

Human Rights, Economics and the Environment

Although often characterized as distinct, Human Rights, Economics and the Environment are in fact often interrelated. Therefore, to effectively address one, the effects of, and on, the other two must also be considered.

The environment is under threat from the forces of economic development and growth. At each step in any products life cycle, there is an environmental cost. In some cases it may be minimal, such as in the transport of organic locally grown produce to a farmers market. But in others it is catastrophic, such as in the extraction of some natural resources from environmentally sensitive areas. As resources become scarcer, companies seek out sources in more remote, dangerous and more sensitive areas.

This is where the link to human rights lies. In countries without strong governance, typically poorer nations, this race for economic benefit is often done so at the expense of the general population. Indigenous peoples land, traditions and way of life are impacted or forever lost, often with meager, if any, compensation. The elite hoard the profits and do not invest back into the communities that are devastated by the economic activity. In fact, their grievances are often violently suppressed.

To address human rights, the world must act in concert to address the policy and policing gaps in the global economic system. When wealthy consumer nations address and place restrictions on the trade of products, and the activities of companies, which participate in environmental or human rights abuses, whether directly or through complicity, an incentive will be created for change. There must be a cost to these abuses. Only then will they be reduced or end altogether.

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