

TRANSCRIPT

Reimagining Sustainability

Elaine Fernandez:

The four big myths of sustainability covered in the last two chapters should make it clear that shifting towards more sustainable systems is no small task.

In this chapter you'll hear from Professor Jeffrey Sachs on how we can reimagine sustainability, commit to lifelong learning in this area, and shift our governance and economic systems in the right direction.

Professor Jeffrey Sachs:

At the global level, global consciousness level. We really need to understand and honour the principle that all of humanity is equal, has rights to dignity, like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says, has the aspirations for economic wellbeing, wants peace, and that this is a common feature of a common humanity. Strangely, that's hard to achieve. So my efforts at a personal level are to support the UN in its mission, to help update the UN to realities of 21st century finance, economy and technology.

To say to the major powers, no, even though you're powerful, you can't write the rules yourself. We need multilateralism. This is all a very big challenge, and it's really being challenged at this moment with war and tensions among the major powers that I find unacceptable. Given the stakes of humanity, we need a cooperative approach under the UN framework.

When it comes to the national level, my advice is look at the goals that the whole world has agreed to, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Climate Agreement, the biodiversity convention and so forth, and then ask the question, okay, what should we in Pakistan or Nigeria or China or South Africa or Russia or the United States do to achieve what we have said is important for all the world? And that comes to planning, to understanding, to setting out a framework and a pathway to understanding how national budgets should be oriented to support these goals that we've set.

And for businesses to ask the question, how can we as a business, align with the objective, for example, of creating a zero-carbon energy system by mid century? A very practical, extremely important question. A lot of this requires planning at the national level or at the company level, because companies plan a lot, or the successful ones do, and they need to

plan how to align with the world that is absolutely urgently in need of sustainable development. And one way or another, too late or on time, is going to orient in that direction.

So that is not only a mindset change, but a very operational change. And I would say in Nigeria or Pakistan or the United States, is the national government setting forward plans on how to achieve universal quality education, how to achieve universal health coverage, how to achieve the energy transformation? I'll give you a hint. The answer is not very often, but that is the job of the government. The job of government is not politicians spinning stories on a daily news cycle the job of government is creating a path to sustainable development for our societies.

The question of economic needs and wants is a long-standing discussion that goes back well over 2000 years. Because you find in the ancient wisdom, this discussion, that there's a big difference between greed, which is the desire to accumulate more and more wealth, and need, which is what we need for our wellbeing. And of course, we have material needs. We need food, we need safe water, we need shelter, we need educational opportunities, we need social protection in the event of illness. We need institutions that help, especially with an ageing population.

Now, in 1948, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, economic rights were identified. These economic rights could be considered to be these needs. The economic rights are things that are so important for human dignity and well-being that everybody should have them. And what is identified in the universal declaration are rights or needs for food, shelter, social protection, education, health care, and a standard of living compatible with human dignity. These are spelled out clearly.

Scholars and sages going back to Aristotle. The teachings of Jesus, the teachings of Bhagavad Gita, the teachings of the Quran, make this important distinction. And the great wisdom tradition say, if you just chase your wants, you'll end up very unhappy, by the way we really need to take on this point in a very deep way. Gandhi is often quoted, the world is big enough to meet everybody's needs, but not everybody's greed.

When Aristotle, more than 2300 years ago, took up the question of what will make a good society, he argued that knowledge was fundamental, that the good life doesn't come by itself. It comes through knowledge, through understanding. And he identified three kinds of knowledge that I think are very helpful for us today. Episteme was the Greek term for what we call scientific knowledge. Techne is the greek term, for what we now would call engineering or technology, understanding and ethics, which is the knowledge of what Aristotle called practical wisdom, the ability to choose properly in life. So he identified the range of knowledge that is needed, scientific, technical and ethical knowledge.

It's a good starting point for us. When the sustainable development goals were adopted, the governments wisely noted that in order to achieve sustainable development, everybody needed to understand the basis of sustainable development. So they put in a target, target

4.7 under SDG 4. SDG 4 is quality education for all. Target 4.7 is to understand the challenges of sustainable development.



So it's back to Aristotle's three divisions of knowledge – understand the science of climate change, for example; understand the basics of the technological transformation to a zero carbon energy system. And understand the practical wisdom that we need for cooperation within our societies and across societies in order to cooperate properly to achieve these goals. Now target 4.7 says everybody needs to be a learner. Of course children in school, but what about the rest of us adults?

Lifelong learning, because we need a lot of tooling and retooling. The technological advances are coming so fast that the world's really being reshaped faster than we can even understand how it's being reshaped. And these technologies often get out of control.

Elaine Fernandez:

Professor Sachs has made it clear that our multilateral and national governance systems should be leveraged to achieve socioeconomic wellbeing, peace and dignity. After all, it is the government's responsibility to develop and implement plans and frameworks to achieve sustainable development, such as universal education, health coverage and an energy transformation. He also spoke to the need for businesses to align with sustainability objectives, which will require mindset, behavioural and operational shifts within companies. Importantly, these changes can be made a reality by each of us, which is why he stressed the importance of shifting away from a culture of overconsumption.

As Professor Sachs concluded, it is incumbent on each of us to continue learning about the issues that impact the world, our countries, our organisations and our communities if we are to successfully redesign our societies for the betterment of people and planet. Now that you've completed this core module, you can explore the rest of the series on deconstructing and reimagining sustainability.