

Together, we can do so much more than we ever imagined

“Let the SDG’s shine on people around you, like a star shines on its galaxy.”

Grazyna Pulawska

Imagine a world, without hunger and poverty. Where people live together in equity, and in peace. Where all conditions favor sustainable development, and all activities that do not contribute to the development our planet, are either taxed or banned. Imagine that world.

The power of imagination

Most of our conversations, both in our daily jobs and in UN-context, are about facts and figures. About policy briefings, implementation roadmaps and strategy alignment. About ways to include SDG’s in wider development policies. And we need all those conversations in order to develop our world.

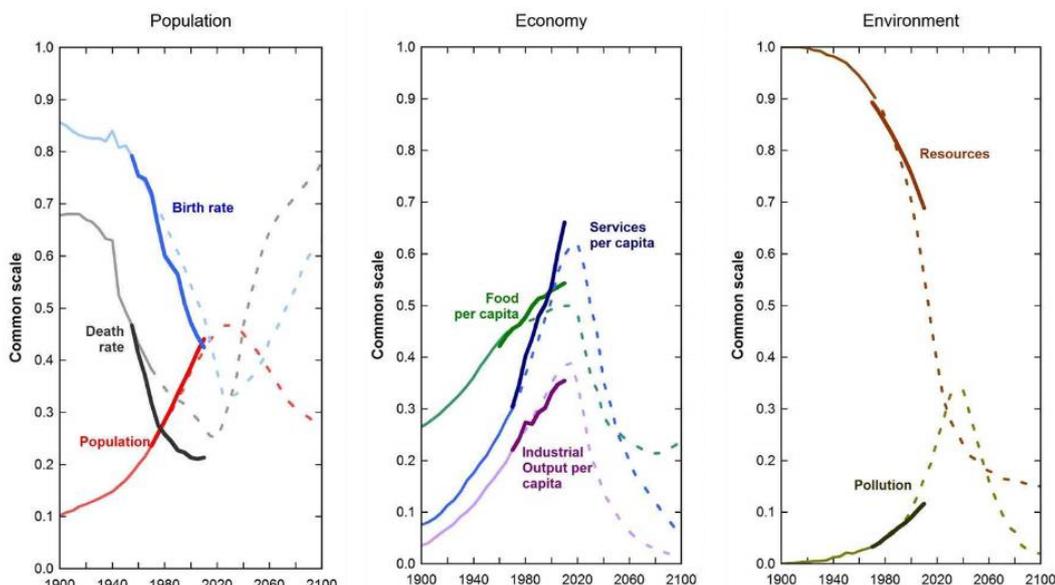
Sometimes, however, it seems like the process of policy making has become an aim in itself, instead of a means to an end. Policy making has – in some areas – lost touch with day-to-day reality. And if policies tell us “to leave no-one behind”, do we indeed work towards leaving *truly* no-one behind?

All of us work from a policy context, and of course we need policies to provide direction on what we are doing. I do however believe that some of us have forgotten how to dream. How to use the power of imagination. To be able to work towards the world we dream of, instead of a world which is shaped by the result of political compromises. If we only dare to use the power of our imagination again. And shape our conversations around that imagination.

The urgency of sustainable development

The urgency of sustainable development is ever-increasing. None of us understands the full impact and far-stretching consequences of climate change on our planet. Flooding of coastal metropolises. Structural droughts in agricultural countries. Populations, requiring to abandon their homes for ever. In 2016, an update of the *Limits to growth* report was published, showing both the 1972-predictions and the 2016-status.

We do however believe that graphs have not changed this world, and will never do so. It are insights, that arise in conversations between people, that have done so. And the more diverse the group of people in the conversation is, the more powerful the insights will be.



Prediction (dots) and data (line) of the Limits to Growth report.

Source: Graham Turner (2016), Is global collapse imminent? Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute

Out of time

In our willingness to provide each other with facts and figures on how urgently we need to take action, and in our enthusiasm on how we can share good examples with others, we forget to take the time to engage in conversation. This happened at the Forum, and this is happening in the real world. We keep talking from our own perspective, instead of taking the time to understand perspectives of others.

The urgency of sustainable development is so high, that we are already out of time. And because of this urgency, we need to force ourselves to take the time to build a common understanding.

How come our present-day decision making consists of political compromises, while the future of human life on earth is at stake? Earth will survive us, but will we survive ourselves?

To answer that last question: yes, I do believe that humanity will survive. But is this truly about *survival*? Or should it be about *improving* the world we want to live in? To make this step requires a long-term perspective, and some consideration of the lasting effects of our actions.

Include youth in decision-making

To provide this long-term perspective, it helps to include young people in decision-making. Young women. Young people from marginalized groups. Not because they are young, but because they are people. People who dream of a better world. And who are willing to fight for that better world, not held back by short-term stakes in finance or political power.

Around 70% of the world population is below 30 years of age. How can we build a world, in which all of them can live a good life? How can we make them own the SDG's? How can we structurally include them in decision-making? Because while we are talking about localizing the global goals into national contexts, we shouldn't neglect that public awareness and advocacy would help a great deal in moving people to action. Are we willing to unleash the potential of youth in achieving the SDGs?

Many examples show how the inclusion of youth in decision-making helps build a stronger approach towards sustainable development. Whether it are youth representatives inspiring political leaders at the HLPF; whether it are European students in over 40 Green Offices that help build more sustainable universities; or whether it are young people in Africa developing their communities with sustainable technologies.

Youth around the world are standing up, and are ready to help build the world all of us dream of. Include youth in decision-making. Because together, we can do so much more than we ever imagined.

