



Fluid Thoughts



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The promise of a new global agenda

Global agendas have all had their successes and failures. The latter may have been dominant, but it is difficult to ignore such feats as all UN countries joining hands to effectively ban ozone-depleting substances, in particular CFCs, and actively reversing the ozone layer depletion. More recently, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in spite of having an extended lag phase has managed to dominate the global development agenda. The progress with the MDGs, across the world, including those regions that have fallen substantially short of the targets, like Sub-Saharan Africa are encouraging nevertheless. The close links between the progress toward the MDG targets and other global targets like reducing hunger are both admirable and logical as folk all around the world are organising their national and regional strategies to engage the complexity of sustainable development.

Multilateral Environmental Agreements



Figure 1. The global negotiated environment within the UN system can largely be divided into the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and the Socio-economic agreements. Many argue that based on the hierarchy of representation, the latter enjoy much more mainstream support and implementation. There is even an argument that the MDGs, while being prolific for its time enjoyed the high levels of support because of its predominant alignment with the socio-economic agenda. This is ironic since the very purpose of Agenda 21 was to effect the convergence. The promise of the SDGs is that they are much more inclusive of both the socio-economic as well as the global environmental ambitions of Mankind in the paradigm of its nomenclature – Sustainable Development.

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The even greater promise of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) lie on three pillars. The pillars are not in the environmental domain, and in many ways are a tribute to those campaigners that have managed to mainstream sustainable development. The first is that the current draft of the proposed SDGs much more effectively embrace the three pillars of sustainable development than its predecessor. Its ability to marry in each target the need for shifts in the global economic growth model, the international social development agenda, and both on a sound and proactive ecologically sensitive manner must be applauded.

Further encouragement is garnered by the fact that in 2015 as opposed to 2000, we are more acutely aware of the mainstreaming of the Earth’s resources in our global economy risk registers. The placement of ‘water’ as the number one risk in the World Economic Forum 2015 Risk Register is compelling, as is the reclassification of the risk from an ‘environmental’ one as in previous years to a ‘societal’ one, as expressed in the 2015 risk register.

The third pillar of optimism comes from further afield. While the run-up to the UNFCCC Paris COP later this year is currently wrapped in a cloak of very cautious optimism at best, the events in the Real Economy may prove to be the unlikely vanguard for a guarantee of a 2 degree increased temperature future (this is the optimistic Carbon friendly scenario of a maximum 2 degree average temperature increase for a warmer Earth but within

the CO₂ budget of 1000Gt). This third pillar is a combination of the changes in the global fossil fuel dependency map and the rise of “Clean Energy” solutions as a market winner. The latter is personified, in part, by the dethroning of Jack Ma as China’s richest man by Li Hejun, the chairman of Hanergy Holdings. Hanergy is described as a producer of clean energy solutions and technologies which has seen unbelievable growth last year. This is not only an indicator of increased global demands for clean energy, but also that China has clean energy as a major growth sector in its economy.

The former is more complex. We have witnessed recently major changes in global fossil fuel dependence from traditional sources. These are driven by very different forces including major substitution of fossil fuels with gas (primarily shale gas) in the United States, the fossil fuel price wars as a tool in the new Cold War (with Russia and Venezuela as targets), and the possibility of a completely new Middle East Roadmap with the impending nuclear deal with Iran.

While these processes are not converged, and their complexity dictates that many scenarios are possible, one very important scenario is a change in the global energy picture moving toward higher investment and use of renewable energy options. All this away from the current heavily fossil fuel dependent global economy, led perhaps ironically by players that have been generally regarded as Climate Change laggards in the UNFCCC negotiations.

Global agendas have generally not been the vehicles for step changes in human development. It is however also true that the nature of a truly multi-polar world like the one we currently have also does not have an historic precedent. This may well be precisely why it may work.

A summary of the current draft of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

1. End poverty in all its forms, everywhere.
2. End hunger and achieve food security and improved nutrition while promoting sustainable agriculture.
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being.
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning.
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
6. Ensure availability and sustainability of water and sanitation for all.
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation.
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.
11. Make cities and human settlements safe, resilient and sustainable.
12. Promote sustainable consumptions and production patterns.
13. Urgent actions to combat Climate Change and its impacts.
14. Conserve and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt land degradation and biodiversity loss.
16. Peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development.
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Source: Technical report by the Bureau of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) on the process of the development of an indicator framework for the goals and targets of the post-2015 development agenda



Diary

Residuals and biosolids: June 7-10

The Water Environment Federation, together with the International Water Association, is hosting a conference on Residuals and Biosolids in Washington, USA. Visit: www.residualsbiosolids-WEFIWA.org

Aquatic science: June 28 to 2 July

The Southern African Society of Aquatic Scientists will be holding its annual conference at the Champagne Sports Resort, in the Drakensberg, with the theme ‘Water resource research, policy and people’. Enquiries: Petrie Vogel (Conference Secretariat); Tel: +27 (0)12 346-0687; Fax: +27 (0)12 346-2929; Email: petrie@savetcon.co.za.

Large dams: July 13-20

The 25th Congress of the International Commission on Large Dams will take place in Stavanger, Norway. Visit: www.icoldnorway2015.org

World water: August 23-28

The annual World Water Week will take place in Stockholm, Sweden, as usual. Visit: www.worldwaterweek.org

Social science: September 13-16

The World Social Science Forum will be held in Durban. A broad range of topics will be discussed under the theme of ‘transforming global relations for a just world’. Visit: www.ssf2015.org

Large dams: September 1-3

The South African National Committee on Large Dams (SANCOLD) is hosting its annual conference in Cape Town with the theme ‘Dam safety, maintenance and rehabilitation of dams in southern Africa’. Apart from the technical presentations, the conference also includes the SANCOLD Young Engineer’s Forum as well as technical site visits to the Clanwilliam and Bulshoek dams, as well as the Table Mountain Dams. Enquiries: Nom Buthelezi (Conference Secretariat) at Tel: +27 (0)11 676-3417; Email: secretariat@sancold2015.org.za or Visit: www.sancold.org.za

Groundwater: September 21-23

The 14th Groundwater Conference will be held at Muldersdrift with the theme ‘From theory to action’. This conference aims to highlight the issue of improving the uptake of existing knowledge

and experiences of groundwater in South Africa to assist in solving environmental and societal problems. Email: info@gwd.org.za or Visit: www.gwd.org.za

Municipal engineering: October 28-30

The annual conference of the Institute of Municipal Engineering in Southern Africa will take place at the Grand West Hotel and Casino, in Cape Town. Visit: www.imesa.org.za

Young Water Professionals: November 16-18

The theme for the 4th YWP South African biennial conference, which will be held in Pretoria, is ‘Stop talking, start doing’. Conference topics include domestic and municipal water and sanitation; drinking water and bulk water supply; industrial and mine-water; environment water; and capacity building and training. Enquiries: Jaco Seaman (Conference organiser), Tel: +27 (0)11 805-3537; Email: events@wisa.org.za; Visit: www.ywp-wa.org/