

Goals!

Sustainable

development

goals

By Carol Posthumus

Earlier this year the 6th World Sustainability Forum (WSF 2017) was held in Cape Town with key local and international speakers including world-leading economist Professor Jeffrey Sachs, senior United Nations (UN) advisor and director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

The WSF is an annual sustainability conference which addresses research in a range of areas related to sustainable development and sustainability globally. This was the first WSF to take place on the African continent. Discussions at the 2017 conference were driven by the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) adopted as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the UN in September 2015. At the event Jeff and Sonia Sachs received the first World Sustainability Award.

Highly pertinent to South Africa with our ongoing education challenges and crises, the speakers highlighted the need for universities' need to take the lead in solving the greatest challenges the world faces today, particularly in Africa.

They said they need to do this

not only through education – teaching the next generation to think critically and creatively to find sustainable solutions – but also through research that cuts across a range of disciplines. To ensure these solutions are implemented, universities need to partner with the private sector and with government.

SDGs a lifeline and our moonshot

Achieving the SDGs “is the moonshot for our generation,” said Sachs. “Like the moonshot [moon landing] of the 1960s, these are tough, bold and achievable objectives.”

“This is a nasty, tough world we live in, and our world agrees on very little. So when 193 governments agree on something: that is important. And when they agree on something as important

as sustainable development that is really something for us to grab hold of – that is a lifeline.”

Addressing the Forum was Foundation Global Values Alliance’s president Professor Klaus Leisinger who spoke on the topic of “Towards a new understanding of the Game, Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.” We met Professor Leisinger in Cape Town recently, where he was attending the San Code of Ethics launch. In addition to heading up the Alliance, Leisinger is Professor of Sociology at the University of Basel, where he pursues research and teaches a wide range of topics related to international development and health policy as well as business ethics, corporate responsibility, and business and human rights.

Leisinger says: “I have worked for nearly 40 years in the areas sustainable development, corporate responsibilities and business ethics – so has my partner, Karin Schmitt. We have built up a global network of like-minded people and continue

to network to make the world a better place. Such a mission keeps responsible people busy as long as they are able to contribute towards this noble objective.

The Global Values Alliance (www.globalvaluesalliance.ch) is a non-profit foundation that helps apply ethical norms and values in everyday practice in business, politics and society.

“We assume the advocacy for the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations and for an economic ethos based on intercultural, interreligious and internationally recognized values. We focus our attention on strategic research and application partnerships with organizations and institutions at home and abroad. The TRUST project (<http://trust-project.eu>) is such a partnership,” elaborates Leisinger.

Big changes, New Game

It appears humanity needs a new approach – a changing of the game - to solve the challenges. It is startling to consider the wholly

unsustainable scenarios if all of us on earth consumed and wasted in the same fashion as the richest one billion!

Right now there are 7.4 billion people on earth. Essentially, the changing of the game refers to the “development game” – the old paradigm of development, as is well-known, was too resource-expensive, too energy-consuming, environmentally too destructive and resulted in unsustainable production and consumption.

Says Leisinger: “If all 7.4 billion people started producing, consuming and creating waste in the same way as the richest 1 billion does, we would need three earths – but we have only one and no Plan B. From a sustainable development perspective, all countries are “developing” countries and all have common but differentiated responsibilities.”

What does this mean further?

“For the “rich”, this means changed consumption attitudes resulting in using less non-renewable resources, consuming less energy, and emitting less waste. There is hope that new technologies will help to stretch the time for the transformation of product and consumption patterns, but eventually “quality of life” will have to be less material-intensive.”

It seems all of us – especially those with the most in terms of material wealth – will need to be less materialistic and consume less in resources and energy.

We can all implement this new game thinking on sustainable development in our everyday life.

Leisinger believes that “every human being should be sensitive and reflect where she and he can make a difference in the sense of voluntary simplicity and sophisticated modesty.

“To demand that people must sacrifice their personal well-being is not a realistic idea – people will



Prof Klaus Leisinger, president of the Foundation Global Values Alliance.

just not do it.”

Naturally in the business and political realms there are incentive problems for getting people to change their ways.

He elaborates: “But there is an incentive problem: investing corporate resources today for a return in the remote future benefitting anonymous people elsewhere in the world contradicts conventional business and therefore managerial logic. The same is true in the political sphere. Inflicting short-term burdens on local electoral constituencies today for the sake of preventing future damage for people of coming generations living far away does not serve the re-election interest of local office holders – and therefore contradicts political logics.”

Spiritual dimensions

It seems, realistically, human beings need spiritual incentives or inspiration to do the right things. People do not just give up their creature comforts because they are unsustainable and they want to make a difference for future generations. In other words, rampant greed and wastage is best tempered by spiritual reflections and ideals.

“Last but not least, without allowing for a spiritual dimension in individual decision-making most of us are likely to follow a comparable logic: Putting up

with an un-alluring purchasing abstinence of items that are not necessarily needed but prestigious and therefore admired by peers in a consumer society does not trigger enthusiasm.

“The same is true for accepting uncomfortable restrictions of individual mobility. If there is no awareness of and commitment to a greater common purpose and an inner, spiritual motivation to contribute to it because it is the right thing to do, sacrificing prestigious or convenient but unsustainable habits today for a minuscule long-term benefit in the future for people living far away will not become a mass movement.

“Without spiritual, philosophical or religious reflections and considerations becoming part of individual decision-making, immediate and material interests are likely to prevail in society, economy and politics.”

Affluence lite

Leisinger counsels we should not get overwhelmed by the requirements of sustainable development – as it is possible to be – but recognise that it is a long-term process. Every bit counts!

“Sustainable development is a “marathon” not a 100m sprint – the addition of many small steps of people in different parts of society will bring about sustainability.” Having witnessed the San Codes of Ethics launch, I asked

Leisinger whether it is state-of-the-art thinking to develop and formally state Codes of Ethics. It seems imperative that values – in all sectors of society – are reflected upon.

He says: “Reflection about values – justice and fairness in an intergenerational sense, solidarity with those who have less and can carry less or respect with regard to integrity of creation – and consideration of values in daily life are a keystone for sustainable development.

“If we as a global community commit to honouring the Golden Rule (**do not do to others what you do not want to be done on yourself**) and include future generations, a lot of what is done today would no longer be done.”

Finally, any pointers as to how can we all constructively implement Sustainable Development goals in our lives? Sustainable development is the result, says Prof Leisinger, of seeing, judging and acting with regards to what is the right thing to do for all 7.4 billion citizens living on Earth.

“If we all reflect for five minutes – ‘What can I do to make the world ecologically and socially a better place’ and then start to act, there is a chance that “affluence lite” becomes a new life style that people all over the world adopt: quality instead of quantity, “slow” food instead of fast food, community service instead of excessive individualism, etc. Of course there is still hope that technological innovations will help – but then, as they are probably patented, they have to be accessible also for those who have less,” comments Leisinger. Let’s all hope and pray that “Affluence Lite” and No Poverty become our mantras for this decade, rather than full-on Greed and Power seeking!

Please refer to page 17 for the Sustainable Development Goals.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

1 NO POVERTY



2 ZERO HUNGER



3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



4 QUALITY EDUCATION



5 GENDER EQUALITY




6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



13 CLIMATE ACTION



14 LIFE BELOW WATER



15 LIFE ON LAND



16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS