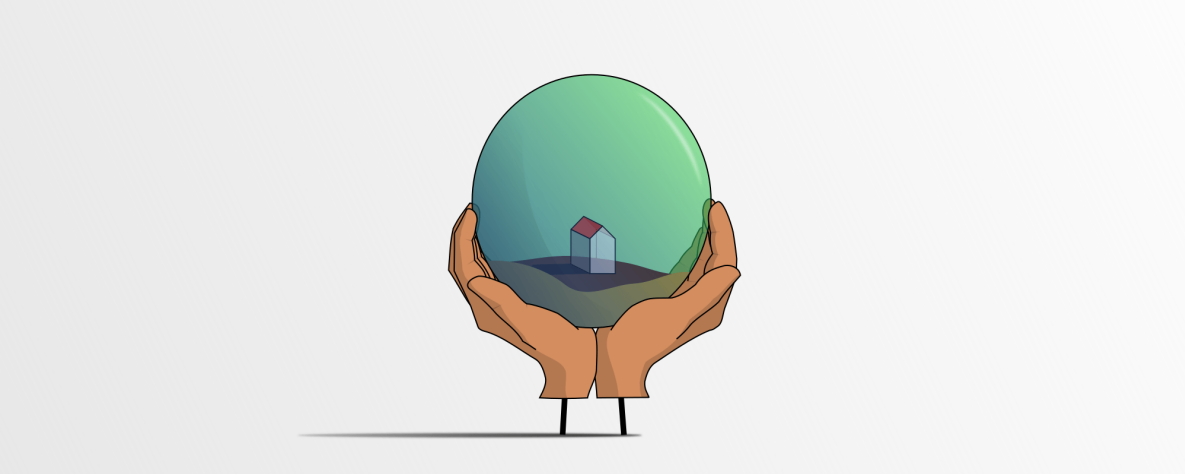
THE 2030 AGENDA AS A BLUEPRINT

Covid-crisis: a testcase to deal with broader sustainability deficiencies

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As the text suggests, the current situation requires strategies of resilience instead of strategies of efectivity, and it is vital to carry out transformations in the main societal systems taking their interconnectivity into consideration. Illustration: "Hands", by Fernando Prado

When societies around the world were faced with the Covid-19 pandemic and the crisis that followed, starting in Spring 2020, many of them approached the issue exactly the way that is needed to manage any major sustainability crisis, based on GSDR2019. The politics of maintaining the business as usual and the emphasis on single goals were left aside and rational thinking with concrete action was placed in the front. This meant dealing simultaneously all issues at stake through close interaction between financing, governance, citizens and STI, and using their levers in an integrated way.

Setting the alarm: the world where we are now living

Despite the facts that this immediate reaction did not last very long, that both the pandemic, as well as the crisis are still ongoing and that the process and outputs have had highly varying success in different parts of the world, the framework offered a great opportunity for the world to see that human civilization is able to act together and push the development on sustainable tracks even in short time, if so needed and wanted.

The actions lead indirectly to issues such as greenhouse gases, pollution and ecosystem health and generally positive results concerning the environment were witnessed (Shakil et al. 2020). Although they have been encouraging, only repetitive cuts of negative environmental impacts on a yearly basis are seen to be needed for long-lasting effects. Some ecosystem-related issues have had direct positive impacts on human health when people especially in the wealthy countries spend more time in nature than before (Pouso et al. 2020, heraproject.com).

> The situation of insecurity in the whole world requires resilience strategies instead of efectivity strategies: this is what sustainable development can offer, but only if it is applied through transformations in the key societal systems

On the contrary to the ecological impacts, social and economic impacts have mainly been devastating all over the world. The poverty development has turned back to rise after more than 10 years of decrease (UNDP 2020), which is strongly caused by the loss of working hours within and between countries (ILO 2020). Although the pandemic hit first the wealthy, developed countries, the impacts of the crisis itself are going to be worst and last longest particularly in the developing, poor countries. As pointed out by the OECD (2020), the support from wealthy countries to support the transformation towards sustainable development in the poor countries is now needed the most, but due to the economic crisis, especially the loss of tax incomes, the ODA financing is to experience higher drop than after the 2008 economic crisis. The insecure situation in the world to all segments of societies from business to individuals, from communities to countries and regions, calls for resilience strategies instead of effectiveness strategies. This is what sustainable development can offer but only if it is applied through transformations in the key societal systems (GSDR2019).

Divided world: normal or new normal – efficiency or resilience strategies

The insecurity raises from experiences that everyday life or strategic plan is under threat due to negative societal impacts. They arise from the combination of growing inequalities, biodiversity loss, climate change or waste problem. These negative impacts include food security, energy provision, health, wellbeing and opportunities in life, problems arising from urbanisation, the inability of global governance to manage environmental global commons, and the way the economic system is functioning in the world. Covid-crisis has now been added to the root-causes of negative societal impacts.

The pandemic has been named as a disease of the anthropocene, the present geological era of planet Earth, which is characterized by humans dominating the entire system of the planet. The pandemic takes us to the basics of issues that are core in sustainable

development: highly dense and large human populations, global flows of people, goods, money and information, and disturbed ecosystems.

The people, businesses and nations in the unsecure situations experience that their entire lives or business models are being affected by either the challenges themselves, the actions taken to deal with the challenges, or the outcomes from today´s unsustainability materializing in the future – I refer now to the youth.

On the other hand, there are winners of present societies who oppose the necessary sustainability transformations as their success. Their high revenues rely on today´s situation and moving towards sustainable development-mode will put their revenues and business models on risk – here I refer to oil business, some effectiveness prioritizing multinational companies, but also to some countries and individuals (GSDR2019). Policies, societal pressure or green competitive companies that are targeted towards sustainability have not been welcome from their perspective.

The covid-crisis has brought a new twist on people, businesses and politicians: there is a divide between those believing and investing into strategies for getting gradually back to the state before covid-pandemics, and those who see that opportunities lie in a new normal which builds on resilience, shorter and just production and consumption chains and on an altered society-nature interaction.

The unperfect world: concrete paths instead of single solutions

The Agenda2030 with its 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) is a fantastic political compass to show the direction all countries are committed to. It is very tempting to pick single SDGs and work on them in one´s own sphere, solving problems linked with them, one by one. But the world is a messy, highly connected place. Once you change something, it affects several other issues, either positively or negatively, now or later, and often create new problems to be solved. This includes also the actions.

Therefore, when implementing the SDGs the compass needs to be shown to the key societal systems. The key societal systems, food, economy, energy, urbanization, wellbeing and opportunities and managing the environmental commons, are where the wellbeing is created for our societies. Today, these systems function in an unsustainable way.

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Because of this, sustainability transformations are necessary. The compass extends,

however, its arrow far beyond country borders. For example, the food system builds on long chains or nets of actors which grow, pack, transport, put together, sell, cook, deliver and warm, eat and throw away the food. Today, we should not necessarily talk about food systems but rather of nutrition systems. What people eat all over the world is in most cases not nutritious and heathy for human bodies, leading to high numbers of undernourishment and even higher numbers of obesity, in all countries of the world.

The present food systems are neither healthy for the environment nor supportive for people at stake: those working for the industry and those living in the areas where unsustainable food system destroys their life and livelihoods. Most commonly, the end part of the food chain – dealers and users of food – are on the other side of the planet than the nature and people living in the place of production and with the problems arising from it: in the turmoil of land use change, often in poor working conditions and low salaries. It has been estimated that in many developed countries, majority of the negative impacts on biodiversity materialize through impacts outside national territory (Yu et al. 2013, Sandström et al. 2017). These extra costs, externalities, which could be costs from ensuring biodiversity or saveguarding good working circumstances during production in the country of production or on the way when the product is transported to the user country, have not typically been included in the price of the consumed products which has made the prices low for the consumer.

It is crucial to transform the systems such as food system rather than putting focus on agriculture, climate change or biodiversity. The system is the context where something is happening, it draws together all the challenges in a functional, real way and on the right geographical level and can be tackled with optimal scenario building, modeling and experimenting new management models.

Resilience-based sustainable development: the future business model?

The populist leaders have been offering simple solutions for people to help the losers towards a better life and better future and the winners with policies which help them continue the same way as before. The covid-crisis revealed that the promises of some of the world leaders in solving individual problems, returning to something that existed before the pandemic or into the past and becoming nationalistic are not beneficial for anyone in the new normal.

> The crisis has elucidated that a more holistic approach is needed, such as the one provided by Agenda2030, which ensures that wellbeing is produced within ecologically sustainable and just conditions

Many world leaders are presently losing their supporters and riots are witnessed due to unsatisfying leaderships lined with unfilled promises and more so, with perverse outcomes caused by their behavior such as putting economy before people by neglecting actions against the covid-19 and the crisis linked with it. Thus, the crisis has elucidated that instead of shortcut solutions, a more holistic approach such as that offered by the Agenda2030, is needed, which transforms key societal systems and ensures that wellbeing is produced within ecologically sustainable and just conditions. This includes building thriving, sustainable businesses which offer moderate revenues, offer jobs with reasonable salaries and produce goods and services necessary for human wellbeing and their opportunities in life.

In the systems transformations, the new normal-featuring companies are looking for alternative business models to replace those which are built around efficiency and intensively centralized production models. Especially the centralized model, where raw material, people, expertise, money and goods are transported – flying in the air in real terms – between different parts of the world has been questioned during the covid-crisis when production and consumption chains have been broken due to closure of entire societies linked with the epidemic, hitting the workers and money flows from emigrants but more so due to the quarantine restrictions set everywhere in the world.

When considering a sustainable business model, the emphasis shifts from efficiency to resilience. This bases on a more scattered model, where consumption and production meet geographically better than today and where externalities are included due to environmental or social impacts in the prices of the products. The risk is, though that if the externalities are required to be added to the production costs in the developing countries, let us take as an example the Republic of Congo, the mining in developed countries such as Scandinavian countries and Canada, become appealing due to their stabile political situation. When looking at the situation holistically, a more sustainable approach would be to develop in Congo socio-ecologically responsible business activities which request the country to co-develop with them socially and environmentally just society and business. This includes developing strong management to end illegal action, corruption as well as social and environmental challenges. This would allow a more balanced production in different parts of the world instead of directing most of the production to one region.

Global governance is a slowly turning ship, but businesses can do rapid moves

In sustainability transformations, the changes in global flows have surely been one of the most crucial affecting how systems evolve. Let me give you this example: plant-based meat for hamburgers and stakes is gaining markets in the US on a fast pace. There are companies competing for the market shares, but the biggest looser is the meat industry. The covid-pandemic brought up the discussions on the vulnerability of human-animal linkages, especially when considering global meat markets. Although the key drivers seem to be health and nutrition security, sustainability as the broader framework is also profiting from this. Meat as food source has been shown to have major multiple negative impacts on

global sustainability, as beef production causes greenhouse gases, uses land in highly inefficient way, has large scale negative impacts on water and biodiversity and threatens human health as there is a clear link between red meat and colon cancer (Eat-Lancet 2019).

Co-funding and co-creation

Curbing the covid-epidemic, surviving through the socio-economic crisis and enhancing sustainable development should go hand in hand also when financing is in question. I started by describing the mismatch between growing needs for funding to drive sustainable development in the developing countries and the decreasing ability or willingness to invest into developing world from developed countries. This is a clear problem. However, now it is the time to see, that every coin put into solving the Covid-crisis should simultaneously drive actions for sustainability transformations. Although the tax money has decreased in many countries due to the present situation, illogical figures can be sought from statistics. For example, it has been calculated that the need to fund developing countries to sustainable paths is 2,5 trillion US$/year until 2030 (UNDP). On the other hand, world total subsidies for fossil fuels in 2018 (IMF) was 400 billion (direct)/ 5.3 trillion (indirect)US $. It is important that the EU economic stimulus funding and the Green Deal are taking forward in a coherent way, also to put political pressure for member coutries to follow.

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Even though the world is seriously reconsidering the need of the long global flows, it is to be remembered that the flows are not only negative. Globally, we share the most pressing problems such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, unequality and growing amounts of waste and they can be combatted only through international collaboration. We also share, though these flows, knowledge and expertise, ideas and innovations. This is a flavour of humanity and a prerequisite for global sustainable development.

To be able to discuss in a fair way the interconnectedness of countries in societal systems and to negotiate global management models for the global environmental commons, science capacity is needed all over the world. This is not the case at present. There is a huge gap between developed and developing countries. Only together can the world develop universal sustainability science which advises planning, decisions and budgeting with universal scientific thinking and local scientific analyses, to pull and push the world into paths which take humanity towards sustainable development and a better future for all.

Ways to move forward: recommendations

- Covid-crisis has had positive impacts on climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution and similar impacts are needed on a yearly basis, by using all possible levers from govenrance, business, individuals and communities, and science and technology.

- Global poverty is increasing again. The poor and developing countries in the world need major financial support to implement the Agenda2030 and the need has been multiplied due to Covid-crisis.

- Sustainable development bases on resilience thinking and offers an alternative to efficiency thinking which has become risky during the Covid-crisis, for businesses, but also countries and individuals.

- Transforming our societal systems from unsustainable to sustainable paths we are still able to turn the vicious development in the world into virtuous. It is time to act. The Future is Now.

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