Since its commencement in 2001, the DSDS has emerged as an important annual event, inspiring leaders and mobilizing public opinion on the objectives of the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals). In the opening session of DSDS 2007, speakers noted that policy formulations are already beginning to stress the tenuous links between environmental concerns, economic development, and social justice. Since climate change is an ongoing process and there are multi-dimensional impacts associated with it, there is need to develop adequate and appropriate coping strategies. This, it was felt, will help civilizations adapt better to climate change.

Speakers also pointed out that reduction in the ecological footprints is an important step towards sustainable development and should not be construed as a reduction in the standard of life. The mobilization of science and technology would have an important role to play in this context; a case in point being the need to bridge the divide between the developed and the developing countries.

The panel discussion, which followed the addresses by the speakers, continued the focus on issues of sustainable development and climate change. It was acknowledged that policy and technology combine to create markets where even the deprived can participate. It also emerged during the course of discussion that forms of governance also impact the sustainability of climate change policies. A democratic set-up is best suited to further the sustainable development agenda, as a clear division of roles between legislation, regulation, and implementation generates mutual trust and respect between political structure and people. The session concluded with the opinion that regardless of the system of governance, political leaders on the whole need to initiate sustainable dialogues at the national and international levels for translating climate change policies into visible impacts on the lives of people.

As they said it...

Efficient markets ignore the poorest of the poor—they have no buying power. We need public policy actions to save them.

Prof. Jeffrey D Sachs, Director, The Earth Institute, and Special Advisor to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, USA

A huge amount of resources – 100 billion dollars – that have been used in the Iraq war could have been used to achieve the MDGs.

Prof. Ralph J Begleiter, Rosenberg Professor of Communication, University of Delaware and Distinguished Journalist in Residence, USA
Meeting Asia’s challenge of sustainable development

Chairperson
Mr S Sundar
Speaker
Prof. Jeffrey D Sachs

Emphasizing that economic development should be considered a long-term objective even for the poorest of the poor, Prof. Jeffrey Sachs expressed concern over half of the population in Tropical Asia being below the poverty line. Hunger, malnutrition, non-availability of safe drinking water, and other basic needs are the major challenges in Asian countries. These problems demand low-cost solutions like availability of schools, rural health care, agricultural inputs, access to water, and safe technologies.

Prof. Sachs also focused on the current economic era of great convergence where the gap between the rich and the poor is narrowed. The only concern was that while the Asian countries account for 60% of the world’s population, they make up for a mere 20% of the GNP (gross national product), which would increase up to 50% by 2050. He urged that all countries should join hands to solve the problem of emissions and proposed a policy framework for a post-Kyoto UNFCCC that would include agreeing on a mid-century target of 500 PPM (parts per million); rebate for the poor; standards for power plants, industries, and automobiles; avoiding deforestation; bio-nuclear and bio-fuels, and car-bon capture and storage that have shown promise need to be supported by business.

The possibilities to overcome the disease can be broadened, if it is fought with classic management principles upheld, keeping affected communities central to social and economic activities. Speakers also focused on MDG 1: eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. It was argued that poverty reduction could not be achieved if development continued to shirk sustainable pathways. The world required perspective and understanding on sustainable development. The role of the media in bringing about this perspective was stressed.

Critical issues relating to water were also a dominating topic of the discussion, especially since more than one-third of the MDGs can be achieved by solving the water and sanitation problem. To tackle the water challenges of the day, it was suggested that businesses, governments, and the civil society work in tandem at all levels.

Other subjects that were discussed include the urgent need to move towards sustainable energy choices, greater support for R&D to monitor the planet’s changing climate, and the importance of global networking to form a consensus on sustainable development.

As they said it...

You can’t address the water needs of the poor with taps and toilets. You need to manage the ecosystem that supplies it.

Mr James Leape
Director General, WWF International, Switzerland

Today’s business paradigm is business in society rather than business and society.

Mr Herman Mulder
Senior Advisor to the UN Global Compact and WBCSD

Session 1

MDGs: the distance yet to be traversed

Chairperson
Dr Prodipto Ghosh
A report on CEO Forum 2007: Business and society—partnering for a sustainable future
Mr Björn Stigson
Speakers
• Mr Ashok Alexander
• Dr James Baker
• Mr James Leape
• Mr Herman Mulder
• Mr Hideaki Oda
• Mr Michael P Schulthof

The session began with a report on the CEO Forum 2007, the curtain-raiser event to DSDDS 2007. While presenting the report, Mr Björn Stigson, co-chair of the Forum, noted that the overriding sentiment that emerged from CEO Forum 2007 was that ‘business and society’ was yesterday’s paradigm. Today, it has changed to ‘business in society’.

Speakers at the session touched upon many aspects of the MDGs, discussing on the prospects of meeting these on time. One such aspect is the race to effectively combat and contain the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This is much more complex in India than in other regions of the world, because of the stigma associated with the disease.

The highlight of the session was an analysis of the inherent strengths of the corporate sector that could be effectively harnessed to achieve sustainable development. Businesses can make, and in many cases have already made, significant contributions to sustainable development; but there still remains untapped potential.

Speakers were of the opinion that the energy and power sector needs to accelerate R&D to bring cleaner technologies into the production process. Technologies, such as biofuels, and carbon capture and storage that have shown promise need to be supported by business.

While costs of such new technologies remain high, it is hoped that their increased use would have the positive effect of decreasing the incremental cost of deploying them.

Speakers were also keen to argue that business support for sustainable development strategies must be, in turn, aided by a policy environment that encourages innovation and facilitates corporate involvement in tackling development challenges. Likewise, the civil society too must form partnerships with businesses to advance the sustainable development agenda.

The session concluded with the consensus that the corporate sector needs to look at sustainable development challenges not as a component of corporate social responsibility practice, but as a business opportunity. Like in all business opportunities, first movers will hold the advantage in the coming business model in which social and environmental sustainability are integral to the bottom line.
Discussions in the session revolved around the vexing issue of climate change, which is posing a hurdle to sustainable development. Climate change reflects a threat that can no longer be ignored or understated. With a slew of scientific evidence pointing out that the adverse impacts of climate change are not far away but are already manifesting themselves, the issue has become too urgent to be postponed further. Speakers were unanimous in this assessment, and elaborated on the grave consequences of climate change that are being observed currently. The rapid melting of snow, the rise in sea levels, and inconsistent weather patterns are directly impacting human productive activity in agriculture and allied sectors. The global scale of climate change poses huge challenges to every country in the world, especially those in the developing world, hence impeding the achievement of the MDGs.

Speakers suggested a dual approach to tackle climate change, with emphasis on strategies for mitigation and adaptation. For instance, development aspirations often reflect increase in energy consumption. Yet, instead of old solutions, governments and corporations have an opportunity to develop and try new alternative modes of low-carbon energy technologies. Technologies such as carbon capture and storage can likewise be tapped for this purpose. To access financial resources and technologies to think beyond conventional energy, speakers cited opportunities presented by international arrangements such as the CDM (clean development mechanism). Similarly, recent efforts like the Asia–Pacific Partnership also offer prospects, especially to the private sector, to play a key role in climate change mitigation. Discussions also focused on the role of governments in bringing about international consensus on climate change and sustainable development. With climate change dialogue often marked by disagreements and expectations, countries could partner each other and foster global cooperation to arrive at common solutions to a threat that does not distinguish between the rich and the poor. Speakers called for commitment at the highest political level to achieve global cooperation. Developing countries must be provided an appropriate incentive structure to encourage participation in climate change mitigation. Broadly, speakers identified integrating action on mitigation and adaptation into the policy-planning process as the focus for long-term, country-level strategies to deal effectively with climate change. Internationally, buttressing long-term cooperative programmes that seek to strengthen the protections on the global environment must be given a priority.

As they said it...

We have a notion that if politicians fail, the scientists can ball us out.
Mr Roger Harrabin, Senior Environment Analyst, BBC, UK

If we all lived like people in sub-Saharan Africa, we would use only half the planet.
Dr Camilla Toulmin, Director, International Institute for Environment and Development, UK

There are three issues that link energy and sustainable development: energy sustainability, energy equity, and climate change.
Mr John A Mansoni, Group Managing Director, BP PLC, UK

Launch of the India Council for Sustainable Development

The ICSD (India Council for Sustainable Development) is a newly formed platform that seeks to perform an advisory function as a non-governmental entity and contribute analysis and guidance to usher in sustainable development in India. The ICSD was launched at the sidelines of SDS 2007 by Dr Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Hon’ble Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Government of India. Dr R K Pachauri, Director-General, TERI and the co-chair of the ICSD, introduced assembled delegates to the members of the body, and gave a broad overview of the ICSD. Prof. Jeffrey D Sachs, Director, The Earth Institute and co-chair of the ICSD, spoke about the need for India to plan for its environmental challenges in terms of decades, and not centuries, and expressed confidence that the ICSD would be able to make a contribution in this regard. For more information on the ICSD, please visit <http://www.icsusdev.org>.

Mr Achim Steiner, in the dinner address, pointed out two separate worlds in India today: the traditional India steeped in natural riches and heritage but lacking in economic power and the new emerging nation that is globally recognized as a powerhouse in science, technology, and innovation. He said that the key to a sustainable future for India lies in bridging the gap between these ‘two Indians’. He expressed confidence that India would be able to harness the enormous potential of its poorer communities and emerge as the ‘hope of the world’ for sustainable development. A revolution of sorts is occurring in India, Mr Steiner said, and it is leading to positive outcomes for the nation’s environment. Through television, magazines, and the Internet, the concept of environment conservation and sustainable development is now understood and appreciated by many ordinary Indians. Returning to his contention that India is now a source of hope for the world, he also said that India today has the potential to shape the future through subtle changes in development trajectories that reflect the desire to restore a balance between human progress and the planet’s health. India could take a leading role in tackling climate change, which requires all the nations of the world to take collective decisions grounded in united thought. Mr Steiner concluded by hoping that the year 2007 would be a year of increased momentum in India on issues of sustainable development.

Guest of Honour of the session, HE Mr Ahmad Abdullah, Minister of Environment, Energy and Water, Republic of Maldives, said that Maldives has taken inspiration from India’s example in sustainable development. He said that urgent international efforts are needed to save vulnerable countries like the Maldives. The world must engage in peace, not war, for sustainable development.

Dinner session
Highlighting technology transfer as a key instrument in mitigating climate change, the special event focused on ‘financing’ and ‘intellectual property rights’ for the effectiveness of the same. On the financing front, various funding options were discussed, such as venture capitalist funds, risk guarantee funds, and also multilateral funds like the GEF (Global Environment Fund).

To implement new and promising technology, speakers highlighted the role of initiatives such as standards and labelling. These, it was pointed out, would encourage adoption and further refinement of clean technologies. At the other end of the technology-transfer spectrum, as cleaner technologies become widely available, inefficient technology would be gradually phased out, leading to a big step forward in mitigating climate change. In addition to mechanisms that promote clean technology, there remains the need to cover the risks involved in bringing such technologies on line. Here, the risk guarantee fund was cited as a possible mechanism.

To address climate change challenges at the local level, speakers noted the pressing need to design products that are locally adaptable and easily absorbed by local communities.

Coming to knowledge creation and transfer, speakers concurred that knowledge transfer is imperative in the CDM if it is to facilitate technology transfer. In other words, along with the ‘know-how’, it is also important to transfer the ‘know-why’, the cognitive processes that result in technical innovation.