

Achieving the UN-2030 Sustainable Development Goals through the ‘One World, One Health’ Concept

(Extending ‘Community of Life’ Chances in an Era of Complexity, Uncertainty and Instability)

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Preamble

The recently agreed UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), present exciting and meaningful opportunities to explore approaches for implementing these on a global scale. However, while the UN Agenda has been carefully crafted, much work remains in terms of translating broad vision and goals into practice on the ground and in finding ways or systems not only of 'doing things better' -the traditional approach to change - but also -and arguably much more important - of learning to do 'better things,' engaging in transformative - often 'out of the box' – holistic thinking and interventions. This article provides a starting point in this direction as it calls for a better understanding of the many social, economic, ecological and geopolitical hurdles we face, the global goals to which nations are asked to aspire and their relationship to an interdependent and interconnected planet, which must support the health and well-being of all species - humans, animals, plants – ensuring their survival in an increasingly threatened environment. The task is formidable and our success depends on our capacity to effectively address what some have called an historic 'ingenuity gap,' whereby our present-day solutions fall far short of the myriad complex problems we face. In the long term our best chance for doing so may be by nurturing imaginative or innovative thinking throughout the student learning experience to raise awareness about the world we inhabit and how we can make it better, thereby fundamentally reflecting the ‘One World, One Health’ mindset in order to safeguard - through collaborative and enabling action - the sustainability of the planet and the future for this and future generations.

The UN-2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

While most will understandably not recall Friday, 25 September, 2015 as an extraordinary day, it may in due course be seen as highly significant for the future of the planet and people. On that date the 193-Member United Nations General Assembly ‘formally adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, along with a set of bold new Global Goals, which Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon hailed as a universal, integrated and transformative vision for a better world’ (1).



Credit: United Nations, Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, 2015

The Goals build on the historic Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), “which in September 2000, rallied the world around a common 15-year agenda to tackle the indignity of poverty.” In his opening address to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on 25 September, the UN Secretary-General hailed the new framework as an agenda for shared prosperity, peace and partnership as it “It conveys the urgency of climate action,” and “is rooted in gender equality and respect for the rights of all.” Resonating with one of the main aims of this brief article, the UNGA members also vowed to ensure “the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources.”

Global Challenges in the 21st Century

However, while the UN September summit was filled with goodwill and optimism, the challenges facing the planet continue to be enormous though not insurmountable given the strength of the human spirit and creative enterprise (3). They call for global responses that address intractable issues relating, among others, to conflicts and terrorism, prompted largely by territorial ambitions and violent jihadism; population growth and urbanization made especially vulnerable by climate change and fragile ecosystems; renewed nationalism coupled by social intolerances; and continuing economic uncertainties, many precipitated by geopolitical and economic forces, including on-going self-interests and corruption across a wide range of human activity (4).

The UN 17 global goals accompanied by 169 targets and presently 231 indicators to “wipe out poverty, fight inequality and tackle climate change over the next 15 years” represent a major step forward. According to Johan Rockström, director of the Stockholm Resilience Centre, the SDGs “may be the biggest decision in history... a much more complex agenda, which requires humans to reconnect with their planet”(5).

One of the main hurdles facing global decision-makers is harmonising the vast imbalances and inequities that continue to characterize much of the world today. As one example, most of the people live in the South and East -over 5.7 billion, but 90 per cent + of the funding for global health (now over US \$7.5 trillion annually) is allocated in the North and West supporting around 1.5 billion people (3).

In terms of trying to achieve WHO ambitions for Universal Health Coverage, the statistical disparities are equally breathtaking. While leading western nations annually spend as much as US \$900.00 plus per capita, Myanmar (Burma), as one specific example, with a population of over 60 million allocates only about US \$2.00 per person per year!(3).

The impact of these imbalances is felt by everyone but perhaps most acutely by children and young adults. Far too many have been and are presently being displaced or caught in conflict and war zones and suffer the most – physically and emotionally. With more than 13,000 children killed already (overall more than 250,000 people), Syria is a cruel example of a total ‘social breakdown’ as intolerable as any in preceding wars (6). Reflected starkly in the UNICEF report, ‘Committing to Child Survival: A Promise Renewed Progress Report 2015’ (7), we are reminded that while “Globally, major progress has been made in improving child survival the toll of under-five deaths over the past two decades is staggering: between 1990 and 2013, 223 million children worldwide died before their fifth birthday.”

Moreover, according to UNESCO’s 2015 Global Monitoring Report, *Education For All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges* (8), there are still “58 million children out of school globally. Of these children, 25 million are in the rural, low-income regions.” It is now estimated that “More than a million migrants and refugees crossed into Europe in 2015” (9) most in fear and desperate for basic human needs and likely with many more to come, a situation in 2016 that is at once unfathomable as it is intolerable.

Progressing the UN -2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through the ‘One World ,One Health’ Concept

The complex and growing global challenges necessitate “renewed global partnerships” (1, 2). To gain the support of civil society top priorities for the UN SDGs are twofold: first, planners need to

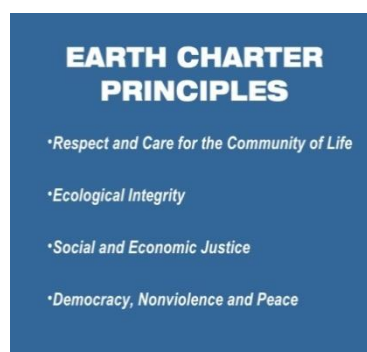
reinforce and urgently communicate a compelling *humanitarian* justification for the SDGs to convince the public that the goals are critical for the survival of our species. In many cases it is about giving people a reason to live, founded on a basic and increasingly critical truth that “social ties save lives and their absence is toxic” (10). In this regard, we need, as the Secretary-General strongly advocates, “to look beyond national boundaries and short-term interests and act in solidarity for the long-term”(1), a lesson from history that should not go unnoticed in Europe and in many other parts of the world.

And, secondly, while a forthcoming World Humanitarian Summit (11), spearheaded by the UN Secretary-General, is warranted and timely, its main *raison d'être* “to protect humanity” is not enough. We must be equally concerned with protecting all other species upon which our survival as human beings depends. As argued in my book, *Global Population Health and Well-Being in the 21st Century: Towards New Paradigms, Policy and Practice* (3), achieving long-term continuance as a species requires a major shift in our worldview. Fundamentally, we must move beyond human egocentrism and replace our present mindset that “the world is a place made especially for humans and a place without limits,” to one that ensures the world is compatible not only “with our needs as human beings” but also recognize “an outer world that is compatible with the needs of our ecosystem” (12).

This re-orientation in our thinking is certainly not new and “is as old as culture” going back more than 2,500 years to Hippocrates who “urged physicians to consider where their patients lived, the foods they ate and waters they drank, their lifestyles, and the seasons of the year” (13). In the 20th century Canadian epidemiologist/veterinarian Professor David Waltner-Toews, concluded that

Much of this integrative thinking was pushed into the background in the mid-twentieth century as many leaders and scholars were lured by the vision that infectious disease had been conquered and that through basic scientific understanding, advanced technology and unlimited electrical power, humanity had somehow been freed from the bonds of nature. In the late 20th century, this vision was clearly demonstrated to be an illusion.

Leading up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, UNESCO commendably focused on four core principles for a sustainable future outlined in the Earth Charter (14). In the intervening years these have regrettably not been fully translated into wide-scale global adoption nor practice as huge disparities remain with regard to social justice, democracy and violence. Ecological integrity across the globe continues to be compromised evidenced by extreme weather as are the “respect and the care for the community of life.”



Credit: International Earth Charter Organization, 2008.

Marco Lambertini, director general of World Wildlife Fund International (WWF), observes in the *Living Planet 2015* (15) that the status quo is unsustainable:

...in less than two human generations, population sizes of vertebrate species have dropped by half. These are the living forms that constitute the fabric of the ecosystems which sustain life on Earth—and the barometer of what we are doing to our own planet, our only home. We ignore their decline at our peril, and should cause us to ‘stop and think.’

He challenges global leaders to respond to three main questions: “What kind of future are we heading toward?” “What kind of future do we want?” and, “Can we justify eroding our natural capital and allocating nature’s resources so inequitably?” His concerns go beyond the UN -2030 global goals and demand finding, first and foremost, a lasting ‘unity around a common cause,’ and, echo Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s global SDG partnership priorities (1). For the WWF Director General the time has come for the public, private and civil society sectors to be proactive and to “pull together in a bold and coordinated effort” and for “Heads of state” to think globally; businesses and consumers, “to stop behaving as if live in a limitless world” (15) -- before facing inevitable and potentially disastrous consequences.

The One Health (and Well-Being) Movement and the World We Need

The One Health movement - spearheaded by the One Health Commission (16) and the One Health Initiative (17) - that recognizes ‘the inter-dependencies in the health (and well-being) of people, other animals and the environment in which we live’ unquestionably provides the essence for the enduring “unity” the WWF Director General is seeking. Given the many ideological mindsets that appear to divide us in the 21st century, ensuring the longevity of the planet and people is arguably the *only* dimension upon which we might build a sustainable future. Doing so will increasingly demand going beyond personal gain and self-interests and place much greater emphasis on collaboration rather than competition, on finding peaceful means to deal with crises and ensuring that ethical responsibilities are rooted in interdependencies and the sanctity of life (3). Our global mission is nothing less, as UNESCO Director-General Irena Bokova articulated several years ago, than evolving “a new humanism that reconciles the global and the local, and teaches us anew how to build the world” while simultaneously facing “our greatest common challenges, particularly respect for the environment” (18, 3).

In terms of implementing the 17 SDGs, and as illustrated below, applying ‘One World, One Health’ values and principles seems essential regardless of the global goal we are trying to achieve. There is little room for doubt that the next fifteen years will provide decision-makers at all levels a unique window of opportunity to shape a worldwide consciousness about what truly matters in terms of the sustainability of the planet and people. As things stand, the SDGs coupled with One Health values and principles, espoused in the UN direction-setting report, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*(2), may offer us the best chance yet to “free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet,” while balancing ‘the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.’”



With an eye on the future, policymakers are particularly urged to listen to the ‘children’s voices,’ reinforced at the Children’s Summit on the World’s Sustainable Development Goals (19). Among their aspirations, their pleas for equality, health, security, and recognizing the devastating effects of social

intolerances- child labor, child marriage and child trafficking - cannot be ignored. For the children and the younger generation as a whole education and working together are the keys to the future as they must surely be for us all.

The One Health Commission (16) together with the One Health Initiative (17) along with other partners are presently working on a project proposal that would support educators to enable learners from K-12 and Beyond to a gain better understanding of and appreciation for the values and principles underpinning the One Health concept and approach. The initiative is provisionally called *Transforming K-12 and Beyond through One Health Education: Toward the 'World We Need*. Themes such as our fragile planet, prevention, global interdependencies and threats (e.g. climate change), cultural diversity and respect for others, and care for the community of life (14), underpinned by collaborative and critical thinking, could raise the learners' awareness of the need for ecological sustainability and their crucial role within it (3).

A final word: It is becoming clear that the 20th century fixation on individualism and “mechanistic understanding of the world and ourselves” (12) has to change . Current events painfully demonstrate on a daily basis that we must find more creative and constructive ways to engage with each other and the planet and evolve a much more fluid or organic and altruistic approach to decision-making across all human activity, drawing on a future consciousness to inform the present. As the World Economic Forum cautions, we must be careful: “We’re at the crossroads for humanity. It could be our best century but it could be our worst because our capabilities of spreading risk are greater than ever before” (20). Implications for refashioning our institutions and systems and “transforming our current attitudes to virtually all aspects of society and the economy,” posited , for instance, by Development Alternatives in India (21), and that also may hold lessons for other nations, are considerable and likely inescapable, according to Dr Alexander Likhotal, president of Green Cross International (22).

Altering our way of thinking, as Pope Francis urges, that “regards the world as a means rather than an end” (23) may be one of the most significant and profound steps we need to take, and not without recent precedent. The Paris Climate Agreement at the end of 2015 and reduction in emissions attested to what can be done when 196 countries decide to unite against a common global threat. The same holds true for many other aspects that sustain life on the planet. To these ends, getting young minds involved with the global picture, such as the UN-2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the One World, One Health concept and approach , is surely the best path for securing the health and well-being of our planet and people. Failure to do so cannot be an option.

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