



GLOBAL COOPERATION NEWSLETTER
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Featured article: Limits to growth - and limits to inequality



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Forty years ago the Club of Rome rang a wake-up call: continuing with “business as usual” will lead the world to a tipping point around the middle of the twenty-first century – actually, forty years from now. Some recent evidence based on research shows that we have been on exactly that trajectory since 1972.

The Club was not the first to talk about the limits to growth – in terms of either population or consumption. Since the times of Plato and his “magic number”-based calculations of the optimal population size of the city-state (population, of course, meant the “free men” of the times), there has been much thinking about the limits to growth along two dimensions: the possibilities for economic growth and the optimal distribution. Concerning growth, two schools of thought have developed: the technology optimists and the technology pessimists. The optimists believe either in limitless resources or in technology’s capacity for development at a sufficiently rapid rate to overcome any resource squeeze. And at the other end of the axis, there are the technology pessimists, who are concerned with the limits set by non-renewable natural resources on material production and the tendency to get the diminishing returns. On the other axis, the distributional axis, the dialogue goes on between the egalitarians, who see equal distribution as either ethically fair or societally functional, and those who believe that inequality is necessary for economic growth and/or each individual is entitled to get what he or she deserves. On the extreme side of the spectrum of the latter group, Social Darwinism seems to be on the rise again, particularly among some richer youth.

The neoliberals are typical technology optimists with their simple logic that free competition may create inequality but is beneficial for economic growth and technological innovation. Wealth will eventually trickle down and the “rich have the duty to be rich”. The contemporary world is very

much the result of such an ideology, which has dominated world economic thinking since Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. The "Taxed Enough Already" or TEA-party is another example of such an attitude.

The dogmatic socialists believed that an egalitarian "socialist paradise" would "turn deserts into orchards", as Friedrich Engels famously put it once. We now know that the exact opposite has resulted when one forcefully promotes the equality of outcomes, rather than the equality of opportunities.

Those who do not believe in limitless material resources and consumption have also had two sources of inspiration on both sides of the spectrum. Thomas Malthus said that "the poor do not have right to enjoy the abundant table of nature unless charity keeps them alive". When population (read consumption) grows faster than resources, the solution — not equitable at all -- is that the rich maintain their consumption levels and the poor pay the price and lose disproportionately. Indeed, a not very uncommon policy option during recessions.

The "Green" movement tends to come up with a more egalitarian solution: scarcity itself must be distributed fairly. There is, however, a scent of optimism in that thinking: "more from less" is a common phrase today, repeated by many, even some who do not belong to "green" parties.

None of the above four world views is well based in evidence. Being ideologies, each of them has shaped and continues to shape politics and social policy-making. From some time down in history thinkers started to base their policy prescriptions on social sciences such as economics, ascribing to it some truths believed to be self-evident. Consider the consequences of world-wide ageing and the options for the care of the growing aged population. Policy choices might be already "under the line"; as numbers grow but resources are not growing at the same rate, the policy choices are tied to finding ways to get more from less or to letting inequality grow. The result is obvious: only those who can pay get enough care.

Back to the scenario put forward by the Club of Rome, at the 40th anniversary one of the original writers of the 1972 Report, Jorgen Randers, published a new Framework for Action called "2052 – A Global Forecast for the Next Forty Years" (<http://www.clubofrome.org/?p=2118>). The 1972 study, he claims, was not a doomsday prophecy, neither is this one. It is again a wake-up call: the course of spaceship Earth must be changed towards "a sustainable, equitable and happier world". Climate change is seen as one of the key features shaping our future. The landing might not be soft anymore, given the prevalent trends, but a crash landing can and should be avoided.

Six anchors for the new course are presented: (1) Sustainability and equity must be reflected in all economic decisions; (2) Economic decisions must reflect the value of natural and social capital; (3) A more equitable distribution of income both within and between countries is necessary; (4) Access to decent work is most important; (5) The limits and value of ecological systems should be recognized; (6) Stronger governance at all levels is vital.

The Report makes four key recommendations:

1. Reduce population growth even further in the rich world, where the ecological footprint per person is many times bigger than that in poorer countries;
2. Reduce the ecological footprint of the rich world (better technology and more sustainable production/consumption patterns);
3. The rich world must invest in and pay for low-carbon technologies in the poor world;
4. Global governance must be strengthened in order to manage development from a long-term perspective.

We can conclude that it is quite clear that a world based on overconsumption and gross inequalities within and between nations cannot be considered a sustainable world. We find unfounded both neoliberal over-optimism and the fundamentalist belief in the natural benevolence of the “invisible hand” of the market that is supposed to drop enough crumbs of wealth from the tables of the rich to the poor when scarcities set in.

The total net flows of capital in the world go the wrong way now, i.e. from the poor to the rich world. Redistribution on a global scale is a necessity through transforming the way in which the world works. The social values of human dignity, equity, solidarity, inclusion and security must be elevated above the current misguided fundamentalism. A well-known Finnish social activist, Dr. Ilkka Taipale, once said that policy makers have two basic options, “social policy or chaos”. On the global level there is a need for implementing systemic global social policy to replace the marginal development aid.

Sustainable development dialogues often invoke distant “future generations”. Today’s children are the first existing “future generation” that has rights as specified by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The right to development should be interpreted as a right to sustainable development as well. Today’s children will be at the peak of their life cycles in 2052. Whether they are healthy and wealthy or poor and ill then depends on decisions made by adults now.

The opinions expressed in the article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the ICSW Management Committee.

The climate summit in Doha, Qatar

The annual climate negotiations, with the involvement of world leaders at the 18th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), got under way on 26 November in Doha, Qatar. The two-week meeting will chart the next phases of the international response to climate change, with participants attempting to deliver on a number of specific outcomes. Among the immediate challenges are ensuring the implementation of the second Kyoto Protocol commitment by January 1, 2013 and the elaboration of the specific modalities of the Green Climate Fund, which has been negotiated already and will be situated in South Korea, even though some questions remain regarding its *modus operandi* and its financing. Another important objective on the participants’ plate is setting out a work plan towards a new international agreement that will replace the Kyoto Protocol by 2015.

Climate change is a complex phenomenon that, although environmental in nature, has consequences for all spheres of existence on our planet. It either impacts on — or is impacted by — such global issues as poverty, economic development, population dynamics, sustainable development and resource management. It is not surprising, then, that solutions come from all disciplines and fields of research and development. At the very heart of the response to climate change, however, lies the need to reduce emissions. In 2010, governments agreed that emissions need to be reduced, so that global temperature increases can be limited to less than 2 degrees Celsius.

By and large the participants will cover national and international efforts underway in the areas of adaptation, mitigation, development and the transfer of technologies, and climate finance. The proposed solutions envision substantial flexibility in approaches. The adaptation process, for example, refers not only to changes in processes, practices, and structures aimed at moderating potential damage, but is also geared to studying benefits that may arise as a result of some new opportunities brought on by climate change.

For more details please go to : <http://unfccc.int/focus/technology/items/7000.php>

ICSW and its partners establish Global Agenda Observatory.

The three partner organizations -- International Association of Schools of Social Work, International Council on Social Welfare, and International Federation of Social Workers, came together in a meeting in Paris in mid-November 2012 to consider specific actions in the context of the implementation of the tripartite Global Agenda adopted earlier this year. For more details, see: <http://www.globalsocialagenda.org>

The two days of negotiations resulted in the affirmation of the vision of the Global Agenda, which makes explicit the contribution of social work and social development practice in building a 'society for all', in which every individual has an active role to play within a fair and just world. In order to gather evidence about the activities of social workers, educators and social development practitioners who support the implementation of the Global Agenda and in order to give visibility and credibility to their contributions and promote further action, it was decided to establish the Global Agenda Observatory.

This new entity is structured around the four themes of The Global Agenda, starting with promoting social and economic equalities. The themes to be covered in subsequent years include: promoting the dignity and worth of peoples, working toward environmental sustainability and strengthening recognition of the importance of human relationships. A focus on ensuring an appropriate environment for practice and education will be maintained throughout. The Global Agenda Observatory is conceived as a mechanism for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Agenda Commitments.

The Observatory will consist of networks or consortia composed of institutions of higher education and professional/practice-based organizations that jointly research, analyze, synthesize and report on Agenda activities. It involves a process that will evolve over time. It aspires to establish a strong, credible monitoring mechanism within ten years. The Global Agenda Observatory will be established at the local, national, regional and international levels, working through the existing structures and workplans, and taking into consideration the existing priorities of each organization.

In the case of the ICSW, one of the objectives of ICSW-affiliated organizations is to monitor implementation of the Social Protection Floor Initiative at the national and regional levels, as that is closely linked to the fight against existing social and economic inequalities — the first of the four commitments of the Global Agenda.

In the light of the preparations for the 2014 joint world conference in Melbourne, Australia, and starting in November 2012, regional partnership bodies have been invited to create regional networks or consortiums to implement the call for national observatory arrangements. The timeline is ambitious: each national network or consortium will complete a draft national report by July 2013. The Global Agenda Coordinating Group will complete the global analysis and finalize the global report by March 2014, just in time for the joint world conference in Melbourne in July 2014, where that report will be launched.

Useful resources and links.

Thanks to the determined efforts of governments and civil society, success in the fight against HIV/AIDS is in sight. The **UNAIDS World AIDS Day Report for 2012** reveals significant progress in preventing and treating HIV/AIDS over the past two years. The number of people accessing life-saving treatment has risen by 60 per cent, and new infections have fallen by half in 25 countries – 13 of them in sub-Saharan Africa. AIDS-related deaths have dropped by a quarter since 2005.

For further information :

<http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/multimediacentre/photos/unaidsphotogalleries/2012/20121120wadreportlaunch>

The role of parliaments in conflict prevention, reconciliation and peace building will be the main focus of this year's Annual Parliamentary Hearing at UN Headquarters in New York. The event, which brings together parliamentarians, high-level UN officials, experts and member States, will take place on 6-7 December, as the 67th session of the General Assembly continues. Participants will identify ways in which parliaments can strengthen UN field missions, its Peace building Commission and the Human Rights Council, in addition to examining the role of legislators in conflict mediation, transitional justice, and truth and reconciliation. The conclusions are aimed at making international decision-making more transparent and effective.

For further information: <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/unqa12.htm>

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