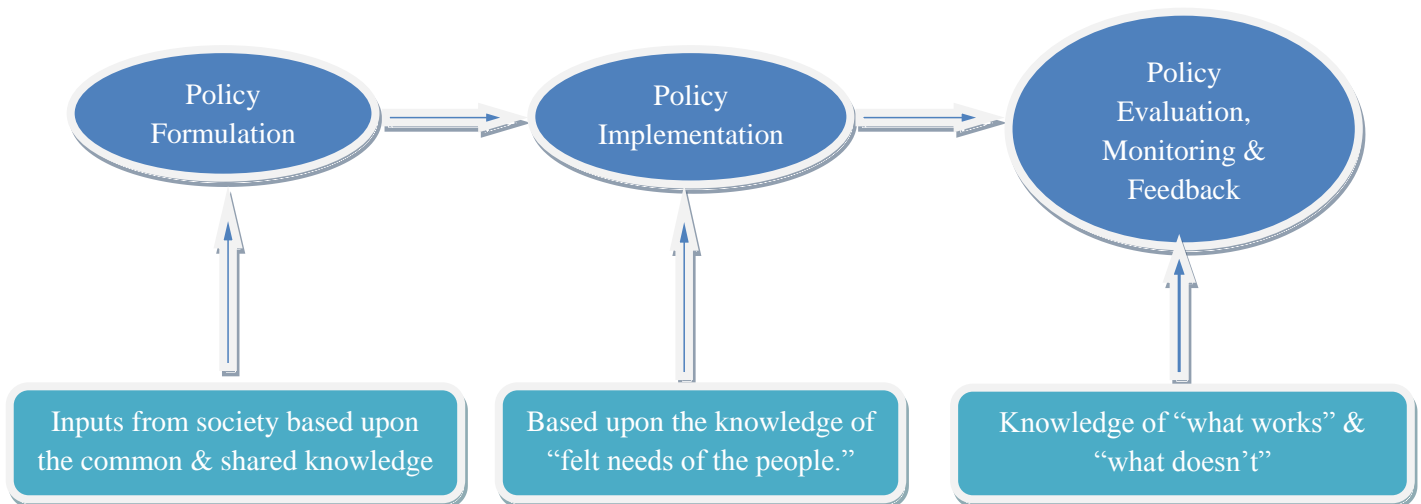


### The Knowledge of sustainable development in society and the shared partnership for development

Sustainable development denotes 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland Commission, convened by the United Nations in 1983).'v Although defined originally to meet the concerns relating to environmental damage, it has since been used to encompass the broader needs of society through economic, social and political sustainability.

Over the past few decades, it has been widely recognized that sustainable economic growth cannot take place without a strong science base. In 1982, a UNESCO report stated that 'assimilation of scientific and technological information is an essential precondition for progress in developing countries'. Again, a few years later, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs instituted a project known as SIST

(Système d'Information Scientifique et Technique)[vi] the primary goal of which was to facilitate sustainable development through support of regional research and promote regional and local knowledge along the priorities defined by the countries themselves (in sectors of renewable resources, health, human and social sciences, agronomy, Information and Communication Technology). Other authoritative organizations such as the InterAcademy Council[vii] , the Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai, India[viii] and many international individuals affirm this position[ixx].

Can low-income countries strengthen their research capacity, if so, then how?

To organize the knowledge on sustainable development in order to make it more useful for practitioners and policy makers, now there exists an organization called the Sustainable Development Knowledge Partnership (SDKP)

While a significant body of knowledge has emerged on the concept and practice of sustainable development, much of this information is fragmented and is often not available in a form that is convenient for policy makers and practitioners.

To cross this barrier, and bridge the divide, the Sustainable Development Knowledge Partnership (SDKP) was established with the aim of organizing the available knowledge on sustainable development, and making it available to policy makers and practitioners in more accessible and user-friendly formats.

The partnership is open and is expected to bring together individuals, institutions, and networks engaged in the production and dissemination of knowledge on sustainable development, including universities, research institutions, expert networks, civil society organizations, governmental institutions, private research entities, and individual researchers working on sustainable development.

The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)[xi] emphasize the urgent need to address problems such as poverty eradication, hunger and malnutrition, child mortality, maternal health, environmental sustainability and combating diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. It is very clear that without strong scientific platforms built on the widest possible access to globally shared research information and knowledge; these goals will not be met. The InterAcademy Council issued a joint statement to the UN[xii] calling on strong international collaboration in developing programmes to implement the goals. If sustainable development is dependent on a strong national scientific base, then permanent access to the widest possible

range of publications from the international library of research is a pre-requisite.

For developing countries, the need of current times is to shift the focus of information provision for research in locally applicable developmental projects to one of a global common good where the needs of research and those of society for solving global problems and relieving poverty are the priority. The logic is to develop such a developmental paradigm, which is applicable to India, as also to other countries of Asia and so also evenly for Africa, Latin America and Oceania, as Patrick Geddes testifies: "Think globally act locally."[xiiixiv]

Thus, many a sustainable developmental paradigm which originally were developed in on or the other countries have now been successfully been replicated and implemented in many other developing countries. For example the Grameen Bank & the microcredit movement initiated by Mohamed Yunis(the 2006 noble peace prize laureate) in Bangladesh now finds place in many other countries including India(with the self help group movement), Pakistan, Srilanka, and in Vietnam, Philippines, Thailand, Uganda, Somalia, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Argentina with the works of Opportunity International, the organization that promotes microfinance in the countries of the Third world.[xv]
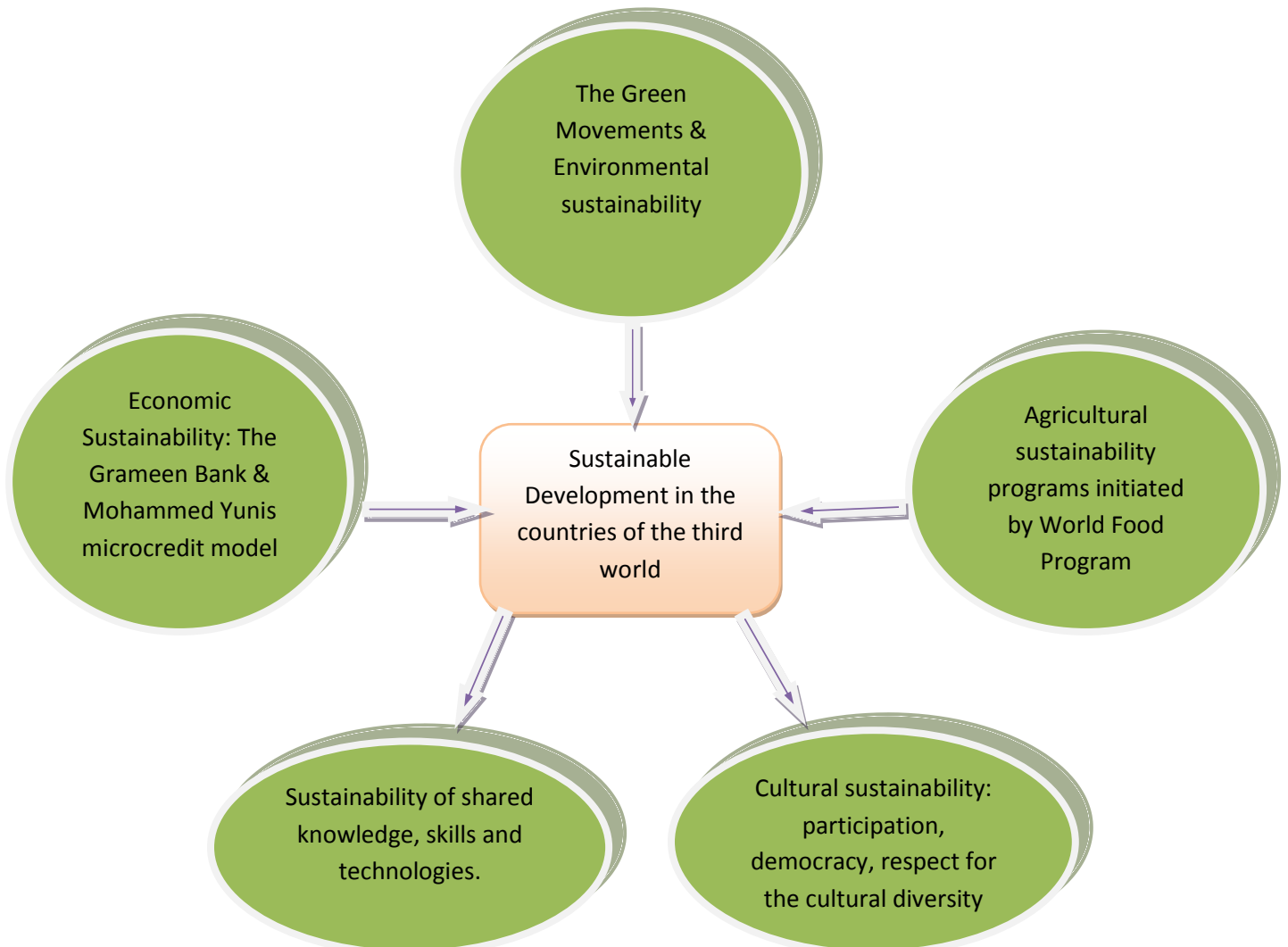
What started with the 2004 noble peace prize winner, Wangari Muta Maathai's Green Belt movement in Kenya found its replication in India as, the narmada bachao andolan, chipko movement, The Tiger protection program, the Rain water harvesting programme by Shri Rajender singh in Rajasthan, the green movements in Uganda, Srilanka, Malaysia, Thailand, Australia, The Save Amazon project in Brazil, and many others.

Indigenous peoples have contested and argued, through various international forums such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Convention on Biological Diversity, that there are *four* pillars of sustainable development, the fourth being cultural. *The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (UNESCO, 2001) further elaborates the concept of cultural diversity by stating that "...cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature"; it becomes "one of the roots of development understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence". In this vision, cultural diversity is the fourth policy area of sustainable development.[xvi]

Sustainability is a statement of values; in effect, it is a vision of the future. Stakeholder involvement is also essential because, "values are in dispute." In a democracy, value dispute requires participation.

The Green Movements & Environmental sustainability

Economic Sustainability: The Grameen Bank & Mohammed Yunis microcredit model

Sustainable Development in the countries of the third world

Agricultural sustainability programs initiated by World Food Program

Sustainability of shared knowledge, skills and technologies.

Cultural sustainability: participation, democracy, respect for the cultural diversity

**The Global Governance Paradigm and the advent of internationally applicable governance Initiatives:** starting from liberalization, privatization, and globalization as a radical policy shift, from the hitherto, inward looking, local & Government sector centric governance paradigm of the nation states, the new model of New Public Management has enunciated far reaching changes in the way the governance is affected for the citizens. This evolved as Thatcherism in United Kingdom, and Reganism in the US and the New Economic Policy as adopted in India: in 1991.

The nation states no longer operate in isolation but are greatly influenced by the international organizations like the UN and its various international agencies such as the United Nations Development Program, The World Health organizations, the various bilateral and multilateral agreements of World trade organization, the aids, assistance, grants and sanctions of World Bank, IMF and also the developed world towards the countries of the third world. Thus, the internationally

prevalent knowledge and the global governance models affect and influence and also in some way shape the local and domestic polity and policies of the nation states.

All so sudden the knowledge of the climate science has evoked a common and shared responsibility amongst the countries of the world to revert back the disastrous consequences of climate change and the ensuing catastrophes that might follow. Knowledge sharing, technological transfers, carbon trading are seen as the measures that might enable the human species to protect and preserve the planet earth for our future generations.

## Science & Technology knowledge and society

The interface between science, Technology, Knowledge and society can also be seen from the ethics and ethos reinforced and maintained by the society. Such as in case of legalizing abortions, cloning technology, embryonic stem cell research, gay and homosexual marriages, the science and technology knowledge and society are at loggerheads. The culture in society has its own preconceptions, prevailing believes and taboos which often change at a slower pace than the material culture in society changes.[xvii]. Thus, the social culture also needs a radical transformation so as to truly realize the true potentials of the developments in science and technology.

Martin Luther king once said: "We have guided missiles and misguided men". The reckless arms race of nuclear arsenals may have devastating effects on our civilization. Thus it is the onus for our society to reaffirm our commitment to peace and harmony through nuclear deterrence regime, and cut off treaties.

## So is the flat world: a reality

Yes, and may be also no. Yes, the flat world appears to be a reality if I am standing on the part of the world that is the West & so also developed, which sees the rest of the world as a flat platform, a level playing field for its investments and also an open market for its manufacturing sector of huge dimensions. The part which modulates and speculates the internal politics of the developing and least developed world through market distortions, superimposing its own notions of governance and a sort of Democratic Fundamentalism[xviii]. The aids and influence hinder rather than help the developmental process in the countries of the third world. Aid is always a means of influence: commercial, political, military and security related. Some influence is benign, but much of it is coercive, even imperialistic. Given the nature of aid, its effectiveness should be judged not only in developmental terms but also in terms of the international relations that they invoke. Even donors agree that, on both counts, the returns are meager. [xix]

And thus, the flat world is still rhetoric for the developing and the least developed countries, which still come at the lower levels in the Human Development Index.

And has the advent of the knowledge society fructified into tangible development. Yes it has, again for the developed world were the deep penetration of the knowledge in society is visibly evident, and these countries have capitalized upon the use of Information, communication, Technology and where such penetration of knowledge in society has translated into a state of well being, high standards of living, as is shown by the high developmental indicators of the human development Index. While on the other hand the least developed countries of the Sub-Saharan Africa and many of the developing countries which are ranked low in the Human Development Index are also the ones where the literacy rates are very poor, high dropout rates and low retention ratio. And thus, a poor knowledge base of society graduates to the poor state of development.
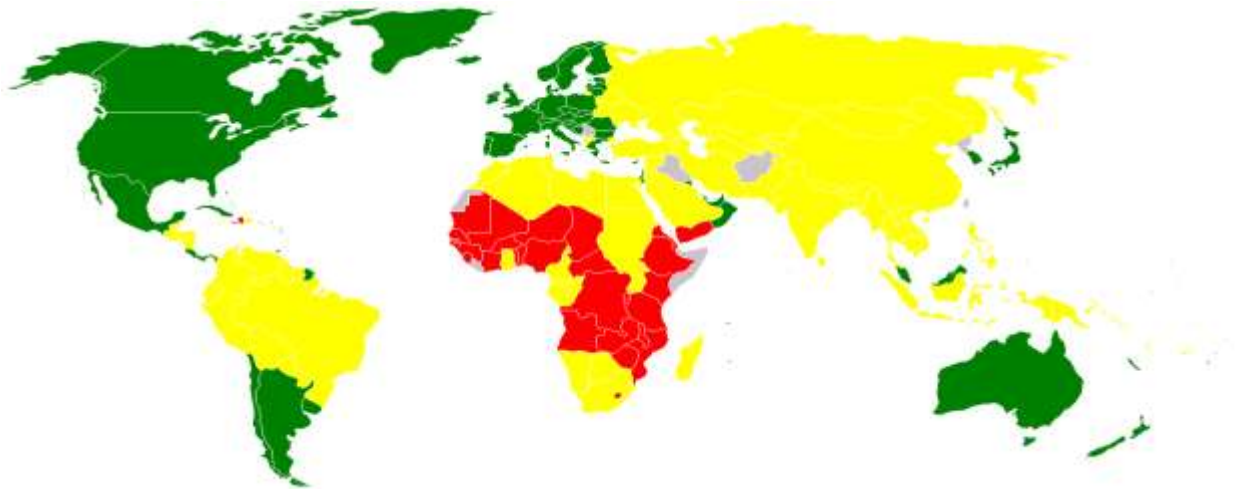
HDI ranking (medium-yellow, high-green, low-red) per 2009 stats, according to en: List of countries by Human Development Index;

■ High human development
■ Medium human development
■ Low human development
■ Unavailablexx

The National Knowledge commision in its report in 2008 commented that the education systems across the third world and so also in India are outmooded.the learning methods, teaching techniques, and paradigms need a serious rethinking, this has again been reiterated by the National Education Policy 2020. Our concepts of knowledge need a revisit. Thus we need to reform the primary secondary, higher and university education. We need to help build knowledge infrastructure and institutions not only in India, but also elsewhere in other parts of the third world. Access, concept creation, application services need to be strengthened. While the disparities of rural-urban, rich-poor,educated-uneducated pose a serious challenge to the emergence of an inclusive knowledge society.

Somewhere today in palastine a soldier still guards a school, as it is here that the future of the country is being carved and reshaped. Somewhere today in the darkest parts of war stricken sierra lione in Africa a starving mother still gathers all her money, whatever meager she has to send her child to school, for she believes that even amidst the atrocities and harsh conditions, there is a chance for her childs dreams to flourish. Let us live by there examples.

We need to provide oppertunities to overcome the demographic devide. Thus we have an earnest and a shared responsibilty and an undiluted commitment to give this legacy of knowledge to our future generations. We need to invest in knowledge: fundamental, technical, vocational and professional. As we need to creat the world that ought to be.

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