

- wise – just – brave – moderate // obedient – diligent – conscientious – humble // faith – hope – love -

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Global Values for Global Development



- qualitative ? – innovative ? – prepared ? – flexible ? – competent ? – value conscious ? -

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Presentation at United Nations NY

by Prof Dr. Leisinger September 2014



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Global Values for Global Development

*There is a global ethic for a globalized world,
based on our common humanity, the Rio principles
and the shared ethos of all traditions:
“do as you would be done by.”*

*High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons
on the Post-2015 Development Agenda¹*

Introduction

Humankind and most individual human beings have more knowledge and wisdom than is reflected in many of their daily actions.² This is also true in the context of sustainable global development. While a great number of social and economic indicators have improved over the past 15 years in many countries, and while significant progress was achieved with regard to a number of *local* ecological issues, the carrying capacity of the Earth continues to be overburdened. The available data³ and the broad scientific consensus about them send a clear message:

- The extent of anthropogenic environmental damage is immense, including global warming, degradation of biological diversity, acidification of marine ecosystems and overexploitation of marine fish stocks. Forests recede at an alarming rate and flooding occurs in places that knew no floods for centuries. Many other environmental issues could be listed here; they are all indicators of another huge “tragedy of the commons”.⁴ The cumulative effect threatens the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The international community believes climate change to represent a pressing and potentially irreversible threat to humans and the planet, and thus requires to be urgently addressed.⁵
- The international community agreed at the Climate Conference in Cancun (November 2010) that “deep cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions are required” so as to hold the increase in global average temperature below 2° C above pre-industrial levels. The Cancun Conference requested that all stakeholders “should take urgent action to meet this long-term goal, consistent with science and on the basis of equity.” Nevertheless, increase in global emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) is accelerating. Emissions today (2013) are more than 46% higher than in 1990.
- The consumption of non-renewable resources continues to be higher than the substitution through renewable ones.
- The world population will grow from 7.2 billion people today to more than 9.2 billion by 2050. Sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth is the precondition for poverty eradication –

1 A New Global Partnership (2013): Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development. New York, p. 6.

2 For an early comprehensive analysis, see Fromm E. (1947): Man for Himself. An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics. Henry Holt, New York 1990.

3 See <http://unsdn.org/resources/> as well as <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/>.

4 See the path-breaking article of Garret Hardin (1968) in: Science, Vol. 162, No. 3859, 13th December 1968, pp. 1243-1248.

5 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change: The Cancun Agreement (FCCC/CP/2010/7/Add. 1, p. 2. <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/cop16/eng/07a01.pdf> .

and progress on the “poverty front” is necessary to create the preconditions for lower birth rates in poor countries.

- The growing global middle class, predominantly in today’s emerging and low-income countries, is likely to repeat the mistakes of the rich countries. In the coming ten years another 2 billion people will adopt the same resource- and energy-intensive lifestyle as the one that has led to today’s greenhouse gas accumulation.
- For the first time in human history we have the ability to destroy the ecosystem on which we depend; the destruction of biodiversity continues at an accelerating rate, despite all the knowledge available since the Convention on Biological Diversity⁶ was signed.
- Already today most of what we perceive to be tribal conflicts, religious conflicts or civil wars are in reality symptoms of environmental destruction, depletion and scarcity of resources as well as destruction of social capital. Increases in local and regional distributional fights, subsequent security threats, loss of homes and property are substantial obstacles to social and economic development.
- Inequities between and within societies continue to grow; the richest population quintile holds about 83% of global income while those in the poorest quintile must subsist with just a single percentage point.⁷ Greater disparities raise social anxiety, tension and the risk of conflict, and resources go into destructive purposes instead of into sustainability investments.

Taking these data seriously⁸ and following the *precautionary principle*⁹ accepted by the Rio Conference on Environment and Development, we have to abandon our unsustainable ways in favor of “the future we want”.¹⁰ As each country faces specific challenges to sustainable development, the respective strategies for ending poverty, achieving social inclusion and preserving our natural resources have to be tailor-made according to the specific local conditions. From a sustainability perspective, *all* countries are “developing countries.”

The crucial questions to be answered the post-2015 Development Agenda process are therefore not those involving an endless accumulation of details about the global ecological, social, political and economic impact of unsustainable patterns of production, consumption and use of non-renewable resources. The already available knowledge in combination with the precautionary principle should be sufficient to initiate a change of course. The questions we should resolve are:

- How can we raise the sustainability awareness of more people and motivate more of us to initiate changes in our private, professional and political capacities?
- How can we shape and implement a (political, economic, social, etc.) framework that allows us to make changes without moral heroism and demotivating individual disadvantages?

Answers need to be approached inter-disciplinarily involving economics, sociology, psychology, biology or engineering and require efforts on the macro- (governments), meso- (e.g. business enterprises), and micro levels (individual human beings). Even more significant: The answers will chal-

6 See <https://www.cbd.int/doc/legal/cbd-en.pdf>.

7 http://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/files/Global_Inequality.pdf.

8 This means also dealing the views opposing the mainstream assessment of global warming e.g.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_scientists_opposing_the_mainstream_scientific_assessment_of_global_warming

9 “Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.” (Article 15 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development).

10 <http://www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/727The%20Future%20We%20Want%2019%20June%201230pm.pdf>

lenge vested interests. The consequences will include changes in political governance (e.g. withdrawal of counter-productive subsidies), economic reforms (e.g. internalization of environmental costs), technological revolutions (e.g. deep de-carbonization¹¹) as well as reforms of international trade and development policies. We will also have to accept an impact on our individual choices with regard to consumption and waste patterns. As “the problems we face can’t be solved by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them” (Einstein), we will also have to deal with propositions based on alternative values and find a global moral ground upon which we can build a future we want.¹² This is the focus of this essay.

What is “Sustainable Development”?

The concept “sustainable development” needs a clear stipulation of the underlying idea and theory since they do not just affect academic work; they have a wide-ranging influence on the choices of political leaders, institutional policy makers as well as decision makers and the goals they set and, as a consequence, the actions they initiate. Our ideas and theories directly influence the way we live our lives and the way we act.¹³ And here we have a problem: No one of us can objectively stipulate what “sustainable development” is with its intergenerational notion. It is a hypothetical construct into which different people project different worldviews, values, individual experiences and expectations, as well as implicit and explicit interests. Most of the people interested in human development issues define development to be a desirable evolution of the economic, social, ecological and political state of affairs – but they have different notions of what is desirable and how to prioritize. Interests guide our cognition, our understanding, our desires and our ways of acting. As so often in social sciences, even experts “construct” their own realities, shaped by their socialization, their experiences, views of the world and valuations.¹⁴ Added to this complexity are scientific disciplines, which bring their own “silo-specific” verity, and their unique specifications about rationality.

A Wall Street economist will suggest other paths to sustainable development and set other priorities than a sociologist from Switzerland, an ethnologist from Australia and an environmentalist from Kenya. So would a fisherman from Somalia, a pastoralist from the Tanzanian Serengeti, a miner from China or a member of one of the indigenous peoples in the Brazilian primeval forest. Their wives and daughters would yet again come up with different propositions. All these people are “right” from their perspective – and all miss the whole picture. Constructivists consider the belief that there is only one “reality” as dangerous self-deception.¹⁵ To appreciate pluralism of perspectives is a rational if not an ethical imperative.¹⁶

To propose the “right” development strategy presupposes a viewpoint about the kinds and directions of interventions. As there are potentially conflicting goals and thus conflicting priorities, one must be explicit about valuations:

11 See <http://unsdsn.org/what-we-do/deep-decarbonization-pathways/>.

12 See <http://www.uncsd2012.org/thefuturewewant.html>.

13 For details of this point in the context of development economics see Nussbaum M.C. (2011): *Creating Capabilities. The Human Development Approach*. Belknap, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

14 Kahneman D. (2013): *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York (Paperback).

15 For a short introduction see Watzlawick P. (1976): *How real is real? Confusion, disinformation, communication*. Random Hous, New York. Also from the same author (1984): *The Invented Reality: How do we know what we believe we know? Contributions to constructivism*. Norton, New York. Also helpful in this respect Kahneman D. (2013): *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York (Paperback).

16 See in this context von Foerster H. (2003): *Understanding understanding*. Springer, New York, p. 227, “Act always so as to increase the number of choices.”

“The viewpoint and the direction are determined by our interest in a matter. Valuations enter into the choice of approach, the selection of problems, the definition of concepts, and the gathering of data, and are by no means confined to the practical or political inferences drawn from theoretical findings. [...] The valuations are with us. Even when they are driven underground, they guide our work. When kept implicit and unconscious, they allow bias to enter. The only way in which we can strive for objectivity in theoretical analysis is to lift up the valuations into the full light make them conscious and explicit, and permit them to determine our viewpoints, the approaches and the concepts used.”¹⁷

Anyway, a post-2015 sustainable development agenda will have to emerge from participatory, inclusive and bottom-up processes and not (only) from a coterie of experts and technocrats. Even if no one of us can individually define global “sustainable development”, because it is a *process* of collective self-discovery at a certain time in a certain space by a certain group of people, we can define some of its elements and preconditions.

Poverty Eradication and Satisfaction of Basic Needs

Children, women and men – and it is them, not abstract entities, who benefit or suffer from a chosen development doctrine – have, as a consequence of the socio-economic, cultural and other circumstances they live in, different needs, desires and aspirations. But they have one common desire, i.e. to satisfy their basic needs. Thus it makes sense to start from a basic human needs perspective and try to understand what a lack of development means for people living absolute poverty in a low-income or emerging country. It means a very low quality of life, characterized by precarious livelihoods, often at excluded locations, high disease burden, premature and preventable deaths, high infant and child mortality, illiteracy, hunger and malnutrition. These are “only” the material aspects of absolute poverty. There are also social, relational and symbolic elements associated with absolute poverty, such as lack of participation in decision-making, powerlessness and susceptibility to the violation of human dignity and physical integrity. Although the latter are not unique to the condition of poverty but can be experienced under other conditions such as ethnic, racial and gender discrimination in rich societies, they are certainly a feature of a lack of (human) development. Eradicating poverty requires first and foremost overcoming

- low levels of productivity, output, income, health and education;
- obsolete modes of production, attitudes towards life and work as well as behavioral patterns, and
- dysfunctional institutions, ranging from those at the state level to those governing social and economic relations.¹⁸

As these conditions are causally interrelated in that a change in one condition will cause changes in all others, we can conceive the state of development of a given country as a social system. A positive change in any of its elements has, in addition to its intrinsic value, also an instrumental value in the sense of triggering or facilitating progress of other elements or conditions. The same is true for a

17 Gunnar Myrdal and Paul Streeten introduced the valuation issue into the development debate; see Myrdal G. (1968): Asian Drama. An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations, (3 volumes) Pantheon, New York, Vol. I, p. 32 f.

18 The valuations “undesirable,” “disadvantageous” and “unfavorable” are made from the perspective that all human rights should be fulfilled for all, and all should enjoy freedom from want and fear. “Unfavorable institutions” also covers corruption. The new report of the B20 Anti-corruption working group states that emerging economies lose approx. 750 billion Euros due to corruption: “If corruption were an industry, it would be the world’s third largest, worth more than \$3 trillion and 5 percent of global GDP.” See <https://b20australia-public.sharepoint.com/Pages/PageNotFound/Error.aspx?requestUrl=https://b20australia-public.sharepoint.com/Documents/B20%20Anti-Corruption%20Working%20Group%20Report.pdf>.

negative change – it triggers other negative changes.¹⁹ From this perspective the state of development is not only a question of the average level of income and productivity (although these remain important especially for low-income and emerging countries), but is also determined by social attitudes and patterns of individual aspirations in life, at work and with regard to society and future generations. In addition, the quality of governance in politics, business and society plays a crucial role.

Without a comprehensive systems approach to development, the complexity of the task to change course for sustainability is likely to be underestimated. Seen from a system's perspective, sustainable development is a steady improvement of the entire social system, eliminating poverty, fostering social inclusion and protecting the natural resource basis. Sustainable Development is the result of complex interactions (i.e. circular causation and cumulative change) of multiple economic, social, psychological, cultural, ecological, political and legal factors. The entirety of the many small changes over the long-term will bring about desired results.

There is no blueprint approach, no straightforward solution valid for all countries under all circumstances. Despite substantial similarities of poverty features and of needed interventions in poor countries as well as of production, consumption and mobility patterns of rich societies, development remains context-specific: "There are different and appropriate answers depending on history and cultural heritage, religious traditions, human and economic resources, climatic and geographic conditions, and political patterns of nations."²⁰ Human development can not be perceived as "a single, uniform, linear path, for this would inevitably eliminate cultural diversity and experimentation, and dangerously limit humankind's creative capacities in the face of a treasured past and an unpredictable future."²¹

There *is*, however, a common moral denominator: the notion that people all over the world today and in the future have the right to live in dignity and without fear of losing their livelihood. But there is more: Genuine human development cannot evolve "by bread alone". Decision makers must make sure that men, women and children can develop their capabilities. The protection of human capabilities is also a right of every individual and must be seen as a "basic need".²²

Respecting Planetary Boundaries, Fostering Inclusive Societies and Fulfilling Human Rights Obligations

The most crucial contribution to the development debate of the Brundtland Commission was that it introduced the normative imperative that the needs of the present generation should be met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.²³ To avoid an interpretation of the term "need" merely as "basic need", today's interpretation would be: present generations must organize their lives in a way that does not reduce the opportunities and choices of future generations. In the context of today's global situation, the interpretation of Herman Daly is even more to the point: "The basic needs of the present should always take precedence over the basic needs of the

19 An obvious example for circular interdependence and cumulative change was given by C-E.A. Winslow in his book *The Cost of Sickness and the Price of Health*. Geneva (WHO) 1951 (p.6): "Men and women were sick because they were poor, they became poorer because they were sick, and sicker because they were poorer." Another example is the increase of adverse climate conditions with its negative impact on the agricultural productivity in several regions.

20 Independent Commission on International Development Issues (Brandt-Commission) (1979): *A Programme for Survival*. Geneva, Bonn, p. 23.

21 World Commission on Culture and Development (1994): *Our Creative Diversity*, Paris (UNESCO), note 21, p. 7.

22 See in this context the admirable work of Johanna Kucuradi, in: *Institut International de Philosophie: Human Rights: Concepts and Problems. Philosophy in Context Vol. 7*, Ed. Hans Lenk Münster 2013, pp. 61-79.

23 Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987): *Our Common Future*, New York 1987. <http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm>.

future (generation) but the basic needs of the future should take precedence over the extravagant luxury of the present.”²⁴

Applied to high-income countries (and high-income strata in poor countries), a lack of (sustainable) development is defined as consumption-, production- and waste patterns that in their entirety overburden the carrying capacity of the Earth and its atmosphere. Another characteristic is the exhaustion of the stock of non-renewable resources at a faster pace than the substitution possibilities with renewable resources. Development in high-income countries therefore means first and foremost²⁵

- Accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production to promote social and economic development within the carrying capacity of ecosystems by addressing and, where appropriate, delinking economic growth and environmental degradation through improving efficiency and sustainability in the use of resources and of production processes, and reducing resource degradation, pollution and waste.
- Increase investment in cleaner production and eco-efficiency, particularly energy-efficiency and conservation through, *inter alia*, incentives and support schemes and policies directed at establishing appropriate regulatory, financial and legal frameworks.
- Integrate these efforts into sustainable policies, programs and strategies for all state, corporate and other activities (e.g. urban planning, investments in infrastructure, public procurement, public transport system, minimize waste and maximize reuse, recycling and use of environmentally friendly alternative materials, etc.).

Since it brings up distributional issues, sustainable development remains a highly political term. It embraces not only economic, social, ecological, governance as well as biological and physicochemical principles – it also contains a vision on intergenerational justice or at least fairness. In whatever current generations do, they ought to reflect and respect the interests of future generations.

By trying to stipulate what the concept of “sustainable development” includes, we find a broad consensus that – in whatever cultural, social or political environment – the following are essential pillars:

- *economic prosperity*, i.e. higher discretionary income and thus increasing personal choices – but above all the end of extreme poverty and hunger;
- *distributional fairness of available opportunities, social inclusion and equal access to social services*;
- *environmental stewardship*, i.e. respect of planetary boundaries in all investments, production and consumption decisions; and
- *good governance* at the international level, in every country and in all sectors of society, including governments, businesses, and civil society organizations. The minimum criteria include the protection of human rights as well as a responsible and transparent use of authority in the management of a country’s economic, ecological, social and political resources.²⁶

It is a question of basic justice and fairness that those who have broader shoulders and have contributed more to the current environmental problems must assume more responsibility and hence contribute more towards possible mitigation and reform processes. Low-income countries continue

24 Daly H. (1996): *Beyond Growth. The economics of sustainable development*. Beacon Press, Boston, p. 36.

25 See the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg 2002, III., p. 15 ff.

26 Issues of importance in this context are: aligning political decisions and allocating resources according to the priorities of the existing problems (instead of expectations of clientele), enforcing policy decisions and placing time-bound, concrete obligations on people and institutions, creating transparency and accomplishing accountability, doing away with counterproductive subsidies and other things.

to have the right to promote the national development of their industry in order to diversify their economy, increase their value and income creation. This means that low-income and emerging countries will increase their contribution to the global environmental burden – and have a moral right to do so. High-income countries, on the other hand, must reduce their environmental burden – and have a moral duty to do so. They must also accelerate the development of and facilitate the transfer of technology to mitigate the emission of green house gases and other destructive chemicals.

Economic and Political Realities

Contrary to the Millennium Development Goals process, where the “rich” committed themselves to help the “poor” with technology and financial resources, the post-2015 Development Agenda will request citizens and institutions of OECD countries not only to support the global development process with substantial financial resources but also to change their patterns of consumption, mobility and energy use to make them compatible with the requirements of global sustainability.²⁷ Inconveniences, up-front payments or even “sacrifices” in this respect are acceptable to most people when they are directly related to the foreseeable welfare of their own children and grandchildren. There are commendable examples of people voluntarily forgoing amenities and comfort, give up vested rights and initiate reforms for future global returns and in the interest of anonymous beneficiaries living in the future and in different places of the world, but not many. We are faced with a substantial incentive problem.

Apart from idealism and enlightened self-interest, there are few incentives for people and governments to

- pay for or invest in something today that might bring a return in the long term for anonymous people far away from home;
- accept concrete inconvenient changes in accustomed production and consumption habits as well as other aspects of conventions for a minuscule long-term benefit elsewhere;
- put up with potentially uncomfortable changes due to restricted patterns of individual mobility today for an infinitely small contribution to the prevention of problems in the future, especially for politicians; and
- inflict short-term burdens on electoral constituencies for long-term change and benefits far beyond the election cycles.

That costs and inconveniences incur immediately while returns on many investments only emerge in the longer run, and probably for different people at different places in the world, does not fit into the current pattern of political, economic and individual decision-making. The incentive is even smaller if projected deteriorations (e.g. at the rise of the sea level) do not materialize because they have been prevented as a result of changed modes of behavior.²⁸

The “right thing to do” from a climate change perspective is likely to open new opportunities but may also result in negative economic and social consequences at least in the short-term. Truth needs to be told about that. To confront climate change, political and corporate decision-makers will have to put up with negative reactions such as those from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and

27 See the report of the Open Working Group for Sustainable Development (New York, July 19th, 2014). <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>

28 Such a success could be a repetition of the biblical narration of Jonah: God gave him the mandate to go to Nineveh and warn its residents to change their wicked life, otherwise they would face a godly tribunal. Contrary to Jonah’s expectation the residents of Nineveh listened, repented and changed course. Jonah became one of the most effective prophets of God – and nevertheless was not happy with the outcome (Book of Jonah 3. 1-10).

politicians from coal-producing states to the Obama administration's decision to cut greenhouse gas emissions from existing power plants by 30% from the 2005 level by 2030. That such economic and social consequences are probably less expensive than those resulting from retaining conventional customs is not really helpful for the political decision processes if jobs in structurally weak regions are lost.

Timeserving political or economic considerations are not likely to admit the value of a change of course. To make sustainable development issues a priority in the political and corporate agenda, stakeholders will have to promote their long-term benefits and appeal to the enlightened self-interest of those in charge. The necessity to reflect the consequences for our planet and humanity if we do not act upon sustainability imperatives today must be subjected to a discourse on values and ethics.

Globally Shared Values and A Common Moral Ground

Since the early 1990s initiatives to revive the reflection on what is of intrinsic value to humankind and to define moral common ground valid for today's world have been under way. As a result of several commissions' work as well as the efforts of eminent individuals such as Hans Küng, a core set of universal values and binding normative imperatives valid over time and across geography, cultures and religions is available. The common denominator of the respective collaborative ethos is the desire that individual actors and institutions act according to the Golden Rule and let their personal and professional lives be guided by global values such as nonviolence, reverence for life, solidarity, fairness, justice (also in its intergenerational meaning), truthfulness, tolerance, equality, sustainability, respect for human rights, and integrity. The most important sources for this kind of thinking are

- The Declaration Toward a Global Ethic and the World Ethos,²⁹
- A Common Framework for the Ethics of the 21st Century,³⁰
- The Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development: *Our Creative Diversity*,³¹ and
- The Report of the Commission on Global Governance: *Our Global Neighborhood*.³²

A less sophisticated but politically more effective document is the *International Bill of Human Rights*. A human right to sustainable development can easily be interpreted into Article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, i.e. "Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized." If one interprets the notion "all members of the human family" in a comprehensive way, including human beings of future generations, then they also have inalienable and equal rights to live in dignity, without fear and able to satisfy their needs. All countries ought to be encouraged to carry out a progressive implementation and be accountable to report on it.

Obviously, it would be much easier to initiate and foster global sustainable development if and when there was an effective global governance framework where binding decisions for all can be taken and enforced according to the structure of the problem and not as a result of power politics. Under such conditions implementation efforts could be routinely controlled, deviations from the "right path" corrected and accountability established. Such a governance structure with legislative

29 <http://www.weltethos.org/index-en.php>. See also Küng H., K.M. Leisinger and J. Wieland (2010): Manifesto Global Economic Ethic. Consequences and Challenges for Global Businesses. dtv, Munich.

30 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001176/117622eo.pdf>.

31 World Commission on Culture and Development (1996): *Our Creative Diversity*. Paris, July 1996
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001055/105586c.pdf>.

32 Commission on Global Governance (1995): *Our Global Neighborhood*, New York, see <http://www.gdrc.org/u-gov/global-neighborhood>.

competence and binding legal procedures, however, is not in sight. The United Nations system, however, has done an important step towards such a global governance system by defining a broad common normative denominator: The Millennium Declaration.

The *Millennium Declaration* was articulated and supported by the Heads of States and Governments that gathered at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 6 to 8 September 2000.³³ Two paragraphs in the introductory chapter on “values and principles” are of particular importance to the post-2015 Development discourse:

“We recognize that, in addition to our separate responsibilities to our individual societies, we have a **collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level**. As leaders we have a duty therefore to all the world’s people, especially the most vulnerable and, in particular, the children of the world, to whom the future belongs.” (I.2),

and

“We consider certain **fundamental values to be essential** to international relations in the twenty-first century. These include:

Freedom. Men and women have the right to live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice. Democratic and participatory governance based on the will of the people best assures these rights.

Equality. No individual and no nation must be denied the opportunity to benefit from development. The equal rights and opportunities of women and men must be assured.

Solidarity. Global challenges must be managed in a way that distributes the costs and burdens fairly in accordance with basic principles of equity and social justice. Those who suffer or who benefit least deserve help from those who benefit most.

Tolerance. Human beings must respect one other, in all their diversity of belief, culture and language. Differences within and between societies should be neither feared nor repressed, but cherished as a precious asset of humanity. A culture of peace and dialogue among all civilizations should be actively promoted.

Respect for nature. Prudence must be shown in the management of all living species and natural resources, in accordance with the precepts of sustainable development. Only in this way can the immeasurable riches provided to us by nature be preserved and passed on to our descendants. The current unsustainable patterns of production and consumption must be changed in the interest of our future welfare and that of our descendants.

Shared responsibility. Responsibility for managing worldwide economic and social development, as well as threats to international peace and security, must be shared among the nations of the world and should be exercised multilaterally. As the most universal and most representative organization in the world, the United Nations must play the central role.”

The UN System Task Force on the post-2015 UN Development Agenda re-emphasized in its report “Realizing the Future we want for All” that “the values and principles in the Millennium Declaration remain a solid foundation for addressing today’s and tomorrow’s global development challenges and should therefore be used to help shape the post-2015 UN development agenda”.³⁴

So a first important conclusion is positive: There *are* shared fundamental values, universal normative imperatives, and there *is* robust support of shared (but differentiated) responsibilities.

General Affirmation of Abstract Moral Concepts but Rejection In Specific Contexts

33 United Nations Millennium Declaration see <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>.

34 http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Post_2015_UNTTreport.pdf, p. 22.

Most of the values and norms adopted in the Millennium Declaration can also be found in many if not most of the constitutions of the United Nations member countries. Obviously, it is easier for human beings to declare abstract common values than living by them. Michael Walzer also drew attention to the fact that the basic affinity with or approval of a general abstract norm among people does not necessarily mean consent in the way they apply such a norm under specific circumstances: “Moral terms have minimal and maximal meanings; we can standardly give thin and thick accounts of them, and the two accounts are appropriate to different contexts, serve different purposes.”³⁵

With “thin” Walzer means the general agreement to an abstract term or moral concept without reference to a specific context. Reasonable people all over the world can easily identify themselves with norms such as those compiled in the Global Ethos body of thought. The inhuman implications of continued unsustainable practices give the sustainability discourse a moral connotation. A moral discourse, according to Michael Walzer,

“ought to be done in a thick manner, accounting for the specificities of the actual situation in which a decision has to be taken. The “thin” level of the moral discourse propagates general terms and concepts like “justice,” “truth” or “freedom” – the thick level necessitates a discourse about how to achieve a desired good concretely, and this is much more difficult as people acknowledge the concept but give “truth” or “justice” their own additional meaning, derived from their own culture. The claim that we must all be heading in the same direction since there is only one direction in which good-hearted (or ideologically correct) men and women can possibly march is an example of philosophical high-mindedness. But it does not fit our moral experience.”³⁶

The Sustainable Development Goals proposed by the Open Working Group for Sustainable Development Goals³⁷, by the Global Compact (UNGC)³⁸ and by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)³⁹ are successful first steps to operationalize the values and principles of the Millennium Declaration:

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages.
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all.
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

35 Walzer, M. (1994): *Thick and Thin. Moral Argument at Home and Abroad*. Notre Dame University Press, p. 2. I am grateful to Claus Dierksmeier for drawing my attention to Gilbert Ryle having used the differentiation “thin” and “thick” in his lecture “The Thinking of Thoughts: What is “Le Penseur” Doing?” already in the early seventies, see http://lucy.uke.ac.uk/CSACSA/vol14/papers/ryle_1.html.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

37 <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>.

38 www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/news_events/9.1_news_archives/2013_06_18/UNGC_Post2015_Report.pdf.

39 unsdsn.org/resources/goals-and-targets/goal-10-transform-governance-and-technologies-for-sustainable-development/

13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Most experts also agree on a great number of concrete targets associated with the goals.⁴⁰ From a political, business, or civil society perspective, however, this agreement and support is still “thin.” To make tangible progress for the post-2015 development agenda in different countries with differing starting conditions, resources and political governance systems, specific responsibilities will have to be defined. They must be differentiated by societal sector and actor, and broken down into specific deliverables for a quantified and time-bound action plan. The political institutions will have to differentiate good governance responsibilities and actions according to the different sectors (e.g. environment, economic, social affairs, agriculture, development cooperation, energy, health, basic and higher education, etc.). Another necessity is to remove perverse subsidies⁴¹ and eliminate inter-sectorial inconsistencies.⁴²

With regard to sustainable development programs for the business sector, the differentiation ought to be at least

- *by sector (sub-system) of society* such as the economic sector (given that the pharmaceutical industry, the extractive industry, the agro industry, the textile industry, the financial industry, and any other industry have very little in common),
- *by initial condition and resource base* of a company (given that small and medium enterprises in low-income countries have other resource bases and responsibilities than high-performance multinationals from OECD countries), and
- *by cultural context.*⁴³

Idealism Without Illusion and Realism Without Resignation

The imperatives of sustainable development – like the aspirations articulated in the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – amount to nothing less than a *new common standard of practices for all peoples and all nations* to the end that every individual and every organ of society shall strive by teaching and education to promote coherent action and implement state-of-the-art national and international measures progressively, to secure universal and effective recognition and observance. Given the scale and complexity of problems to be solved, single actors or institutions cannot make a decisive difference. Successful endeavors to change the development path necessitate a multi-stakeholder approach, whereby the international community, multilateral institutions, national govern-

40 unsdsn.org/resources/goals-and-targets/goal-10-transform-governance-and-technologies-for-sustainable-development/.

41 E.g. despite all the known environmental consequences, the subsidies for the production of coal in Germany are substantially higher than the subsidies of renewable energy, see www.greenpeace-energy.de.

42 Fossil-fuel price-distortions are large, increasing and often hidden, furthermore, they are major contributors to higher carbon-emissions and lower GDP. See Stefanski R. (2014): Dirty Little Secrets: Inferring Fossil-Fuel Subsidies from Patterns in Emission Intensities. OxCarre Research Paper 134, Oxford University, April 2014.

43 Hofstede G. (2001): Culture’s Consequences. 2nd ed. Sage Publication, London, p. 9f.

ments, regional institutions, civil society, educational institutions and the business sector as well as individual households share responsibility and commit resources, skills, and know-how to achieve sustainable solutions in a fair way. In the same way that a nation's economic and social success is greatest when there is a fair division of labor, sustainable development will benefit from shared values and common understanding over basic issues and opportunities.

From this basis, and looking at the world and its conflicts today, there is one “big” question: Is there a realistic chance that global values will be embraced, wisdom will prevail and governments, multi-lateral institutions, business and a growing number of individuals will acknowledge the available facts, apply the precautionary principle and start acting coherently? Niccolò Machiavelli once advised, “Whoever wishes to foresee the future must consult the past; for human events ever resemble those of preceding times. This arises from the fact that they are produced by men who ever have been, and ever shall be, animated by the same passions, and thus they necessarily have the same results.” The actual performance after the many statements of the international community in the past does not exactly encourage to repudiate the validity of Machiavelli's dictum. The notion of sustainable development is neither new nor are the necessary steps to initiate an appropriate process unknown.

The UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm 1972

The idea of sustainability in development gained political attractiveness and took off in the early 1970s.⁴⁴ Barbara Ward (Lady Jackson) who probably coined the term sustainable development pointed out that socio-economic development and environmental protection cannot be dealt with separately but must be linked.⁴⁵ In the declaration of the first United Nations Conference dedicated to environmental issues (UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm 1972) the international community proclaimed, “The protection and improvement of the human environment is a major issue which affects the well-being of peoples and economic development throughout the world”⁴⁶. It warned that

“A point has been reached in history when we must shape our actions throughout the world with a more prudent care for their environmental consequences. Through ignorance or indifference we can do massive and irreversible harm to the earthly environment on which our life and well being depend.”

Already then, the international community stated,

- “Man has the fundamental right to freedom, equality and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being, and he bears a solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations.” (Principle 1);
- “The natural resources of the earth, including the air, water, land, flora and fauna and especially representative samples of natural ecosystems, must be safeguarded for the benefit of present and future generations” (Principle 2);

44 Of course, the concept of “sustainable development” was not invented in the 1970s or '80s. A lot of other names appear in the early part of the pedigree of this concept. For example: Malthus T.R. (1798): *An Essay on The Principle of Population As It Affects The Future Improvement of Society*. London. Liebig J.v. (1862): *Die Chemie in ihrer Anwendung auf Agricultur und Physiologie*. Braunschweig, 7. ed. Veblen Th. (1948): *The Technicians and the Revolution*. Reprinted in Veblen Th. (1948): *The Portable Veblen*, Viking Press, New York 1948. Also economists such as Pigou A.C. (1932): *The Economics of Welfare*. Macmillan, London; and my late teacher, Kapp K.W. (1950): *The Social Cost of Private Enterprise*. Reprinted as Schocken Paperback ed. New York, 1971.

45 See Ward B. and R. Dubos (1972): *Only One Earth. The Care and Maintenance of a Small Planet*. Deutsch, London.

46 <http://www.unep.org/Documents.multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=97&ArticleID=1503>.

- “The non-renewable resources of the earth must be employed in such a way as to guard against the danger of their future exhaustion and to ensure that benefits from such employment are shared by all mankind” (Principle 5), and
- “International matters concerning the protection and improvement of the environment should be handled in a cooperative spirit by all countries, big and small, on an equal footing” (Principle 24).

More than 40 years later not one of these statements has lost its validity.

Report of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues (“Brandt-Report”)

A historic moment of clear-sightedness and visionary optimism for international development was the first “Brandt-Report”. In late December 1976, the then President of the World Bank, Robert McNamara, proposed to Willy Brandt to establish an expert commission on international development issues and requested him to chair it. About a year later, in 1977, the *Independent Commission on International Development Issues*, under the Chairmanship of the former German chancellor, was created “to study the grave global issues arising from the economic and social disparities of the world community” and “to suggest ways of promoting adequate solutions to the problems involved in development and in attacking absolute poverty.”

Already in 1977 Willy Brandt recognized the *inevitability of change*. Looking at the dangers to world peace and the growing social disparities, his conclusion was that North and South cannot proceed with “business as usual,” merely adding a few bits here and there. He called for an intellectual reorientation, serious steps towards structural change, increased cooperation. The Report cautioned against false hopes of general solutions when so many individual and national aspirations have to be brought together. “The question is whether the world community will take deliberate and decisive steps to bring about, or whether change will be forced upon us all through an unfolding of events over which the international community has little control.”⁴⁷ Today, the world is in exactly the same situation. Although environmental issues were not at the center of the issues taken up in Willy Brandt’s introduction,⁴⁸ the plea to *change attitudes* as well as the procedural advice are as relevant today as it was then, e.g.

- Be more concerned with human values than with bureaucratic regulation and technocratic constraints and bring hope that humanity can solve the problems it created.
- Nurture understanding, commitment and solidarity between peoples and nations; be courageous and visionary to complete the great task and be guided by mutual respect, open-mindedness and honesty, with a willingness not only to offer criticism but also to listen to it.
- Support change and reform in a two-way street approach, i.e. by governments and people in both industrialized and developing countries.
- Do not avoid serious exchange of views and discuss frankly in the South *and* the North unpleasant issues such as waste and corruption, oppression and violence as well as abuses of power by élites, the outburst of fanaticism, the misery of millions of refugees, or other violations of human rights which harm the cause of justice and solidarity, at home and abroad.

47 Independent Commission on International Development Issues (1977): A programme for survival. New York, Geneva, p. 195.

48 See the reproduction and appreciation of this introduction on the occasion of Willy Brandt’s 100th birthday: Brandt W. (2013): Das Überleben sichern. Die Einleitung zum Nord-Süd-Bericht. Mit einer Einführung von Dirk Messner. In: Schriftenreihe der Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung, Heft 25, Berlin. (http://www.willy-brandt.de/fileadmin/stiftung/Downloads/Schriftenreihe/Heft25_Nord-Sued-Bericht.pdf).

The simplest common interest was then and is now “that mankind wants to survive and has a moral obligation to survive.”⁴⁹ The right thing to do in this respect is, so the Commission, “not enlightened charity or humanitarian aid but a rearrangement of international relations and a new kind of comprehensive approach to the problems of development in which all countries accept their proper share of responsibility for international political and economic affairs, i.e. a “globalization of policies”:

- As more and more problems affect humankind, solutions to these problems have to be internationalized. The globalization of dangers and challenges calls for a domestic policy that goes beyond parochial or even national items. Quite a number of problems affect societies regardless of their political regimes.
- New perspectives and bold leadership for the real interests of people and humankind is needed; the international community is still too cut off from the experience of ordinary people, and vice versa.
- We need a new awareness of the environmental and ecological dangers to our planet.

Willy Brandt in his foreword to the report drew attention to points that are in equal measure relevant today:

- It would be dishonest to gloss over different convictions, and foolish to disguise conflicts of interest – but it would also be extremely unwise if we failed to balance and link interests wherever a common denominator can be found.
- The self-interest of nations can now only be effectively pursued through taking account of mutual interests. There *are* growing mutual interests. Whoever wants a bigger slice of the international economic cake cannot seriously want it to become smaller.
- The survival of humankind, in justice and dignity, will make it necessary to use new methods to open new roads.

The Brandt-Report also addressed the issue of common values and asked for their mutual recognition. A technology-based world civilization requires a common social and work ethos. Self-righteousness will neither create jobs nor feed hungry mouths. *Situations are seldom hopeless if they are not accepted as such.*⁵⁰ Nearly 40 years later, there is not much to be added to the basic messages of the Brandt Report. The only exception is its focus on social and political concerns, neglecting the significance of environmental issues. They were the focus of the “Brundtland Report” *Our Common Future* a decade later.

Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (“Brundtland Report”)

Like the Brandt Report, “Our Common Future”⁵¹ is still pertinent. Many statements that were right in 1987 remain totally appropriate today:

- Attempts to maintain social and ecological stability through old approaches to development and environmental protection will increase instability. Security must be sought through change. Without such reorientation of attitudes and emphasis, little can be achieved.
- The concept of sustainable development implies not absolute limits but *limitations* that the present state of technology and social organization imposes on environmental resources and the

49 Independent Commission on International Development Issues (1977): A programme for survival. New York, Geneva, p. 12.

50 Willy Brandt in his introduction to “A Programme for Survival”, the first “Brandt-Report”.

51 http://conspect.nl/pdf/Our_Common_Future-Brundtland_Report_1987.pdf.

ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities. *But technology and social organization can be both managed and improved to make way for a new era of economic growth.*

- There was criticism of “*non-universalizable consumption patterns.*” Much of the economic growth that led to improvements of living standards in the past has been “based on the use of increasing amounts of raw materials, energy, chemicals, and synthetics and on the creation of pollution that is not adequately accounted for in figuring the costs of production processes. These trends have had unforeseen effects on the environment.”
- Sustainable development seeks to *meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future.*
- *Environmental problems have a global system character.* Traditional distinctions between matters of local, national, and international significance have become blurred. Ecosystems do not respect national boundaries: it is all about “*common concerns,*” “*common challenges*” and “*common endeavors*”.
- *There is a moral and values dimension of solutions:* “To successfully advance in solving global problems, we need to develop new methods of thinking, to elaborate new moral and value criteria, and, no doubt, new patterns of behavior.”

The Brundtland-Report led to the convening of

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit)

The Earth Summit brought together representatives of 172 governments, of which 108 were represented by their Heads of State, as well as some 2400 representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and – for the first time – business. The resulting treaties and documents (Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and the Statement of Forest Principles) were state of the art then – and up to the present day remain valid in their basic message. The Summit’s general message was that the magnitude and complexity of the problems facing us necessitates a transformation of consumption and production patterns. Poverty as well as excessive consumption by affluent populations damages the local and global environment.

The most important contribution of the Rio conference – and probably the most important in the context of the sustainable development – was Article 15 of the Rio Declaration: “Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.” The *precautionary principle* must be a cornerstone of all sustainable development matters. Other messages of importance were

- Governments need to redirect international and national plans and policies to ensure that all economic decisions fully take into account their environmental impact.
- Patterns of production have to be scrutinized in a systematic manner and abandoned whenever possible.
- Alternative sources of energy have to be developed to replace the use of fossil fuels that are linked to global climate change.
- Public transportation systems have to be built up in order to reduce vehicle emissions, congestion in cities and the health problems caused by polluted air and smog.
- Greater awareness of and concern about the growing scarcity of water is necessary.

Jeff Tollefson and Natasha Gilbert looked into what happened to the treaties signed at the United

Nation's Earth Summit in 1992 twenty years later.⁵² In a nutshell, their conclusion was that the world has failed to deliver on many of the promises it made 20 years ago at the Earth Summit in Brazil. This is in stark contrast to enthusiastic statements such as the one made by Richard Benedick, who had negotiated the ozone accord for the United States, that “the history books will refer back to this day as a landmark in a process that will save the planet from deterioration.”

Ten years after the Rio-Summit, the international community convened a follow up conference.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg 2002)

The Johannesburg Summit reaffirmed the principles and the program of action for achieving sustainable development provided by the Rio Conference. It emphasized the importance of good governance: “Good governance within each country and at the international level is essential for sustainable development. At the domestic level, sound environmental, social and economic policies, democratic institutions responsive to the needs of the people, the rule of law, anti-corruption measures, gender equality and an enabling environment for investment are the basis for sustainable development (I.4.). The reference to the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms included the right to development (I.5.).

The main achievement of Johannesburg Conference was the development of a “Plan of Implementation” that went into substantial detail with regard to e.g.

- poverty eradication
- changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production
- protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development, and
- sustainable development in a globalizing world.

The Johannesburg Summit reiterated the “common but differentiated responsibilities” conserving, protecting and restoring the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem. In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, and in view of the technological and financial resources they command, high-income countries are expected to lead and facilitate the global change of course. Evaluating the chapter “Sustainable Development in a Globalizing World” one finds an implicit acceptance of a “catching up” path of development for low-income countries. This implies that the more developed countries would have to undergo a very ambitious change of course in their production, consumption and waste patterns. This has not happened in the past 14 years.

Another ten years later, the international community once again looked at the progress achieved since the 1992 Rio-Conference:

United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio 2012)

Twenty years after the Earth Summit and its path-breaking Agenda 21, the international community adopted the outcome document “The future we want”.⁵³ The Rio Principles of 1992 and past action plans were reaffirmed and the political commitment renewed, the common vision was reiterated:

“Poverty eradication, changing unsustainable and promoting sustainable patterns of consumption and production and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development are the overarching objectives of and essential requirements for sustainable develop-

52 Earth summit: Rio report card. In *Nature* 486, 20–23 (07 June 2012) see <http://www.nature.com/news/earth-summit-rio-report-card-1.10764>.

53 https://rio20.un.org/sites/rio20.un.org/files/a-conf.216l-1_english.pdf.pdf.

ment” (I.4.)

Therefore the Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives saw a continued “need to achieve sustainable development by promoting sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth, creating greater opportunities for all, reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living, fostering equitable social development and inclusion, and promoting integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems that supports, inter alia, economic, social and human development while facilitating ecosystem conservation, regeneration and restoration and resilience in the face of new and emerging challenges.”(I.4.)

The participants of the Rio+20 conference affirmed

“that there are different approaches, visions, models and tools available to each country, in accordance with its national circumstances and priorities, to achieve sustainable development in its three dimensions which is our overarching goal. In this regard, we consider green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication as one of the important tools available for achieving sustainable development and that it could provide options for policy-making but should not be a rigid set of rules. We emphasize that it should contribute to eradicating poverty as well as sustained economic growth, enhancing social inclusion, improving human welfare and creating opportunities for employment and decent work for all, while maintaining the healthy functioning of the Earth’s ecosystems.” (III.56)

All the wisdom compiled over the past 40 years was mentioned again and reaffirmed – and it was decided to establish an inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process on sustainable development goals that is open to all stakeholders, with a view to developing global sustainable development goals to be agreed by the General Assembly. To summarize this journey through the high level conferences and reports

- all basic issues, be it poverty, climate change, losses in biodiversity or others are known since several decades;
- all necessary steps to initiate a sustainable path of development, necessary for “The future we want for all” are also known: poverty alleviation, changing unsustainable consumption and production patterns as well as finding non-fossil-based energy alternatives to be the most important;
- the principle of the common but differentiated responsibilities has been accepted and – in general terms – outlined: the “rich” countries must carry a larger share of the investments necessary to achieve a sustainable path of development”.

The mainly poverty-related Millennium Development Goals process was very successful and great progress was achieved in the field of poverty alleviation and its concomitant problems, mainly infant mortality, hunger and maternal mortality. This success is an encouraging sign that problems can be solved if and when the political will to do so can be mobilized.

The balance sheet shows a different story if we look at the emission of greenhouse gases and consumption of non-renewable resources, especially fossil energy.

Why Should Things be Different This Time?

Evaluating all the wisdom by the finest brains in the many conferences and working groups one wonders why so little was done with regard to practical implementation. What *really* new and different facts and opinions are to be expected at the UN General Assemblies in 2014 and 2015 or at the Climate Summit in December 2015 in Paris? Is it reasonable to assume that the “rich” countries with all their accumulated public debts and budget deficits will contribute a quantum leap in financial re-

sources, reform of the WTO or intellectual property schemes for the sake of accelerating the change necessary for global sustainability? And is it reasonable to expect that low-income countries relinquish opportunities for economic growth fueled by inexpensive fossil resources and – implicitly accept less social development and slower improvement of their citizen’s physical quality of life?

Where should the willingness to invest for the future come from in a time when “inexpensive” (e.g. coal-based energy) economic growth is badly needed to create jobs for young people and curb the debt load? Those individuals, politicians, businesspeople who want to know have access to all the knowledge they need. Those who want to act could have initiated change long ago or do so now. How can we overcome the disincentives posed by electoral cycles, time frames of business reporting and lack of individual inconvenience tolerance? Of course one could free enormous means by a reduction of military expenses – but that is another matter ...

Filling Values With Practical Life

As the Brundtland-Report highlighted, sustainable development requires a fundamental process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional reforms are in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations.⁵⁴ There are a number of motivational and attitudinal obstacles preventing significant progress in the short-term. A reference to universal values and norms supported by all cultures and all religions at all times must be added to bring in a perspective on what is the “right thing to do”. “Sustainable Development” is another term for a “World Ethos” as Hans Küng called it. People are more likely to forego a present benefit or even sacrifice something if it is for a “higher” purpose. This might be for a religious belief, for a loved human being or an admired idol – sometimes, and with not so good results, for a political ideology. In all cases normative ideas and values are involved:

Reverence for Life

Albert Schweitzer’s universal ethical concept and normative imperative *reverence for life* (Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben) is non-negotiable at least if we relate it to human life. It is a defining and constituting part of what civilization is all about. Albert Schweitzer saw this principle as one in which affirmation of the world and ethics are joined together. Human life, according to his conviction, is life that wants to live in the midst of life that wants to live.⁵⁵ Despite his idealism, he saw the world realistically:

“Standing, as all living beings are, before this dilemma of the will to live, a person is constantly forced to preserve his own life and life in general only at the cost of other life. If he has been touched by the ethic of reverence for life, he injures and destroys life only under a necessity he cannot avoid, and never from thoughtlessness.”⁵⁶

Taking note of the human misery created by absolute poverty and applying Johan Galtung’s idea of “structural violence”, reverence for life acquires an even more comprehensive meaning. The notion that unjust social structures, exploitative societal institutions and traditional hierarchies can prevent

54 The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987): Our Common Future. Oxford University Press, Chapter 2.I. See http://conspect.nl/pdf/Our_Common_Future-Brundtland_Report_1987.pdf.

55 Schweitzer A. (2009): Out of my Life and Thought. (Aus meinem Leben und Denken). Johns Hopkins University Press, 60th Anniversary Edition.

56 Ibid, p. 236.

people from meeting their basic needs and thus cause premature death and preventable disability⁵⁷ implies that reverence for life comprises reforms to deal with exclusion and inequality and to foster enlightened charity, applying the principle of humanity as well as all other imperatives of responsibility.⁵⁸ Reverence for life in this comprehensive meaning is just another term for development with a human face:

“All of us must strive for a civilization that is not based on the accretion of science and power alone, but which cares most of all for the spiritual and ethical development of the individual and of humankind.”⁵⁹

Even in such an ideal constellation people may, in order to preserve their own life, cause harm to another life. But human beings who have been touched by the ethic of reverence for life will harm and destroy life only under a necessity they cannot avoid, and never from thoughtlessness. Such people will also under any circumstances use non-violent means of conflict resolution in their sphere of influence. In exactly the same words one must define the value base of sustainable development. Whenever normative dilemmas or conflicts of interest arise, preference must be given to preserve life and the integrity of Creation.

Justice and Fairness

The High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 Development Agenda sees the imperative to “leave no one behind” as an issue of basic social justice. “Many people living in poverty have not had a fair chance in life because they are victims of illness or poor healthcare, unemployment, a natural disaster, climate change, local conflict, instability, poor local leadership, or low-quality education – or have been given no schooling at all. Others face discrimination. Remedying these fundamental inequalities and injustices is a matter of respect for people’s universal human rights.”⁶⁰

It is also a matter of fairness that those who have more financial and technical resources – and they are those who also contributed more to the present state of unsustainable affairs – have more responsibility and duties. Looking at and searching for the “speck in the eye” of emerging countries and not noticing the “log” in the eyes of the industrial countries is not an appropriate manner of analysis.

Justice and fairness are ideals that most rational people can agree to as long as they are not made “thick” in Walzer’s terms. Making them “thick” e.g. in the context of poverty alleviation, may be a complex endeavor, but as we cannot wait for an ideal world we must start in a pragmatic way and proceed in the spirit of progressive implementation. An intervention focus on the poorest and most marginalized, a disproportionate number of which are women, would not only be a good start to show reverence for life but also help break a vicious circle of causation and consequence. As the subject is well researched⁶¹ and as I cannot add any significant insight I want to highlight just three

57 Galtung J. (1969): Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. In: Journal of Peace Research. Vol. 6 (1969), Nr. 3, pp.167- 191. A simple example is the life expectancy and infant mortality of the bottom 25 percent of the income receivers versus the top 5 percent.

58 Jonas H. (1984): The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of Ethics for the Technological Age. University of Chicago Press.

59 Schweitzer A. (2009): Out of my Life and Thought. (Aus meinem Leben und Denken). Johns Hopkins University Press, 60th Anniversary Edition, p. 152.

60 See High Level Panel on the post-2015 Development Agenda: A new global partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development. Chapter 2, p. 7 <http://www.post2015hlp.org/the-report/>.

61 See e.g. Rawls J. (1999): Theory of Justice, Cambridge, Mass., revised edition. Rawls J.(2001): Justice as Fairness. A Restatement. Cambridge, Mass.; Sen A. (2010): The Idea of Justice. Penguin, London; Sen A. (2000): Development as Freedom. Anchor, New York; see also Sandel M. (2010): Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do? Penguin, London. For an introduction to the subject see <http://athome.harvard.edu/programs/jmr/>.

aspects:

1. *Poverty alleviation* will remain the most important element of a just sustainable development agenda: The lower income quintiles can only benefit from aggregate economic growth if and when there is fairness of opportunities, in labor conditions, in gender relations and in the access to basic health, education, social protection and other infrastructure services. While there is evidence of progress, it is far too slow. UNICEF estimates that it would take more than 800 years for the bottom billion to achieve ten percent of global income under the current rate of change.⁶² An important aspect of fairness is therefore to support economic growth and sustainable industrialization in low-income and emerging economies. Without this there will be no progress on the poverty alleviation front. As economic development entails the use of non-renewable resources as well as climate relevant emissions, technology transfer to mitigate negative externalities becomes part of the duties of those who have more resources and share a greater responsibility for the current state of affairs.
2. *Intergenerational fairness* is an essential part of any sustainable development action. As far as intergenerational justice or fairness is concerned, the situation is more complicated than one would expect at first glance. Without significant interpretational efforts traditional philosophical theories on justice fall short of dealing with distributional issues caused by environmental burdens and resource depletion. The general idea of *reciprocity* would have to be bended and stretched considerably to cover the notion that the current generation owes something to the next (an exception being direct parent-children or grandparent-grandchildren relations). Also the concept of *mutual advantage* is not really applicable to such circumstances. Last but not least intergenerational justice is difficult to “sell” to people who have bear higher costs or accept a lower convenience level today for the sake of advantages of a group of unknown people of a future generation at a different location.⁶³

On the one hand it is irreconcilable with any common sense of justice, fairness or of reverence for life if the “current” generation would damage the environment and consume the available non-renewable resources to such an extent that future life is only feasible with a medieval quality of life, if at all. On the other hand, today’s generations and the two before have invested huge intellectual resources and stimulated new insights resulting in the development of an immense body of technological, biological, medical, engineering and other knowledge and skills. This resulted not in only unprecedented economic value creation but also fertilized our problem solving capabilities.

We will not find consensus on how to weigh up what the current generation leaves to the future generation against whatever negative “heritage” it has allowed accumulating to the detriment of future generations. It is very difficult to balance a loss in biodiversity or cultural heritage against economic and social improvements of e.g. indigenous peoples in the rainforest of Central Africa or South America. But then we have the *precautionary principle*: The current generation should consume non-renewable resources, allow emissions and leave other negative heritage only to an extent that, in the light of today’s best knowledge, does not prevent future generations from meeting their needs. The appropriate fairness rule is an inter-generational application of the Golden Rule.

62 http://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/files/Global_Inequality.pdf.

63 See as an excellent discourse on these issues Gosseries A. (2008): Theories of intergenerational justice: A Synopsis. In: Surveys and Perspectives Integrating Environment and Society (S.A.P.I.E.N.S) Vol. 1, No. 1. <http://sapiens.revues.org/165>.

3. *Procedural justice* is important: Not only must all countries (and not only the privileged ones) be heard and empowered to contribute their points of view as well as to defend their legitimate interests – there is also an immense necessity for a broad public discourse in all countries and with all agents of society on the concrete meaning of justice and fairness in the context of sustainability.

Whenever normative dilemmas or conflicts of interest arise, we must give preference to solutions that are perceived to be the fairest and most just by the majority of the people affected by it.

Protect, Respect and Fulfill Human Rights.

Human beings are entitled to have their rights protected, respected and fulfilled simply by virtue of them being human.⁶⁴ Above all these are the rights to life, liberty and justice. It seems obvious to count our own children and grandchildren as “members of the human family” to which the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights refers. It is only in the logic of the spirit of the Human Rights discourse to include not only our *own* children and grandchildren but also those of other human beings living in the future. For them too one can argue that the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. Article 28 can also be interpreted along these lines. It stipulates: “Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.”

Whenever normative dilemmas or conflicts of interest arise preference must be given to solutions that protect, respect and fulfill human rights and develop the potentialities of the people affected by it.

Accept Corresponding Human Duties.

Article 29.1. of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights deals with the fact that one should not discuss rights without considering corresponding duties: “Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible” – this is also true for the global community. “The Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities”⁶⁵ deepened this thought and reminds us:

- If we have a right to life, then we have the obligation to respect life.
- If we have a right to liberty, then we have the obligation to respect other people's liberty.
- If we have a right to security, then we have the obligation to create the conditions for every human being to enjoy human security.
- If we have a right to partake in our country's political process and elect our leaders, then we have the obligation to participate and ensure that the best leaders are chosen.
- If we have a right to work under just and favorable conditions to provide a decent standard of living for our families, and us we also have the obligation to perform to the best of our capacities.
- If we have a right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, we also have the obligation to respect others' thoughts or religious principles.

64 Johanna Kucuradi combines the discourse of the subject matters “human rights” and “development” in an excellent way in: Institut International de Philosophie: Human Rights: Concepts and Problems. (Philosophy in Context Vol. 7, Ed. Hans Lenk).

65 See <http://interactioncouncil.org/a-universal-declaration-of-human-responsibilities>.

- If we have a right to be educated, then we have the obligation to learn as much as our capabilities allow us and, where possible, share our knowledge and experience with others.
- If we have a right to benefit from the earth's bounty, then we have the obligation to respect, care for and restore the earth and its natural resources.

The Interaction Council concluded: “As human beings, we have unlimited potential for self-fulfillment. Thus we have the obligation to develop our physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual capacities to their fullest. The importance of the concept of responsibility towards attaining self-realization cannot be overlooked.”

One can, however, give responsibility a much deeper meaning. In his book “The Question of German Guilt”⁶⁶ Karl Jaspers made the distinction between “criminal guilt”, “political guilt”, “moral guilt” and “metaphysical guilt”. *Metaphysical guilt*, according to Jaspers, is the lack of absolute solidarity with human beings as human beings in situations where injustice, criminal deeds and other terrible things happen. This guilt remains indelible where morally meaningful requests have ended. “This solidarity is violated, whenever I am present where injustice and crime happen.” Many people would agree that we are “present” while millions of children die due to preventable causes, while hundreds of millions starve and while the writing is on the wall with regard to causes and mitigation possibilities of climate change.

Cooperation

None of the sustainability problems can be solved by ideological confrontation, let alone force. Sensible solutions can only result from dialogue and cooperation. And, considering the magnitude and complexity of the issues standing in the way of sustainable development, even the most able individuals with the best intentions can only make a small contribution. This makes cooperation a normative imperative. To make tangible progress a broad range of stakeholders at the global, regional, national and local levels has to be consulted, committed and invited to join the “solution team”, be they governments, including subnational and local governments, private businesses, civil society or religious communities. Searching for win-win opportunities, striving for an intersecting set of interests among different stakeholders and supporting ways and means to accelerate transfer of technology and financial support are some of the top items of the respective terms of reference.

Integrity

Integrity can be defined as “an uncompromising and predictably consistent commitment to honor moral, ethical, spiritual and artistic values and principles.”⁶⁷ Persons of integrity act in accordance with their knowledge about the possible consequences of their actions and – if these are undesirable or cause damage to others – they change course. The same is true for institutions such as business enterprises, political parties, churches or NGOs. Individuals proceeding with consumption and non-renewable resource-use patterns, which, to the best of their knowledge, are not compatible with sustainability imperatives, are not acting with integrity. Business enterprises proceeding with unsustainable modes of production and non-renewable resource-use patterns despite the knowledge about their long-term impact are not competing with integrity. Political parties and members of governments who have access to databases and scientific expertise and yet do not initiate reform processes and create incentives for a change of course are not ruling with integrity.

66 Jaspers K. (1946): Die Schuldfrage. Einleitung zu einer Vorlesung über die geistige Situation in Deutschland. Lambert Schneider, Heidelberg April 1946, p. 47 f.

67 Killinger B. (2010): Integrity: Doing the Right Thing for the Right Reason. McGill University Press.

As important as the reflection on global normative principles and sustainability values is – philosophical reflection on alternative values and coherently changed priorities *per se* will not initiate a change of course. A new political, economic and societal framework, designed in the light of global values, must be developed with the objective of making the necessary adaptations in individual and institutional practices also beneficial from a self-serving perspective.

A Cookbook⁶⁸ Approach to Sustainable Development

While the actual implementation of any national sustainable development concept and action plan will have to be context-specific and consider economic, social, political and environmental specificities, there are some essential “pillars” under all circumstances.

Setting the Right Political Incentivizes For Sustainability

The Political Ingredient: There is no lack of knowledge; governments have comprehensive knowledge about every aspect of the sustainability portfolio. Accepting the conclusions of for example the report of the German Committee of Inquiry (Enquête Kommission) “Economic Growth, Prosperity, Quality of Life – towards a sustainable economy and societal progress in a social market economy”⁶⁹ and breaking them down into sector-specific action plans (to be stretched over 10 to 15 years to manage opposition and resistance of vested interest holders) would be an excellent start into a German sustainability process. A well-designed process of such a nature was chosen by Switzerland. The “wheel” does not have to be “re-invented”, in many respects good practices are available for adaptation to national circumstances.⁷⁰

The eminent German sociologist Niklas Luhmann argued in his social systems theory that each societal sub-system looks at the world from its specific perspective, acts with a coherent rationality and has its functional “normality”.⁷¹ The *economic* sub-system is interested in *payments*; the *science* sub-system in *truth*, and the paramount interest of the *political* sub-system is *power*, its preservation and possible increase. In order to stay in power (i.e. be re-elected), the first priority of candidates is to defend and promote the interests of the traditional constituencies and potential voters within the electoral cycle. As future generations disengage from formal political participation, politicians act from their perspective rationally when they defend the particular (short- and medium term) interests of their electorate regardless of their long-term impact. As a consequence politicians in power (governments) may pay subsidies for conserving jobs in the extractive sectors, e.g. brown or stone coal mining, or for generating relatively inexpensive electricity regardless of future consequences, or oppose legislation that may make intellectual sense to them but does not bring them votes. If counter-productive subsidies were abolished and polluters paid the full costs of their actions, resource prices would be closer to representing the ecological truth. Ecologically damaging practices would become more expensive and hence less attractive. Higher costs of non-sustainable goods would re-

68 The term “cookbook” was chosen to allude to the fact that the “meal” is perfect only if and when all ingredients are used in the right dosage. “Tool box” does not catch this notion.

69 Enquête-Kommission “Wachstum, Wohlstand, Lebensqualität – Wege zu nachhaltigem Wachstum und gesellschaftlichem Fortschritt in der sozialen Marktwirtschaft”, see <http://www.bpb.de/shop/buecher/schriftenreihe/175745/schlussbericht-der-enquete-kommission..>

70 See Schweizer Eidgenossenschaft (2007): Nachhaltige Entwicklung in der Schweiz. Ein Wegweiser. Bern. See also <http://www.are.admin.ch/themen/nachhaltig/00262/00528/04599/index.html?lang=en>, also Swiss Position on a Framework for Sustainable Development Post-2015, www.deza.admin.ch/ressources/resource_en_225086.pdf.

71 See Luhmann N. (1997): Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main; also Luhmann N. (1988): Soziale Systeme, Grundriss einer allgemeinen Theorie. Suhrkamp, 3rd Edition, Frankfurt.

duce demand and stimulate research for substitution.

As every change – certainly the structural transformation processes necessary for sustainable development – has “winners” and “losers” it is not to be expected that the post-2015 development agenda will have a smooth run. Those benefitting from the status quo are likely to use scientific uncertainty and incomplete information about future impacts to carry out placation if not disinformation campaigns, and they will lobby to retard changes. This is why the precautionary principle has to be reemphasized and fine-tuned, and consultation and negotiation processes as well as stretched implementation periods implemented.

As it is unrealistic to believe that politicians are willing to do “the right thing” from a sustainability point of view when this comes at the cost of loss of their seats in parliament, one ought to be realistic about what can be expected in the short-term. The rationale of the political sub-system is to follow public expectations, not bold leadership for change that could bring their political careers to a sudden end. There has to be a *development from below* so that politicians can jump on the train in time and help with their armory. The success of “green” parties as well as the “greening” of traditional parties is a hopeful sign that more and more voters are internalizing the risks of a business as usual trajectory and helping to generate different political majorities.

Education and Explanation

The Knowledge Ingredient: There must be a vision. Visionary, idealistic messages will motivate people and sensitize their awareness. But sustainability does not evolve into a mainstream movement just because of the idealism of the enlightened few. Visions remain empty if not followed by broad and deep knowledge about the consequences of unsustainable actions. Knowledge is the precondition for concrete definitions of the problems and the solutions – and that again is the prerequisite for action plans.

We must use social marketing, education and teaching about the concept of Sustainable Development. Changes in the right direction need to be advertised and supported by social marketing to gain momentum. The same is true for good news in this respect. And this on the broadest scale possible by politicians, business leaders, civil society leaders, media, schools and universities.⁷² Education must include known facts about impacts of current energy-use, production and consumption – all with the objective to raise awareness, improve understanding and make people reflect on the potential consequences of their actions. Educations should also make transparent the dilemmas and the conflicts of interest associated with a change of course.

Better, broader and earlier understanding of what is at stake is likely to deepen the understanding and foster concern about the lack of sustainability among those who get educated. Thereby it is likely to accelerate the political process. An acceleration of the course of change – and this must also be part of the education – will make all mitigation endeavors and investments less expensive and leave more degrees of freedom for a change of course. Postponed actions and deferred changes will be significantly more costly.

Sophisticated Modesty and Voluntary Simplicity

The Image Ingredient: The current capital-intensive, energy-intensive and consumption driven “western” lifestyle enjoys immense popularity nearly everywhere. This attractiveness looms so large that it

72 Open online courses like the one Prof. Jeffery Sachs offers on SDSN.edu. are of special value in this context as they can be accessed from all over the world

has biased the global “development paradigm” which hundreds of millions of people are currently trying to “catch-up” on. While *non-material* development aspects promoted by the “West” such as the respect for human rights and modernization ideals such as rationality, productivity, efficiency, pragmatism and attitudes to “get things done” will continue to be part of a sustainable development concept – the *material* aspects of the Western development paradigm are not universalizable. They thus cannot be part of a blueprint for global sustainable development.

For a lot of well-to-do people sustainable development still has an image problem: They confuse it with having to give up many pleasant aspects of life for a dire existence in cold, dark rooms, with highly restricted mobility, constraints in consumption choices, and imposed asceticism. While such doom may well be the eventual result of unsustainable habits, it is by no means necessarily associated with modern alternative lifestyles such as *sophisticated modesty* and *voluntary simplicity*. Lots of highly motivating lifestyle “projects”, initiated or followed by predominantly younger, well-educated people are already prominent and spread wide through Internet platforms: Think about the “simplify your life” movement showing that life is not about riches but enrichment; the “slow-food” movement that celebrates regional, seasonal and biologically produced and unprocessed foods over exotic imports; urban gardening communities who share work and produce; Internet platforms where people offer their surplus foods, even cooked, to “hungry foodies” in town instead of throwing valuable groceries away; Internet communities who prefer car-sharing, garment-sharing, tool-sharing over being possessed by “things” and cluttering their spaces. These are just a few examples that the “grassroots” find exciting and creative ways of life, and that there is an increasing longing for Zen-like simplicity, peace of mind and a sense of “community” in a world otherwise full of competition, haste and noise and keeping up with the Joneses. These new lifestyles hopefully scale-up; their followers have understood that conspicuous, material-intensive consumption is not a precondition for happiness or a good quality of life.⁷³

There are clear signs of “mal-development” in many high-income countries, e.g. the growing prevalence of life-style related chronic diseases, such as depression and burnout, and the soaring of the socio-economic and human costs they inflict.⁷⁴ If we analyze the *World Happiness Report*⁷⁵ as well as the *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*⁷⁶, it is safe to conclude that consumption matters and that adequate availability of energy is a must. But there is not only a measurable diminishing marginal utility of income and wealth – the well-being of people, the real quality of life, depends to a significant extent on non-economic aspects of life and goods as well as services that are not sold on markets. Living a good life depends to a significant extent on social capital, i.e. well meaning, loving personal and community relations.

Innovation and Technological Progress

The Technological Ingredient: If we look at the astounding development of information and communication technology (ICT), of computational capacity as well as the advances in genetic sciences there is a

73 Eminent psychoanalysts like Erich Fromm see the central focus on economic and material affairs as a symptom of insane societies, where human beings are lacking a sense of identity and a frame of orientation and devotion. Fromm E. (1955): *The Sane Society*. Holt Paperbacks, New York. See also Fromm E. (1941): *Escape from Freedom*. Holt Paperbacks, New York 1994.

74 New data for Germany show an alarming picture: The number of sick-leave days due to psychogenic diseases rose by 165% since 1997, 16% of days absent in the first 6 months of 2014 were due to psychological strain, 33% of working man and women feel “exhausted” and “burned out”. See Kade C. (2014): *Wie die Zitronen*. In: *Welt am Sonntag* September 7, 2014, p. 6.

75 See http://unsdsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/WorldHappinessReport2013_online.pdf.

76 See http://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/documents/rapport_anglais.pdf.

lot of reason to assume that “now is the best time to be alive!”⁷⁷ The 21st century could become the best of all times – if all members of society recognize the looming dangers and risks as well as the potential opportunities – and act accordingly.

While one should not look at technological advances as the magic solution for all sustainability problems, it would be foolish to disregard the contribution it can make. Julian Simon argued many years ago that the potential of economic feedback mechanisms and human creativity that lead to improved technologies, substitution mechanisms, and modified patterns of behavior are often underestimated. When resources are priced properly, resource-intensive and ecologically damaging goods will become more expensive, hence less attractive. Competition encourages producers to make the use of such goods cost-effective – that is, to minimize their use. Companies that take their sustainability responsibility seriously and develop better products and processes will have a competitive edge. Under such conditions, the competition inherent in open markets becomes the primary driving force for the creation of ecologically sound technology. If markets were made to work for the environment by applying “full-cost pricing” along with the polluter pays principle, ecological innovation would be encouraged on the product and process level.

Despite a more than doubling of the world population over the past 50 years and a substantial increase in consumption, many metals and other natural resources have become increasingly available rather than scarcer over time. Many of the world’s known reserves⁷⁸ went up, the prices (adjusted for inflation) of most natural resources came down. With the exception of greenhouse gases, the main pollutants have lessened in most industrial countries, and air and water quality have improved. Diseases caused by microorganisms such as smallpox, plague, cholera, typhus and the like, which threatened the lives and health of earlier generations in industrial countries, have been successfully conquered and are much better contained than they were 50 years ago. There has also been spectacular progress in the management of diseases such as HIV and malaria.

The question of whether the future will be so different depends, according to the late Julian Simon, on the response to another question: Will the rate of technological development slow down?⁷⁹ His answer was that the pace of development of new technology will increase – and he was right. If the future differs from the past, the bias is likely to be in the direction of underestimating the rate at which technology will develop. The value and weight of “the ultimate resource,” as Simon called human ingenuity, with the proper economic signals and in a free society should not be underestimated. Simon and others concede that in the short run all resources are limited, but the longer run is a different story:

“The essence of wealth is the capacity to control the forces of nature, and the extent of wealth depends upon the level of technology and the ability to create new knowledge. A wealthy world can find remedies for a new disease more quickly than can a poor world, because the wealthy world possesses stocks of knowledge and skilled persons. A key characteristic of a wealthy society is a well-developed set of legal rules. Wealth both creates such rules and depends upon them to produce the conditions of freedom and security that progress requires.”⁸⁰

77 This is the first sentence of the Report of the Oxford Martin Commission for Future Generations, Oxford, October 2013. www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/commission/Oxford_Martin_Now_for_the_Long_Term.pdf.

78 A concept that depends on the current prices and current technologies and hence changes with new scientific discoveries, technological progress, and the recycling rate.

79 Simon J.L. (1996): *The Ultimate Resource 2*. Princeton University Press; see also Simon J.L. (1995): *The State of Humanity*. Blackwell, Oxford.

80 Ibid, pp. 12 f.

Better technologies have already changed the definition of eco-efficiency, and more of the same is to be expected.⁸¹ The interest should be not so much in specific resources per se (copper, for example) but in the particular services that resources can yield (such as the capacity to conduct electricity).⁸² If other resources can supply the services required for sustainable development (such as optical fibers in the example above), the availability of the original resource (copper) loses its significance. If scientists are able to assemble atoms and molecules into new materials that can be substituted for a scarce resource, that specific scarcity becomes irrelevant. There is no reason to assume that similar mechanisms will not help us to deal better with emission issues – deep de-carbonization being one example.⁸³

Where Do We Go From Here?

To borrow a striking metaphor from Vittorio Hoesle⁸⁴: If in the middle of a frozen lake we recognize from the sound of ice breaking under our feet that we are in danger, the process of recognition is not in itself sufficient to rescue us. Declarations of intention and ritual expressions of concern do not release us from the obligation to actually do what is possible here and now.

It would be an illusion to believe that there are “quick” solutions. Multilayered, complex problems do not have simple solutions. The whole “knowledge, skill and resource portfolio” must be brought to the table to have all the elements needed in the solution of the puzzle. The fact that we are dealing with slow moving systems embodies two major and historically new problems: First, deterioration will come in small and uncertain steps – too small and too uncertain to trigger more than temporary political dismay and symptom management. And second, when things get worse and a change of course is no longer avoidable, deterioration will continue for sometime and worsen the situation.

A paradigm change with regard to the standard operating principles of the political, economic and social sub-system characterized by a new appraisal of values and interests, new priorities and new solution-coalitions is necessary to avoid serious consequences for future generations. Such a comprehensive societal paradigm change will have to be based on a robust consensus on values, i.e. a World Ethos. The criterion of “universalization” becomes a *conditio sine qua non progressus*. This is also true for political alliances and cooperation. As the evolving threats of a business-as-usual approach constitute a new “common enemy” that dwarf all “old” enmities, unorthodox coalitions are to be expected and ought to be supported.

Confronting oneself with the dire economic consequences small farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa already have to face today due to changing precipitation patterns and applying a “heuristic of fear” as suggested by Hans Jonas⁸⁵ to the impact of global warming, one can understand the moral outrage of some civil society organizations. It might help to raise awareness and deepen sensitivity. But moralizing is the wrong approach; it is likely to deepen the trenches within and between societies and create

81 Already 10 years ago von Weizsäcker E.U., A.B. Lovins, and L.H. Lovins (1995): Faktor Vier. Doppelter Wohlstand – halbiertes Naturverbrauch. Der neue Bericht an den Club of Rome. Droemer Knaur, Munich. And, more recently, von Weizsäcker E., K. Hargroves, and M. Smith (2010): Faktor Fünf. Droemer Knaur, Munich.

82 Simon J.L. (1996): The Ultimate Resource 2. Princeton University Press; see also Simon J.L. (1995): The State of Humanity. Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 23 ff.

83 See <http://unsdsn.org/what-we-do/deep-decarbonization-pathways/>.

84 Hoesle V. (1991): Philosophie der ökologischen Krise. Becksche Reihe, Munich, p. 16.

85 Jonas H. (1984): The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological World. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

an adverse “cold-war” atmosphere – and this in a situation where dialogue and cooperation in “new coalitions” is more necessary than ever.

On the other hand – with all due respect for what governments have to do to facilitate and accelerate a change of course: Overregulation and an abundance of political intervention leading to a plethora of new legal constraints is also not the path of choice – too slow, too heavy-handed, too easy to circumvent, too bureaucratic, and disempowering the true agents of change: people.

Of course everything that is technologically, politically and socially feasible must be implemented – but in the end sustainable development is probably not achievable without a value change, one that de-materializes “well-being” and de-monetizes “happiness”.⁸⁶ A change of course for sustainability must become attractive, fashionable, “hip”, worthy of imitation. Indulging in resource-intensive and insatiable “conspicuous consumption” to please peers and social norms and satisfy a perceived need for prestige wherever it happens will have to be ridiculed, not admired. “Beautiful people”, global super stars from science, sport and show business must be taken on board to promote voluntary simplicity and sophisticated modesty as the coolest possible lifestyle to adopt. And, as quantum leaps in the transformation of fossil fuel based economies are not to be expected, we must learn to celebrate incremental progress (e.g. in energy efficiency), be proud of small steps in the right direction. The societal transformation to sustainability is a slow process, but as long as it does not stop or go into reverse progressive implementation is the best we can expect.

Given the complexity of a global sustainable development path, a values management process of all the Member States of the United Nations may be the appropriate approach to initiate, manage and control actions coherent with the post-2015 Development Agenda. The approach would be similar to value management practiced in enlightened companies.⁸⁷

Values Management for Sustainable Development

A national values management for sustainable development processes defines *country-specific* goals, targets and instruments with the aim to create an incentivizing framework for sustainable development. It also specifies guiding principles for implementation to align the standard operating procedures of every organ of society. A simplified national concept could consist of the following elements:

Definition of National Values and Principles Compatible with Those Articulated in the Millennium Declaration

The reference base for all national efforts would be

- Collective and shared responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity as well as sustainability at the global level,
- Freedom, Equality, Solidarity, Tolerance, Social and Cultural Dignity and Respect for Human Rights, Respect for Nature, complemented by
- Characteristics of good governance such as truthfulness, transparency and integrity.

Contextualizing and Operationalizing This Values Fundament

86 See http://unsdsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/WorldHappinessReport2013_online.pdf.

87 See Wieland J.: How can we manage values? A practical guideline. In: Küng H., K.M. Leisinger and J. Wieland (2010): Manifesto Global Economic Ethic. Consequences and Challenges for Global Businesses. dtv, Munich. pp. 223 ff. see also Wieland J. (2014): Governance Ethics: Global value creation, economic organization and normativity. Springer, New York (forthcoming).

In contrast to a corporation where top management can enforce values management in a top-down approach, the nearly 200 UN Member States do not only have different problems, absorptive capacities and implementation resources – but also the sovereign right to decide on their specific progressive implementation. So, implementation of the moral common ground will be in a rather wide corridor determined by economic, social, political, environmental and cultural specificities.

A next logical step would be a disaggregation of national data into different sectors (sub-systems) and the encouragement to all societal actors to develop action plans, define outcomes, budgets and accountability measures. This is by far not a government task; the corporate sector, non-governmental organizations, scientific institutions and the media must be included.

A reinvention of global governance seems to be an indispensable imperative. Without coherent global governance, free riders on global public goods will flourish and global sustainability essentials will be subordinated to short-termed national political interests. The United Nations system is of particular importance in this respect and leadership institutions such as the Sustainable Development Solutions Network and the LEAD Initiative of the UN Global Compact must be supported to facilitate a continuous learning process to shed more light on the issues discussed here.

In addition, as discussed above, the different sub-systems that form “society” in the national contexts (e.g. economy, legal system, science, art, education) have a different rationality, perform different tasks to achieve different objectives. All of them have developed specific processes and standard operating procedures, specific incentives and control mechanisms. As a consequence, the general common values and normative principles need to be contextualized also per societal sub-system. In each country, political leadership has to create a framework that facilitates, sets incentives and otherwise encourages sustainability initiatives to be implemented in the different societal sub-systems.⁸⁸ Differentiated legal and regulatory structures, interdictions as well as encouragements, matching investments and steering taxes – the whole regulatory and fiscal armory a democratic state avails itself of has to be used to create a framework in which reaching sustainability goals is compatible with enlightened self-interest of the majority of actors. While being realistic about the incentives and disincentives within the political sub-system, this leadership must be strong in vision, motivated by ethics, and carried by the political courage to look beyond the next elections.

Once the appropriate rules of the game are set, the different societal sub-systems must elaborate their specific sustainability programs, investment plans, management and compliance processes, accountability mechanisms and communication policies. In all this work one element is important for public acceptance: Creating transparency and engaging in broad public dialogue when

- defining the sustainability stakeholders and developing specific action plans with clear responsibilities, activities and outputs;
- defining indicators to measure success, supervising continuous implementation and creating political, economic and societal accountability;
- setting rules for the handling of conflicts of objectives as well as conflicts of interests and communicate then;
- communicating on opportunities and problems, engaging in social marketing and creating positive news about best practices as well as about small but consecutive successes achieved in the progressive implementation leading to the targets set.

The wheel does not have to be re-invented: A substantial number of governments have already

⁸⁸ See as an example UN Global Compact LEAD Initiative (2014): Government Policies that Drive Corporate Sustainability. Implementing the post-2015 Development Agenda. New York, July 2014.

started to work out national sustainability goals, defined corresponding national indicators and defined time-bound, quantified targets, performance criteria and budgets.⁸⁹ Maybe we ought to set our sights a little lower and appeal to human intelligence. Human beings are not frogs who get boiled to death if big dangerous developments come in small enough portions. The “boiling frog metaphor” does not apply to the *homo sapiens sapiens* – enlightened human beings react in time and maintain their health.

Sustainable Development will Become Reality

The choice is not “reforms for sustainability” or “business as usual” – but “learning by enlightenment” or “learning by pain”. But there is no reason for pessimistic resignation: In summarizing the results of his *Study of History*, the great historian Arnold J. Toynbee stated that

“Growth takes place whenever a challenge evokes a successful response that, in turn, evokes a further and different challenge. We have not found any intrinsic reason why this process should not repeat itself indefinitely even though a majority of civilizations that had come to birth down to the time of writing might have failed, as a matter of historical fact, to maintain their growth by failing to make, for more than a small number of times in succession, a response that had been both an effective answer to the challenge that had called it forth and at the same time a fruitful mother of a new challenge requiring a different response.”⁹⁰

Change always emanates from minorities. It is triggered by intellectual and spiritual elites which are ready to take the risk of entering uncharted territory – the great values were always linked to a small number.”⁹¹ But broad-based changes for sustainable development will have to come through a broad *development from below*, or they will not happen (voluntarily). Changes for sustainability will happen in the spirit of the African proverb that “many little people doing many little things in many little places will change the face of the world.” Understanding the state of sustainable development of a country in terms of a social system, a large number of small steps towards change will drive the sustainability process by circular causation and in a cumulative way.

Every individual contribution of any person anywhere, as small as it might be, matters. As in elections one could argue that if I do not cast my vote, the overall result will not be different – and yet I do participate in the election, as I know that all the individual votes together bring the result. “The moral power of the seemingly disappearing individual is the only substance and realistic factor to shape the fate of humanity.”⁹²

The fact that it is still a global minority that is aware of the issues and willing to act should not be a reason for resignation: Not only are there many signs that the “denial phase” is ending; it is also the insight of Margaret Mead that should encourage us: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Early Positive Indications for A Change of Course

89 See e.g. <http://www.ere.admin.ch/themen/nachhaltig/00262/00528/index.html?lang=en>

90 Toynbee A.J. (1938): *A Study of History*. Oxford, p. 274.

91 Guardini R. (1986): *Das Ende der Neuzeit. Die Macht*. Grünewald, Schöningh, Mainz, Würzburg, p. 56.

92 Jaspers K.: *Über Bedingungen und Möglichkeiten eines neuen Humanismus*. In: *Die Wandlung*. Schneider Verlag, Herbstheft, Heidelberg 1949, S.734. Jaspers K. (1949): *Über Bedingungen und Möglichkeiten eines neuen Humanismus*. In: *Die Wandlung*. Schneider Verlag, Herbstheft, Heidelberg, p. 734

There are examples of people willing to voluntarily waive immediate benefits for the sake of future returns. They include investments in development cooperation to combat poverty in low-income countries, parental savings for children's education as well as public and private research investments. The underlying rationale in a given decision situation is usually the result of a specific, complicated agenda; but it is always *also* of a normative conviction. Values only have an influence on human life if they are actually lived by in people's private and professional capacities. Striving for higher goals and engaging for ideals beyond today's grasp are two of the finest characteristics of enlightened human beings. There are a few indications that "something is going on" with regard to a change of course.

The number of aspirational consumers is growing. More and more business leaders understand that business cannot flourish in failing states and troubled societies. Successful societies with healthy, well-educated, productive and prosperous citizens are stable and predictable customers. And there is a growing number of "aspirational consumers,"⁹³ enlightened business leaders see them as a business opportunity, especially as competition in "me too" product markets becomes more fierce and brand differentiation more difficult, as Tom LaForge, Global Director, Human & Cultural Insights of the Coca-Cola Company has put on record:

"The harder we compete, the less differentiated we become. As brands sell on functional benefits (what the product is and does for me) and emotional benefits (how I want to feel on this occasion), category after category is being filled with nearly similar products. Large established brands are losing loyalty and market share to newer smaller brands that offer social and cultural benefits. It's a billion dollar paradigm shift."⁹⁴

Coca-Cola perceives the rise of "aspirational consumers", a high-velocity global segment driven by young, optimistic shoppers in developed and emerging markets, to be a

"tremendous opportunity [...] a tectonic shift toward sustainable consumption" which is underway. Enlightened business leaders will therefore integrate "sustainability deeply within an organization, a strong vision, performance against goals, and sustainable products as key drivers. [...] Over the last 20 years experts see only marginal progress toward the ambitions set forth in Agenda 21. At the time, the Rio conventions were seen as a significant driver of future sustainability success. Today, experts see technology and the private sector holding the most promise to advance sustainability... A sign of the times, the economic aspects of sustainability are expected to receive the most attention in the near term."⁹⁵

More and more consumers are "buying" sustainability. The observation of the Coca-Cola officials is supported on a broader scale, e.g. in the UK: According to the Price Waterhouse Coopers Report the answer to the question "Sustainability: are consumers buying it?" is "Yes, and in increasing numbers."⁹⁶ The majority of consumers in the UK buys "sustainability" and demonstrates awareness and concern about the issues. As a result they are changing lifestyle and behaviors. The conclusion of the PWC report is, "consumers are now at the point where they increasingly expect sustainable attributes to be an inherent part of the products and services they buy. Sustainability is becoming a business imperative; doing nothing is no longer an option." Sustainability is about securing your business for

93 See www.globescan.com.

94 <http://theaspirational.com/insights>.

95 GlobeScan: SustainAbility: The 2014 Sustainability Leaders. A GlobeScan/Sustainability Survey. See <http://www.globescan.com/component/edocman/?view=document&id=103&Itemid=591>.

96 PriceWaterhouseCoopers: Sustainability: Are consumers buying it?. http://pwc.blogs.com/files/pwc-sustainability-pamphlet13_06_08.pdf.

the future. Converging influences are forcing sustainability issues to the top of the corporate agenda. Consumer awareness, pressure on commodity and energy prices, scarcity of raw materials, together with regulator and competitor actions are combining to ensure business cannot ignore the environmental and social dimensions of how they operate. Consumers are buying it, both notionally and at the tills. Mainstream awareness and concern exists and behaviors are changing.

The depletion of the Ozone Layer has been reversed. After it was recognized that a number of compounds emitted by human activities deplete stratospheric ozone, and when the potentially catastrophic risks of widespread ozone depletion were sinking into public awareness, the *Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone* was adopted in 1987. The objective was to protect global ozone and, consequently, protect life from increased ultraviolet radiation at Earth's surface. Today, so the forthcoming report of the World Meteorological Organization, the problem of man-made CFC has been solved and – in the light of today's knowledge – the ozone hole will be history. The positive lesson learned: If a problem is acknowledged, a political consensus for counter-measures found and these measures implemented, even a big issue can be managed.

U.S. renewable energy growth accelerates. The Worldwatch Institute reports that wind, solar and geothermal energy are all on the rise.⁹⁷ In all of 2014, regenerative power sources grew faster than fossil sources of energy. Most importantly, not a single new coal-fired power station was put into operation. According to the US Energy Information Administration, renewable energy will account for about one-third of new electricity generation added to the U.S. grid over the next three years. The accelerated growth of renewable energy projects is a response to the powerful combination of high energy prices and growing state government support. The positive lesson learned: If a problem is properly addressed, the combination of market forces and government regulation will facilitate solutions.

Fairtrade products enjoy significant customer acceptance and sales increase. In 2013, Shoppers spent 5.5 billion Euro on Fairtrade products in 2013, 15 percent more than in 2012. The sales of Fairtrade certified products have been growing at high rates since many years increasing alongside major improvements to the working conditions of coffee, sugar, and banana farmers as well as strengthening cooperatives and raising suppliers prices. Nearly 6 in 10 consumers have seen the Fairtrade certificate and of those 9 in 10 trust it.⁹⁸

Individual mobility patterns and use of cars are changing. The number of young adults acquiring a traffic license is declining in several high-income countries. More and more young car drivers use increasingly also public transport. With the exception of Japan and the USA the proportion of individual cars used for commuting is declining. The number of young adults (18-34 years of age) in Germany living in a household without a private car increased since the 1990s by 50%. Low-income young male adults living in an urban setting in a single person household have fewer cars than in the 1990s. The sum of such changes results in a decline of traffic performance of young adults in German, France, Great Britain, Japan, Norway and the USA. Among the reasons for this change are socio-economic factors but also improved availability of public transport, diffusion of modern infor-

97 <http://www.worldwatch.org/node/5855>. See also Jahn Th. (2014): Der Grüne Boom in Amerika. In: Handelsblatt August 27, 2014, p. 26.

98 http://www.fairtrade.net/fileadmin/user_upload/content/2009/resources/2013-14_AnnualReport_FairtradeIntl_web.pdf.

mation and communication technologies and declining importance as a prestige factor.⁹⁹ For those who continue to use cars, new and fancy electric alternatives (e.g. from Tesla) are available.

Corporate interest in energy-efficiency is on the rise. Buildings absorb nearly 40% of global energy. If energy used for construction is included it is more than 50%. More and more companies use the attractive opportunities to reduce buildings' energy use to save costs and contribute to a more intact environment.¹⁰⁰

Voluntary community services increase. “Something” is going with societal attitudes. The number of persons engaged in unpaid community services is growing in a number of countries: E.g. in 2008, more than 16% of the German population was holding an honorary appointment.¹⁰¹

Positive indications like these must be celebrated and used for social marketing to spread the sustainability “gospel”: It can be done if we all want it. Jeffery Sachs often refers to John F. Kennedy’s speech in late summer 1962 at Rice University, where he reaffirmed America’s commitment to landing a man on the moon before the end of the 1960s and bringing him back safely: “We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too.”¹⁰² And President Kennedy added: “To be sure, all this costs us all a good deal of money [...] However, I think we’re going to do it, and I think that we must pay what needs to be paid. I don’t think we ought to waste any money, but I think we ought to do the job.” This is the mind-set necessary for sustainable development. The fact that the challenges to achieve sustainable development are immense should not trigger resignation but inspiration, ingenuity, excitement and engagement.

Desiderata

The discourse on the post-2015 development agenda is already going on intensively in the political institutions of a number of countries. A substantial number of motivated people in scientific institutions, multilateral organizations, civil society organizations as well as in a few private enterprises with enlightened leadership are working on the subject. This work will gain momentum in the next 12 months and its consequences will determine a large part of the socio-economic and political framework for the decades to come.

The conceptual discourse on sustainable development, however, must be broadened and deepened – and made more relevant for humankind: If the discourse continues to be restricted to economic, social, ecological and human rights matters, two vital dimensions are neglected: the moral¹⁰³ and the psychological base of development. The term “sustainable development” continues to have a positive connotation; it still denotes an evolution that is desirable, valuable and good for all human

99 http://www.ifmo.de/tl_files/publications_content/2011/ifmo_2011_Mobilitaet_junger_Menschen_de.pdf.

100 <http://www.wbcsd.org/Pages/EDocument/EDocumentDetails.aspx?ID=14872&NoSearchContextKey=true>.

101 *Wirtschaft im Wandel* Jg. 17 (2011) pp. 7-8; also <http://www.masf.brandenburg.de/cms/detail.php/bb1.c.317858.de> and <http://europeanvoluntaryservice.org>.

102 <http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/jfk-space.htm>.

103 Early taken up by Louis Baeck but then mostly forgotten: See Baeck L. (1988): Shifts in concepts and goals of development. In: UNESCO: Goals of Development. Paris 1988, pp. 48ff.

beings concerned. And we know, people do not live “by bread alone”. Asking questions such as “What is the true meaning of my life?” or “What is a good, a felicitous life?” is part of the very nature of sane human beings – and thus of development.¹⁰⁴

Material issues are, of course, important and continue to be so. But answers to questions of meaning and wellbeing transcend the economic and material sphere. Here is reason for optimism: “Man is gifted with reason; he is life being aware of itself; he has awareness of himself, of his fellow man, of his past, and of the possibilities of his future.”¹⁰⁵ Care, responsibility, respect and knowledge are part of the basic elements of the character of sane people, so are compassion and empathy. Mankind cannot live in peace and prosper without his and her spiritual and metaphysical aspirations duly considered. Communities cannot flourish without the continuous fostering their social capital. Adding a spiritual and value as well as a psychological dimension to the sustainable development discourse is not an esoteric obliquity. It makes good sense to motivate people to reflect on the difference between subjectively perceived “consumption needs” and objectively valid desiderata in line with a future we want for our own children and grand-children. Bringing a value dimension into the sustainable development discourse is likely to help putting convenient habits or pseudo-prestigious practices in perspective and thus facilitate a change of course.

This is a decisive moment in time, one we must use.

*There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.*

*William Shakespeare
Julius Caesar Act 4, scene 3, 218–224*

104 Fromm E. (1958): The Moral Responsibility of Modern Man. First published in Merrill-Palmer. Quarterly of Behavior and Development, Detroit, Vol. 5 (1958), pp. 3-14. Made available by courtesy of Dr. Rainer Funk and Karl Schlecht.

105 Fromm E. (1956): The Art of Loving. Originally published by Harper, New York 1956., p. 6; made available by courtesy of Dr. Rainer Funk and Karl Schlecht. See also Fromm E. (1976): To Have or To be? Harper and Row, New York.