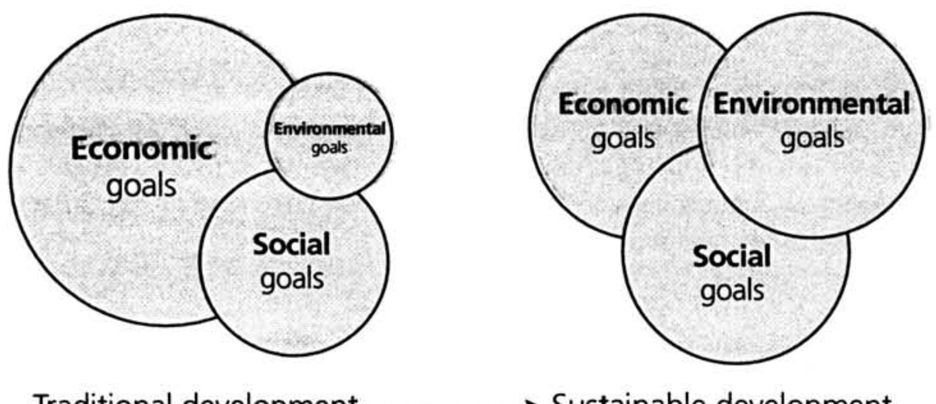
3 PARTICIPATION AND CONSENSUS

One of the reasons why environmental issues are so challenging is that the values attached to natural resources vary tremendously between stakeholders. In some cases values may have evolved over thousands of years of interaction with the environment and be embedded in the spiritual life or culture of a community. In other cases they may have been acquired recently in response to new economic pressures or opportunities. A paradox exists since, in many cases, the signs of environmental deterioration are clear to many, yet there is no consensus on how to respond.

Traditionally, economic goals have carried most sway over development decisions, as depicted in Figure 1. One of the reasons for this is that social and environmental values are more difficult to quantify than economic values. For instance, how does one quantify the potential value of an undiscovered species to the pharmaceutical industry, or the detriment to society of a species extinction? Such uncertainty has the effect of encouraging stakeholders to underestimate environmental values in their decision-making. For this reason, large-scale projects may be subjected to social and environmental impact assessments (EIA) before they are implemented, ostensibly to ensure that steps have been taken to minimise non-economic costs. However, confidence in this process is still low in many

Figure 1 Changing visions of development: the search for sustainability



countries where such assessments have not been successful in preventing social and environmental damage.

Now that the costs of economic development are becoming more widely understood, world attention is being focused on an alternative vision — known as **sustainable development** — in which economic goals are achieved in balance with social or environmental goals (see Figure 1). This may not satisfy all stakeholders (e.g. those who would wish to see more rapid economic development), but most may expect to benefit in the long term and, critically, the benefits of development will be shared more equally.

Individuals, communities, companies, nations and international bodies all make decisions which affect the sustainability of living resources and, consequently, all have a role to play in their conservation and sustainable use. No segment or level of society can be left out, since decisions made by one group can affect the livelihoods of others. Thus, wherever possible, policies aiming to conserve living resources should reflect the perspectives and needs of all stakeholders who stand to win or lose. Even small-scale environmental challenges tend to arouse the interest of many stakeholder groups. Such groups are typically politicians, civil servants, natural resource managers, local government officials, non-governmental and community-based organisations, business leaders, industry representatives, professional associations, scientific researchers, teachers, the general public, media and the international community.

Despite their apparent diversity, most of those involved fall into one of three categories: **government, private sector** and **civic society**. Together, these are referred to as the development 'triad' (Sandbrook 1994), since they represent the three core interests shaping development policy. In the long term, policies which do not represent all three broad interests are destined to falter, stall or fail. Figure 2 depicts the development triad in terms of its constituent stakeholders. Clearly, the term 'civic society' represents all of those who are not actively engaged with government or commercial activities, including non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations and individuals.

Figure 2 The development triad