

# **Week 2: Addressing Development Challenges in a Changing World**

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**Which global trends and uncertainties will influence how environmental sustainability is framed in the international development agenda over the next 10-30 years?**

## **1. Failure to Provide Democratic Space for People's Participation and Decision-Making**

Failure to provide democratic space at local, national and international level for people's participation in decision-making on environmental sustainability is directly and profoundly impacting the realization of environmental sustainability. Instead, decision-making power and voice are ceded to transnational corporations, international financial institutions (IFIs), and often powerful country elites to influence and set policy decisions in favor of natural resource consumption, extraction and management. For example:

- a. People and communities are increasingly criminalized if they protest against oil, gas and mining projects, and people lack effective access to remedy injustice or to defend their case against the impact of unsustainable development that degrades the environment, adversely impacts health, destroys vital ecosystems and violates human rights.
- b. National environmental protection laws are changed and loopholes are available to provide advantage to corporations and to ignore environmental sustainability; for example, the Harper Government's recent gutting of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, the Fisheries Act, and the Navigable Waters Protection Act.
- c. Communities and indigenous peoples are frequently not consulted; Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is all too often ignored before oil, gas and mining companies are granted concessions by the state to extract and mine on community and indigenous lands
- d. Governments, corporations, and IFIs write the trade rules that commodify nature and natural resources without consideration of the impact of the trade rules on human rights, vital ecosystems, and the well-being of peoples and environment.

## **2. Failure to Address Root Cause Analysis of Environmental Unsustainability and Poverty**

National and global political policy and decision-makers fail to systematically address the root, systemic and institutional causes that create and enable environmental unsustainability and poverty. Instead, market-based solutions, such as carbon markets, are offered to rectify environmental sustainability issues.

One must ask: Is this failure due to corporate pressure and lobbying in favor of gaining the economic benefit of "natural capital assets" and methods of production?

### **3. Failure to Respect Planetary Boundaries**

In economic and sustainable development planning, governments have largely ignored the urgent need to operate within the nine planetary boundaries and safe space needed for the well-being, sustainability, and the viability of the community of life. Three of the nine planetary boundaries: climate change, biodiversity loss and nitrogen emissions have already exceeded their limits.<sup>i</sup> The Stockholm Resilience Center and scientists are calling on governments and the United Nations for a “ framework based on planetary boundaries that define the safe operating space for humanity with respect to the Earth system and are associated with the planet’s biophysical subsystems or processes.”<sup>ii</sup>

### **4. Failure to enact human and ecological impact studies in Foreign Direct Investment Decision Making Processes**

Governments focus on securing foreign direct investment (FDI) without giving equal due diligence to the human rights impact and the environmental sustainability impact of the FDI. The short-term financial and economic gain of the FDI is the primary focus; the long term sustainability of the environment and the quality of life and livelihoods of community members are largely ignored. Moreover, governments fail to scrutinize the collective impact of granting oil, gas and mining concessions on the future sustainability of the environment and on vital ecosystems.

### **5. Neoliberal and Free Market Rules at the Expense of Environmental Sustainability**

Neoliberal and free market economics and models of production and consumption govern decision-making on the use of environment in the global economy. In this global economic model, nature is put into the market as commodity and the extraction of natural resources to promote economic growth prevails without due consideration of its human or ecological cost.

The long-term negative impact of largely unregulated natural resource extraction is not considered: i.e., its impact on environment, on climate, on community health, or on the fair distribution and access to essential resources of water, soil and air.

### **Conclusion**

If we do not give back to the people the power to participate in decision-making, if we do not enact policies that are rights-based and in harmony with nature, if we do not *stop* the abuse of power by corporate rule, and if States continue to fail in their obligation to protect their people and the environment, the planet will die and we along with it.

Is this the future we want? Who will have the courage and the political will globally to reverse this course?

**What new elements and considerations must be incorporated into the Post-2015 Agenda in order to achieve environmental sustainability and to adequately capture the essence of the challenges to the evolving social, cultural, political and economic development of the planet?**

**1. Focus on Root Cause Analysis**

A new paradigm must focus on root cause analysis in order to adequately address environmental unsustainability and poverty. For example, such analysis must scrutinize unsustainable consumption and production; the destructive impact of free market economics and unsustainable growth models of development; corporate rule of economic and production systems; and, corruption, etc. Moreover, existing environment-friendly laws and guidelines at State and Local level must be fully implemented and easily monitored for their positive impact on sustainable development.

**2. Adopt a New Ecological and Human Rights Economic Paradigm**

A fundamental shift must take place from a free market, growth model of development to an ecological economic model of sustainable development. The global economic system must begin serving the wellbeing of human and environmental communities rather than having the environment and vital ecosystems serve – to their extinction – the current global neoliberal economic model of growth and development.

The new paradigm must recognize the essential ingredient in any post-2015 development agenda: human rights acting in harmony with nature and within the nine planetary boundaries and safe space created for the future sustainability of the community of life.

**3. Assess the Collective Impact**

States and the international community must fully comprehend the collective impact on future environmental sustainability when oil, gas and mineral contracts are signed by a State. The FDI and economic benefit to governments and corporations must not take priority over the future sustainability of environment, ecosystem and local community. The social impact of and the economic benefit to the local community needs to be highlighted in the consultation process prior to any signing of contracts.

**4. Recognize Planetary Boundaries**

The Post-2015 Development Agenda must recognize and ground the development agenda on the nine planetary boundaries as identified by the Stockholm Resilience Centre 2009. Sarah Cornell, Coordinator of the planetary boundaries research at the Stockholm Resilience Centre admonishes that a "stable planet is necessary for human prosperity in the world; a post-2015 development agenda should consider its relationship to a safe operating space defined by global sustainability criteria such as the science-based planetary boundaries.<sup>iii</sup>"

**5. Address Corporate Rule and Give Power Back to Communities and Peoples**

Governments are obliged to address corporate rule and power over environment sustainability. Corporations must be held accountable by governments to legally binding obligations to protect

and not consume or destroy our vital ecosystems and environment, especially at the expense of the community and future generations. The homes, lands and property of people must be legally protected against any possible negative impacts of extractive industries.

## **6. Recognize that local Communities and Indigenous Peoples are the Solution and Rights Holders for the Post-2015 Agenda**

Governments and the United Nations must engage in a process of genuine consultation with Local Communities/Indigenous peoples to recognize needs and to listen to possible solutions before concluding that the only viable answers are from corporations and before the State signs a contract with multinational corporations for natural resource extraction.

## **7. Recognize the Dangers of the Promotion of Natural Resource Extraction as an Enabler of Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication**

Governments must refrain from promoting natural resource extraction as a primarily sustainable development strategy. Rather, the role of natural resource extraction in sustainable development initiatives is conditioned by the fact that it is inherently unsustainable. In the Post 2015 Development Agenda, a natural resource extraction framework must be based on a human rights framework as the best foundation for sustainable, just and limited extractive practice. Furthermore, where natural resource extraction occurs, governments must make a commitment that the benefits of resource extraction will go toward the development needs of local communities and that they will never be at the cost of vital ecosystems, and the needs of future generations who are guaranteed their basic right to water, health food, livelihood, development.

## **8. Recognize the Rights of Mother Earth**

The Post-2015 Development Agenda can no longer see Earth as a commodity and driver of economic growth. Nature must not be considered the property of the global economic system. Rather, post-2015, the Rights of Mother Earth as reflected in the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth, Cochabamba 2010 must be recognized for the good of humanity and for the good of the planet.

The Post-2015 Development Agenda must recognize that all human and ecological life is interdependent and interrelated. Human rights are dependent upon the realization of the rights of Mother Earth. This new path of sustainable development must recognize Mother Earth's right to exist, to create, to rejuvenate, to be healthy, to be nourished, and not to be degraded, exhausted, grabbed and polluted.

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<sup>i</sup> Human Prosperity Requires Global Sustainability- a contribution to the Post -2015 agenda and the development of Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2013-01-09, from the Stockholm Resilience Center

<sup>ii</sup> Rockström, J., Steffen, W., Noone, K., et al. (2009). Planetary boundaries: exploring the safe operating space for humanity. Ecology and Society 14, 32. <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art32/main.html> ( cited by above report)

<sup>iii</sup> Human Prosperity Requires Global Sustainability- a contribution to the Post -2015 agenda and the development of Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2013-01-09, from the Stockholm Resilience Center