Shipping and the three dimensions of sustainable development

Anna NATOVA, 2005 United Nation – Nippon Foundation Fellow

The three dimensions of sustainable development, namely the economic, environmental and social are equally important in the context of maritime transport. The concept of sustainable maritime transport is deeply examined in an IMO document elaborated under the theme of the 2013 World Maritime Day: “Sustainable Development: IMO’s Contribution beyond Rio+20”¹. The document provides an opportunity for IMO member Governments and policy makers directly involved in shipping and maritime industries to consider the sustainability of the international shipping industry, the Maritime Transportation System and the role of IMO in achieving desired objectives.

The document reiterates the most commonly accepted definition of sustainable development, adopted by the Brundtland Commission in its Report, entitled “Our Common Future”, in 1987: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: the concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs”.

The document aims to raise the profile of maritime transport and highlights why maritime transport is a fundamental element in achieving a more sustainable world. The material discusses a concept of a Sustainable Maritime Transportation System (SMTS) and identifies the various ‘imperatives’ or goals that must be met to implement an SMTS, and the activities to be undertaken to achieve them.

A Sustainable Maritime Transportation System requires well-organized Administrations that co-operate internationally and promote compliance with global standards, supported by institutions with relevant technical expertise, such as recognized organizations (i.e. organizations entrusted by a flag State to carry out mandatory inspections and surveys on its behalf).

An important challenge facing the shipping industry is how to attract and retain a sufficient number of adequately trained and qualified seafarers with the right motivation, knowledge and skills for the professional application of technologies and procedures. This challenge will increase as world trade continues to grow and shipping activities increase accordingly. A SMTS will need the collaboration of shore-side actors, from both industry and Governments, (for example, the implementation of the Maritime Labour Convention), for the protection and care for seafarers, in order to ensure that qualified seafarers have an attractive work environment.

¹ Concept of a Sustainable Maritime transportation,
http://www.imo.org/MediaCentre/HotTopics/SMD/Pages/default.aspx
As modern society increasingly demands clean air, the SMTS will need to have access to an ample amount of clean energy, such as LNG and low-sulphur fuel oils. The burden and cost for compliance with the stringent emission control standards, such as the sulphur regulations, should be shared by society equitably rather than be pushed onto the users, i.e. the shipping industry.

As the world’s economies develop, and the use of the world’s oceans intensifies, new challenges in the resolution of competing interests need to be overcome, taking into account the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and global standards of other relevant instruments. The SMTS will be affected by competing interests in ocean uses, ranging from tensions such as those that exist between environmental concerns and increased demands for seaborne freight capacity expansion, to pressures for the protection of ocean spaces for users other than the shipping sector (for example the creation of Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas). Coordination between competing interests is required, so that a balance can be achieved and any costs fairly distributed. Any reallocations of ocean uses must be properly understood and agreed by all concerned, paying attention to relevant harmonized, global standards and ensuring the sustainability of the different uses.