Road to Agenda 2030

CHAPTER 1

Alessi, Pia Lovengreen

1. Road to Agenda 2030

Introduction

1.1 We the peoples. The post-war design
A new "World Order"
Human Rights
A long and hard path

1.2 Economic Development and International cooperation - worlds apart
Through transformations and conflicts, economic collaboration survived
Capitalism and Global Economic Institutions
The Western Economies
The Eastern block
Decolonisation: steps to self-rule and finances needed for economic development
Inequality reduced and increased at the same time
Economic cooperation in a multilateral world

1.3 Sustainability – the environmental challenge
The origins of the concept of sustainability

1.4 Globalisation – interconnection and interdependence
Global Governance

1.5 Millennium – the new beginning
Millennium Goals
Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction

The world is becoming increasingly globalised and the political, corporate, and individual decisions taken in one part of the world often have a direct and/or indirect impact on the quality of the lives of people and environments in other parts of the world. Impacts can be both positive and negative: positive effects include rise of new industries and jobs while negative effects include environmental pollution and lack of decent working conditions and rights. Many decisions regarding the economic development of a given nation or region also influence the human rights of the people and the environment, the two main pillars of the Agenda 2030 and of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this introductory chapter we explore how and why the concept of sustainable development came about and why it is today the focus of the Agenda 2030.

To understand how the concept of sustainable development came about it is useful to put it into a historical context. First, we look at the call for increased protection of human rights after the Second World War (WW2), then how geopolitics and capitalism influenced the economic development after WW2 and finally how environmental protection became increasingly central in the development paradigm. While we still have far to go to find the equilibrium between social equity, economic growth and environmental protection, it is important to understand the evolution and interplay of these three concepts to make sure we take the right path to reach the goals of the Agenda 2030 on time.

1.1 We the peoples. The post-war grand design.

During WW2 (1939 – 1945), 71 million people died with an estimated 50 million of those being civilians. The extent of the destruction, genocide, hunger, and displacement of people resulting from WW2 had never been seen before and horrified the world. In reaction to this devastation came calls from across the globe for punishment of the perpetrators of these horrific crimes, for abolishing war and establishing peace and cooperation among countries, and for human rights standards to be established to protect citizens from abuses by their governments in the future.

A new "World Order"

To meet these demands, the United Nations (UN) came into being as an inter-governmental organisation, with the purpose of saving future generations from the devastation of international conflict.
On 25 April 1945, representatives of 50 nations, invited by the four main allied powers (the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and China, then joined by France), assembled in San Francisco, US, and signed the United Nations Charter, the preamble of which reads: "We the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person … and for these ends to practice tolerance and live together in peace … have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims.[1]"
The UN officially came into existence six months later, on 24 October 1945, when the Charter had been ratified by a majority of the founding members. Maintaining peace and security as well as promoting human rights were the top priorities.

Human Rights

Human rights had a long history in many countries pre-dating 1945. The first written statement concerning limitations to the arbitrary powers of a sovereign are observed in the Magna Carta, agreed to by King John of England on 15 June 1215, stating that "No freeman shall be taken or imprisoned … except by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land[2]". They were enunciated in the Declaration of the Rights of

---

[1] United Nations Charter: Preamble https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/preamble
[2] Magna Carta https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/magna-carta

Man and of the Citizen and voted by the French National Constituent Assembly in 1789[3]. They were developed into 10 amendments to the Constitution of the United States in 1797-98 to be regrouped into the Bill of Rights. But never had these rights been established on behalf of all the people living in the world, and now, after the horrific crimes perpetrated during WW2, a solemn proclamation was felt as a duty.

The Charter of the UN established the Human Rights Commission, which, under the chairmanship of Eleanor Roosevelt, drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration was drafted by representatives of all regions and religions of the world and was, and continues to be, the most universal human rights document in existence. It was adopted on 10 December 1948. From that day on, malicious acts by a government on its citizens became a matter of legitimate international legal concern, not just a domestic matter[4]. Trials have been conducted both before and after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, most notably the Nuremberg trials in 1945-46, all contributing to the building of international jurisprudence in matters of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and wars of aggression. Furthermore, human rights treaties and instruments have been adopted since 1945, further expanding the body of international law to protect vulnerable people: the conventions on genocide (1948), racial discrimination (1965), discrimination of women (1979) and rights of the child (1989). The UN Human Rights Council is charged with promoting and protecting human rights around the world by addressing human rights violations and responding to human rights emergencies.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is based upon the individualistic ideology of the Western world, and centres around rights which are enforceable by legal means. Such an individualistic ideology may differ somewhat from the focus in certain non-Western cultures where priority is given to the natural hierarchy of the family or the community, the tribe or caste, and "where it is the duty of the individual in the community to live according to the rite or the style of life ascribed to his status[5]". Yet, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, based upon individual rights, may still be relevant in non-Western societies, as it is less about the specificities of the singular rights and more about the fact that all states must fulfil certain minimal physical and spiritual needs of human beings, and are accountable to the international community, now by law, for doing so. Herein lies the universality of the Declaration of Human Rights[6].

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, it has been adopted by, or influenced, most national constitutions. However, ratifying a declaration does not always equate to those rights, or certain minimal physical and spiritual needs, being met and protected in practice.

A long and hard path

Today, the UN with its 193 Government members, continues to play an important role in guiding our collective future. It strives to maintain peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations, achieve international cooperation, and be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations.

Regarding human rights, significant progress has been made since 1948 in many countries (not all): think of voting rights, gender equality, racial equality and gay rights. Civil rights movements have, both before and after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, spearheaded the call for the protection of both individual and civil rights and liberties and continue to do so: Black Lives Matter, LBGTQ and the "me too" movements, as well as Friday for Future, Extinction Rebellion and many more.

---

[3] Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, https://www.elysee.fr/en/french-presidency/the-declaration-of-the-rights-of-man-and-of-the-citizen

[4] In order to be able to enforce the declaration, two Covenants were adopted in 1976, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which focuses on such issues as the right to life, freedom of speech, religion, and voting; and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which focuses on such issues as food, education, health, and shelter. Together with the Universal Declaration, they are commonly referred to as the International Bill of Human Rights.

[5] Human Rights: A Non-Western Viewpoint, S. PRAKASH SINHA, Archives for Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy
Vol. 67, No. 1 (1981), pp. 76-91, Franz Steiner Verlag

[6] Human Rights: A Non-Western Viewpoint, S. PRAKASH SINHA, Archives for Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy
Vol. 67, No. 1 (1981), pp. 76-91, Franz Steiner Verlag

While a lot has been achieved over the past 75 years, no country can claim to meet all the human rights yet: some are not far off while others have a long way to go still. There is a broad variety among countries, and there is still a long road ahead before we can claim all rights are universally respected both in national legislation and in practice.

There may be hard choices to make among priorities. As stated in Article 29, limitations to the exercise of these rights may only be determined by law, and "solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society"[7].

In fact, in many countries, public order has been and is considered to require restrictions on individual rights. Reference to what is determined "by law" implies reference to a legal system, and there is a variety of legal systems. The goal of allowing large parts of the population to have an exit from poverty has been considered as requiring limitations to individual freedom in many cases.

While the thirty fundamental articles of the human rights declaration form the basis for a democratic society, in the basic meaning of a society oriented to the interests of all and not of the few, the types of institutions that should accompany a country towards achieving this goal is an issue that allows for different solutions. Every country in the world has its unique setup of institutions. It is notable that, even in the presence of such different itineraries, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its guiding principles are present within all nation states. The Human Rights therefore represent ultimate goals by universal consensus, although the understanding of them and the timing for their implementation differ.

Progress is a never finished job. Societies are ever evolving and what constitutes a violation today may have been common practice some years back, while common practice today may not be acceptable in the future. Much progress has indeed been achieved in many countries since the end of WW2. Although progress is discontinuous and sometimes in some places we see steps backwards, in general human right standards continue to increase, and this is a good thing.

We must continue to stand up for those individuals and groups that do not yet benefit from the protection of human rights and make sure the next generations continue to build on the efforts of past generations towards achieving them.

1.2 Economic Development and International cooperation - worlds apart

Through transformations and conflicts, economic collaboration survived

The conclusion of World War II gave rise to an extended era of geopolitical tensions spanning from 1945 to the late 1980s, between the United States, the Soviet Union, and their respective allies. This era is widely known as the Cold War.

Along the same period most colonised countries gained independence from the rule of colonial powers that had been established in the previous centuries, a phenomenon commonly referred to as the decolonisation process.

The world was therefore commonly known to be split into "three worlds": the Western liberal world (First), the Eastern communist world (Second), and the Developing countries, often with a history of violent exploitative colonization, mostly in the southern hemisphere (Third).

The Cold War dominated the relations between the Western liberal and the Eastern communist worlds, with partial involvement of countries of the Third world with the one or with the other, while an effort to set up an alliance of "non-aligned" developing countries achieved some results.

---

[7] The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

This division was profound in the political, the cultural, the military and the economic sides of social life, yet it did not prevent a gradual build-up of commercial exchanges and of institutions dealing with and facilitating economic cooperation.

Capitalism and Global Economic Institutions

While capitalism can be traced as far back as medieval Europe, it was only really with the British industrial revolution in the 18th century that capitalism as we know it today took off. Technological breakthroughs such as mass-transport and electricity allowed for industrial capitalism to flourish relying on a combination of wage labour, access to cheap natural resources primarily from their colonies[8], production and competitive markets, which all together strived to supply an ever-increasing demand for a vast variety of specialised goods.

Similar to the concept of democracy, capitalism also lacks a singular, definitive model. Nevertheless, all forms of capitalism are rooted in the fundamental concept of utilising financial investment to generate additional wealth (capital). This capital can encompass various assets with monetary value, including properties (land, buildings, tools, machinery, or stored goods), human skills and capabilities (referred to as human capital), or market shares (referred to as financial capital). Competition is key to the capitalist model, and those that manage to drive down costs of production furthest stand to gain a larger share of the market and thus to make more profit: the main measurable goal of capitalism.

At the outset of capitalism in England there was little state regulation of the markets which allowed for swift growth based on low wages and no labour rights – also called free market or laissez faire or economic liberalism. By mid-20th century labour movements had gained ground which led to the founding of the modern welfare state, providing free healthcare and education to all, and thus improving the living conditions of many.

While the causes and motivations for WW1 and WW2 are many and highly debatable, the financial burden and economic impacts were enormous for the counties directly involved in the war, and they also were significant on countries on the side-line as they lost important trade partners.

To address the economic loss caused by the world wars, a number of global economic institutions and instruments were put in place in the immediate post-war years, under initiative of the US and Great Britain, built on the seminal notion that increased global trade based on the principles of capitalism would boost economic growth and development for all.

Coordination of trade and finance was based on the Agreement established in July 1944, well before the end of WW2, during a conference of all the 44 Allied nations held in the Bretton Woods resort, New Hampshire, USA. The so-called Bretton Woods System of institutions was successively joined by other nations.

The favourable economic conditions established after WW2, resulted in over 20 years of both economic growth, also referred to as "the golden age of capitalism". Markets, including financial markets, were gradually subjected to regulation to guarantee labour rights, consumer safety, freedom of entry to new competitors, and respect of the environment.

The golden age came to an end in the 1970s because of soaring fuel prices and international competition from cheap labour costs in third countries and increasingly productive machines, which led to mass outsourcing and loss of traditional jobs, inflation and global economic recession. The economic "stagnation" of the 1970s was followed by a wave of neo-liberalism. With Margaret Thatcher (Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (UK) 1979-1990) in the UK at the lead, neo-liberalism supported increased privatisation, de-regulation, tax-cuts, and less spending in the social domain. This new capitalist model spread from the UK and from the US to most of the world, facilitated by increased globalisation, and reduced state and labour-movement intervention, and allowed the economy to recuperate some growth,

---

[8] Cotton, lumber, iron, tobacco, sugar etc. extracted and produced from colonies through slave labour

however often at the expense of the masses in the given country, with reduced welfare and increased income inequality.

While the new Global economic model provided great opportunities for many, the playing field was unequal, and this had significant long-term effects on vast amounts of people as well as on the planet. It is worth looking at how the situation differed around the world.

The Western Economies

At the end of WW2, the immediate challenge in most war ridden Western economies was to deal with an unprecedented economic crisis. Since the economic Global Depression of the 1930s had been, according to most historians, a major contributing factor to the breakout of WW2, the Western allies were determined to avoid another depression by pursuing economic cooperation.

To support the war-torn Western European countries in their economic recovery and to prevent Communist Soviet Union from extending its rule over Europe, apart from activating the Bretton Woods Institutions, the US designed a financial aid package known as the Marshall Plan (officially the European Recovery Program, ERP) in 1948 which was key in reconstructing the European economies[9].

New collaborative initiatives were also adopted within Europe. Remembering that a conflict between Germany and France over the border regions rich in coal and iron ore had played a role in unleashing both World Wars, on 9th May 1950 the French foreign minister Robert Schuman proposed to establish the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), as a means to promote regional integration that would make war "not merely unthinkable but materially impossible"[10] [11]. The Community institutions were granted their own powers, and as such the ECSC was the first international organisation to be based on the principles of supranationalism[12].

In 1957 two more European Communities were set up, one for cooperation in atomic (nuclear) research and energy, the other for general economic cooperation. The three Communities have since evolved into what is now the European Union (EU), with membership increasing from the six founders (Belgium, France, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, and West Germany) to the present 27 member states. Not only has peace been assured among its members, but the EU is today the world's largest single market, implementing a free movement of goods, capital, services and labour, and an important promoter of peaceful agreements and cooperative development.

Since Capitalism strives to maximize profit, operations will naturally tend to migrate towards locations with lower labour costs, ensuring that the end product remains as competitive as possible in global markets. As a result, all western economies suffered some level of displacement of jobs and certain industries in the 1970s as newly industrialised countries emerged offering cheaper solutions. In some cases, workers were able to be re-skilled for new jobs, however this transformation left many unemployed. The 1973 oil crisis, combined with mass-unemployment and high inflation, led to economic recession and stock market crash, which was followed by the neo-liberal era of capitalism.

Altogether, the liberal international economic system that developed after WW2 facilitated international and regional trade. Cooperation in the Western capitalist system, European integration and post-war recovery of Japan led to one of the greatest economic expansions in world history from 1948-1973. This growth persisted throughout the century although at a slower rate and not without some bumps on the road.

---

[9] History, https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/marshall-plan-1
[10] EU Consilium, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/70-schuman-declaration/
[11] European Union, https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_en
[12] Bóka, Éva. (2012), The European idea of a supranational union of peace. Society and Economy. 34. p. 387-397.

The Eastern block

The Soviet Union incurred substantial human and economic losses during World War II. Following the war, it swiftly rebounded on both economic and political fronts, positioning itself as a global power. This resurgence was largely attributed to a forced rapid industrialisation strategy, spearheaded by Joseph Stalin through comprehensive state control. This approach involved an increasingly centralised, militarised, secretive, and punitive institutional rule which allowed a backlog of unexploited economic potential to be effectively exploited.

By 1948 the average Soviet income had climbed back to pre-war levels[13], and continued to increase for the next two decades. After the death of Stalin 1953, the new leader Nikita Khrushchev enabled a de-Stalinisation campaign[14], a series of political reforms marking a clear break with Stalin's oppressive regime and attempting to balance increasing liberal demands from the younger generations. Communist rule survived for a while, collapsed in the satellite countries[15] in 1989, and in the Soviet Union in 1991.

The new Russian Federation made a turn toward a market economy and opened its domestic markets to foreign trade and investment, implemented rounds of privatisation and obtained loans from the IMF. The transition proved difficult, and most of the Russian population saw their living standards drop rather than increase as expected, while a few super-rich oligarchs emerged. After 2000, a steady increase in the annual GDP has allowed many Russians to climb out of poverty, toward constituting a growing middle class. In 2012 Russia joined the WTO.

Many European countries who had been satellites of the Soviet Union have since joined the EU.

Decolonisation: steps to self-rule and finances needed for economic development

The starting point for colonised countries was very different, since sound economic development first and foremost requires stable governance and access to finances.

While the process of decolonisation had begun before WW2 through the League of Nations, in an attempt to prepare colonised countries for self-rule, it was only after WW2 that a drive to self-determination, affirmed in the Charter of the UN, became reality in most colonies.

Colonisation had produced economic gains on the side of the coloniser, more than often, through brutal exploitation of natural resources and subjugation of labour in the colonised countries. In addition, colonisation had often resulted in arbitrary boundaries and borders where none had existed before, dividing ethnic and linguistic groups and natural features, laying the foundation for the creation of numerous states lacking geographical, linguistic, ethnic, or political affinity.

There was no single process of decolonisation. Each colonised country had its unique history of exploitation, geographical delimitation, and oppressive external rule, often with severe political, economic, and social implications. As a result, for some the process of independence was achieved in a relatively peaceful and orderly manner while in other cases it was the result of long and painful revolutions, and for many it was somewhere in-between the two. Economic growth of many new states was slow, and many were ruled by dictators or military groups for decades. Some rulers were dedicated to the public good, others were more interested in personal power and wealth gains. Independence for many countries resulted in long periods of internal conflicts among ethnic groups.

To ensure economic and social development it is important not only to have stable governance but also to have access to adequate finance needed to ignite economic growth. This, in turn, requires capital and inevitably some debt. Bilateral loans (between two countries) and multinational grants and loans did make credit available to developing countries by making loans easier to obtain and cheaper to pay back. However, often such loans came with unrealistic rules and conditions (conditionality) which resulted in the

---

[13] Mark Harrison, 2010, The Soviet Union after 1945: Economic Recovery and Political Repression, University of Warwick
[14] Robert C. Tucker, (1957) The Politics of Soviet De-Stalinization, World Politics. Vol. 9, No. 4, pp. 550-578, Cambridge University Press
[15] A satellite country is formally independent but under heavy political, economic and military influence or control from another country.

piling up of external debt which has only further contributed to making the economies of many developing countries even more fragile.

Tragically, in many cases the grants and loans were not spent on projects that benefitted the populations at large as they were meant to do, but rather ended up in the pockets of corrupt government officials or used to pay back old debt. As a result, lack of investments in healthcare, education and infrastructure exacerbated conditions of poverty and resulted in continued high rates of malnutrition, illiteracy, and child mortality, making it impossible to escape the poverty trap.

Furthermore, during the 1970s, income growth degenerated in many Western countries, resulting in inflation. Central banks fought inflation by raising interest rates which damaged indebted companies, banks, and nation states, as they consequently had to pay a higher price for their loans, and was particularly disastrous for weak debtors, as many developing nations were.

The global financial institutions, trying to maintain conditionality in presence of debt that had become unsustainable, worsened the position of weak states, and forced them to cut needed social expenditure. In many cases debt had to be written off eventually, while social unrest fed political instability.

Despite facing multiple obstacles to economic development, closer contact and collaboration with developed countries implied importing their capitalist models of consumption and production as well as a globalised culture. Ethnic knowledge, culture and modes of consumption that had been passed down for generations, techniques that had been developed locally according to local needs and resources, were displaced, even when they could be maintained and fruitfully adapted. While more abundant food supplies help in combating famine, health conditions and traditional values are often damaged by sudden substitution of traditional local food, knowledge, and culture with the globalised homogeneous version.

Sub-Saharan Africa is the region that has had the most difficulties in installing the political and economic stability needed to get their rapidly increasing populations out of poverty. The reasons for the slow economic development of many sub-Saharan countries are numerous and complex and include elements linked to Africa's colonial legacy, ethnic divisions, particular geographical difficulties, and low life-expectancy but also to poor policies and institutions[16]. Despite signs of progress over the last decade, today the average poverty rate for sub-Saharan Africa stands at about 41 percent, and 27 of the world's 28 poorest countries are in sub-Saharan Africa[17].

Asian countries have been able to show the best results in terms of economic growth. Taking off after Japan and South Korea, China has become the new giant in the world economy.

India is following with high rates of economic growth. Also, Brazil is now in the top group for GDP, although showing slower growth recently.

The emergence of so many new independent states has changed the balance of power within world institutions. A united Global South has emerged, often standing together in the UN system and demanding that their voices be heard. Two thirds of the WTO's 164 members are from the 'global south', and as such should play an increasingly important and active role in the international governance system[18].

Inequality reduced and increased at the same time

While the liberal economic model opened exciting opportunities for many, it had differentiated impact on equality both within and between nations.

Where well-regulated and governed, the capitalist model can allow most of the population within a nation state to benefit, as we observed happening in many European countries in the years immediately after the

[16] Sources of Slow Growth in African Economies; Jeffrey D. Sachs and Andrew M. Warner; Harvard Institute for International Development; Journal of African Economies, Vol 6, Nr.3

[17] Poverty and shared prosperity: Piecing together the Poverty Puzzle, World Bank, 2018

[18] Inge Kaul (2013) The Rise of the Global South: Implications for the Provisioning of Global Public Goods, UNDP

end of WW2. When this happens, differences Gross National Income (GNI) and Human Development Index (HDI) between nations, and within nations, are reduced, and that is a positive thing. Nonetheless, in situations where state intervention is limited (as seen in neo-liberalism) within a specific nation-state, there is a potential for a rise in income and wealth inequality. This tendency is particularly noticeable within affluent countries, where certain entities are more adept at capitalizing on the market-driven economy, often at the detriment of others.

Consider, for example, a very large company with a distinct market dominance in terms of either its service or product. This company enforces the lowest possible wages and employment conditions on one side, while simultaneously raising prices for consumers and failing to enhance the quality of its product and services on the other side. Such a scenario could lead to significant portions of the middle class descending along the spectrum of income and social status. Meanwhile, at the top, a small percentage of the population accumulates an increasingly substantial portion of income and wealth.

Therefore, where policies of social equity are reflected in labour market rules, competition policies and quality regulations for products and services, increased inequality does not have to be the outcome. This has been observed in the Scandinavian model as well as in Japan and other European countries. It is possible to keep high social welfare levels and minimize inequality, provided there exists the necessary political determination.

Modern technology is another example that can open new and attractive horizons, but only to those who can master it. Here, a new social divide opens, between the upper social classes who can reach the higher levels of specialised instruction in digital tools for communication, computing, visual creativity, and the lower classes who cannot, and are disadvantaged whenever digital tools are used for education, culture, and training. This exacerbates pre-existing educational differences within nations and across social classes.

Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic, a consequence of a broken equilibrium between man and nature, is exacerbating the problems of inequality both within countries and between countries. While rich countries manage to provide their citizens vaccines and health care, compensations for loss of income and welfare support measures, populations in developing countries who live of tourism from or exports to rich countries, and depend on daily wages for minimal subsistence, have, in most cases, been left to their own devises with no or limited access to health care or vaccines and no compensation for loss of income. The Covid-19 pandemic has in fact reversed years of progress in the reduction of poverty, gender inequality, and in improved education for many developing nations.

Pre-existing inequalities were also exacerbated in developed countries as a result of the pandemic. In some of the richest countries in the world where access to healthcare is not guaranteed, the poorer segments of society, who cannot afford healthcare, as well as women who primarily cared for the young and the sick, suffered disproportionally[19].

The governance model, access to technology and the impact of pandemics all influence the degree of equality present in a country and highlight inequalities across societies, always hitting the most vulnerable hardest. We all live in a globalised world where fragile social systems pose massive challenges to the human rights progress, we have achieved over the past decades. Given the increased global interdependence, the lack of global solidarity between countries and regions as well as between social classes within given countries leaves us with the question of how we can build back better, not only for limited segments of society but for all segments of society throughout the world.

Economic cooperation in a multilateral world
Economic cooperation through trade has certainly allowed for unprecedented economic and human development. It has taken billions out of poverty and increased the quality of life of large parts of the world's population. It has survived times of conflict and times of crisis in the economic systems.

---

[19] National Geographic (2021) Why women have suffered more financially during the pandemic

However, such economic and human development has come at a certain price. First and foremost, it has been possible only because of exploitation of human labour, which has exacerbated inequalities within and between nations and regions. Secondly, it has also been contingent on the exploitation of natural resources, which has resulted in considerable environmental destruction (further explored in chapter 2).

World equilibrium is today a complex multilateral affair. Such complexity is a matter for concern as cooperation is not always granted by all. But all nations in the world have much to lose in breaking it. This is a reason for hope.

1.3 Sustainability - the environmental challenge

The long, unprecedented growth of the world economy carried a destructive side in its relation to the environment that has gradually been acknowledged and has been giving rise to a multifaced reaction: surprise, negation, awareness, research, mobilisation, negotiation, decisions.

Fast-paced industrialization was facilitated by a growing reliance on the combustion of fossil fuels, which released unprecedented amounts of greenhouse gasses (GHG) into the atmosphere, thus leading to climate change. Furthermore, to feed an ever-growing global population, intensive forms of agricultural farming facilitated by chemical fertilisers has led to the poisoning of land and water while deforestation has resulted in unprecedented loss of biodiversity and imbalance, even collapse, of many ecosystems.

The accumulated impact of these human activities - e.g., GHG emission, pollution, and deforestation - has reached levels that are threatening the Earth's ecosystems and climate. The results are already being felt in many regions of the world causing many to migrate away from their land, often towards cities in hope of finding jobs and better lives. The consequences of the collapse of Earth's ecosystems would be detrimental for humanity at large, and possibly even irreversible. (Further explored in chapter 2)

It has become increasingly clear that our present economic system is dramatically biased in the direction of short-sightedness, as its decisions are aimed at advantages reaped today without considering disadvantages of tomorrow, and narrow-mindedness, to maximise individual welfare and neglecting common goods.

The origins of the concept of sustainability

Rachel Carson was, with the publication 'Silent Spring' in 1962, one of the first to place human activities at the centre of environmental degradation. Using the specific example of pesticides and the negative impact they have on ecosystems; Carson highlighted the impact human society can have on nature. The Silent Spring conveys a message as pertinent today as it was back in the 1960s: human dependence on the living environment underscores the folly of neglecting its protection.

Carson's Silent Spring effectively generated widespread environmental interest and was without doubt of great inspiration to the participants of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1972, and particularly to the follow-up World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, known as the Brundtland Commission in recognition of its chair, the former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland), which marked the formalisation of global concern for environmental development.

It was in fact the Brundtland Commission that in 1987 first popularized the concept of sustainable development, with the publication of the report entitled "Our Common Future", also known as the "Brundtland report". This report placed environmental issues firmly on the international political agenda and defined sustainable development as: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"[20].

Carson and the Brundtland report initiated a shift in global environmental consciousness which has continued to evolve to this day. It has placed the paradigm of sustainable development as a guiding principle for development. Since then, it has no longer been possible to think of development without considering the impact it may have on the environment. Sustainable development has furthermore placed the health of the planet at the centre of intergenerational justice and argues that in our pursuit of better lives, we must make sure to avoid environmental degradation, over-exploitation or pollution that will have a negative impact on future generations.

---

[20] Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future, 1987

Three fundamental components, as well as their interaction and interlinkages, are key to sustainable development: social equity, economic growth, and environmental protection. Social equity and economic growth dominated the concerns of political leaders after WW2, while environmental degradation and over-exploitation of natural resources have increasingly become concerns as our economies and population have grown, putting an increasing strain on our natural resources, and pushing natural boundaries to the brink of collapse. The response to environmental degradation has resulted in many international agreements addressing a wide range of issues, from the protection of the rainforests, wild flora and fauna, and marine environments to limiting air pollution and the emission of greenhouse gasses (GHGs).

1.4 Globalisation

Since the adoption of the Human Rights Declaration, the Bretton Woods System and the Brundtland report we have come far. In our present era, we inhabit a truly globalised world, characterized by a growing web of interconnections and interdependencies. This phenomenon stems from various intricate processes, notably the escalation of trade and the exchange of cultures, both greatly aided by modern advancements in transportation, technology, and financial systems. Consequently, this has spurred heightened integration among individuals and communities, as well as among businesses and governments on a global scale.

Though many scholars place the origins of globalisation in modern times to the 17th and 18th century, others trace its history back to the third millennium BC Mesopotamia where the first systems of commercial banking as well as trade of goods and exchange of language and ideas between central Asia and Europe first became a reality[21]. However, large-scale globalization as we know it today only began in the 1820s, with industrialisation leading, after WW2, to a massive increase of networks of worldwide interdependence and increased economic interaction. The expansion of capitalism to a global scale has ushered in optimised trade relations, streamlined the movement of labour and capital, and equipped this dense world-wide network with improved technology, efficient transport, and seamless communication channels.

Modern globalisation is defined by Martinelli as "a set of related processes that involve a stretching of economic, social, cultural and political activity and interconnect the individuals, groups, communities, states, societies, markets, corporations, international governmental and non-governmental organisations in complex webs of social relations, intensifying their interdependence and increasing the consciousness of what is happening … the growth of networks of worldwide interdependence"[22]. In the past, local communities would have distinct cultural, economic and social realities, today we find the same high-street shops and services across nations, regions and continents (Starbucks, IKEA, HSBC Bank etc.) and the social, cultural and political opinions of the individual and local communities are instantly and continuously connected and influenced by the rest of the world through the internet, smart technology and migration, creating an increased opportunity for learning and sharing across cultures, yet often leading to homogenisation and some form of cultural hybridisation. Globalisation is therefore a multi-faceted process with far-reaching consequences for the lives of all women and men, imposing constraints, and opening opportunities for individual as well as collective action[23].

Global Governance

Today we are living in a transnational civil society with an international public space and a growing awareness of our common fate as human beings, but does this mean that a sense of global community is developing, i.e., that we can identify some form of global unity and civic consciousness resulting in shared global responsibilities and solidarity? And if so, who has the mandate to govern such collective responsibilities?

---

[21] Andre Gunder Frank, 1998, ReOrient - Global Economy in the Asian Age
[22] Martinelli A, 2005, Global Modernization – Rethinking the project of Modernity
[23] Martinelli A, 2005, Global Modernization – Rethinking the project of Modernity

In our current form of global society, there is no Global authority with the right to establish and enforce the rules of the game, and where needed, sanction illegal behaviour on the global stage in the same way that our nation states are mandated to do so. Furthermore, there exists no democratic governance structure at the global level wherein exploited or disadvantaged social groups could effectively amplify their voices through voting rights. Such groups could then influence political decision-makers who vie for their support, allowing them to trade their allegiance to democratic institutions for equitable rights encompassing legal, political, and social citizenship.

Globalisation therefore raises the question of global governance, that is, the definition of a complex set of global norms concerning the entire world as a single system in various ways, i.e. planet Earth as an ecosystem; humanity as an endangered species, with the related concerns for the lives of future generations; the peoples of the world as a single constituency of individuals entitled to equal rights and responsibilities to whom decision-makers must be accountable; the world market as an economic space regulated by international law which can guarantee the rights not only of investors, but also of workers, consumers and communities[24].

While the nation state continues to hold a pivotal role in establishing the necessary institutional and legal frameworks for guiding and shaping the country's trajectory based on established national interests and policies, it is becoming evident that nation states are concurrently becoming more interconnected on a global scale. This interconnectedness is manifested through the swift movement of goods, services, money, people, knowledge, news, and pollution across national borders. Alongside these dynamics emerges a gradual erosion of the sovereignty traditionally associated with the nation state. In reality, because of the multifaceted impact of globalization, nation-states are undergoing a deep transformation, as their functions and powers are rearticulated and re-embedded in complex transnational and regional networks.

Indeed, we are witnessing the consolidation of a multileveled form of global governance that comprises a plethora of international regimes and supranational institutions of governance at the world (UN) and regional level (EU)[25]. The latter are based on the principle of subsidiarity and result in both voluntary and compulsory national commitments and increased harmonisation of national law. We are also observing the emergence of a transnational civic society and an international public space, where likeminded people come together independently of national borders and stand stronger in unity giving a "mandate" for increased supranational authority on various global issues i.e., youth on climate issues. We are therefore observing both top-down and bottom-up processes that are mutually reinforcing and increasing global governance of global issues and are contributing to a more peaceful world with greater individual freedom, social justice, and respect for cultural diversity for all.

It is within this multi-layered global governance structure, that increased co-dependence and a growing awareness of our common fate as human beings is being acknowledged and that the UN members granted support to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted in 2000, and the subsequent Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) adopted in 2015.

1.5 Millennium, the new beginning

At the turn of the century (and millennium), the pervasive effects of globalisation made it clear that the organisation of the world economy, and with it the social and ethical norms that had been shaped, accepted, and implemented after WW2, needed a radical adjustment in order to assure satisfaction of the basic needs of all humans on Earth. A new awareness of collective responsibility toward universal issues, universally shared values, and the recognition of human rights was the spirit that guided the drafting of the MDGs.

---

[24] Martinelli A, 2005, Global Modernization – Rethinking the project of Modernity
[25] The principle of **Subsidiarity** holds that, any social or political issues should be dealt with at the most immediate (or local) level that is consistent with their resolution

In 2015 when the deadline of the MDGs was approaching, the emergence of much larger environmental risks was becoming evident as were the causes for them. The new SDGs were put in place to address both human and environmental issues in the Agenda 2030. Differently from their predecessors, the latter were not only striving for major action in development policy in and for the Global South, but also emphasized the urgency of innovative policies needed in the Global North to achieve sustainable development. The SDGs offer major improvements on the MDGs, as the new framework addresses key systemic barriers to sustainable development that the MDGs neglected or did not stress sufficiently, such as inequality, unsustainable consumption patterns, weak institutional capacity, and environmental degradation.

It was no longer satisfactory to just affirm rights in a world where rights were in fact denied and were bound to be further compromised as a result of the worrying economic and environmental trends. It was clearly a duty to act together and create new conditions.

Millennium Goals

The Millennium Summit took place in New York City in 2000 and brought together world leaders with the overarching goal of defining the role of the United Nations at the turn of the century.

189 Member States of the United Nations agreed to help citizens in the world's poorest countries to achieve a better life by 2015. They signed a Millennium Declaration affirming collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality, and equity at the global level and to ensure that globalisation may become a positive force for all the world's people.

The framework for this progress was outlined in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which should have been achieved by 2015:

1. To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

2. To achieve universal primary education

3. To promote gender equality and empower women

4. To reduce child mortality

5. To improve maternal health

6. To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases

7. To ensure environmental sustainability

8. To develop a global partnership for development

It is not a simple task to evaluate the success of the MDGs. While unprecedented progress was achieved from 2000 to 2015 in poverty reduction, access to education and improvements in child and maternal health, they failed to adequately address socio-economic inequality and environmental degradation.

One of the main criticisms to the MDG framework highlighted the inefficacy in addressing the structural causes of poverty, which resulted in leaving too many behind. As the former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon claimed: "The MDGs helped to lift more than one billion people out of extreme poverty, to make inroads against hunger, to enable more girls to attend school than ever before". He then went on to say that: "Yet for all the remarkable gains, I am keenly aware that inequalities persist, and that progress has been uneven."[26]

Indeed, it is widely acknowledged that the success of the MDGs was largely possible due to huge progress at all levels in two main countries, namely China and India, and that, at the end of 2015, there were still many unresolved problems in other parts of the world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and in many countries afflicted by war.

---

[26] The Millennium Development Goals Report, UN, 2015

Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, the 193 member states of the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Development Agenda titled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" which includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals with a total of 169 targets.

The SDGs were developed to succeed the MDGs and incorporated important lessons from the failures of the MDG. First, these new goals aim to drive change in both developing and developed countries. They call for the participation of not only all Member States but also international organizations, businesses, local authorities, the scientific community, and civil society -an authentic call for action that aims to engage the entire global community. Second, the SDGs put emphasis on key systemic factors, previously neglected, that hinder sustainable development, such as inequalities between countries and within them, environmental degradation, unsustainable consumption models, the weakness of institutions and governance models[27]. Finally, the SDGs identifies 17 distinct areas in which progress shall be achieved and emphasises the importance that solutions and actions should be tackled in their interconnection to achieve the highest impact.

The preamble of the official 2030 Development Agenda identifies five P's that are at the centre of the 2030 Agenda and highlight how the SDGs form part of an intertwined framework instead of a group of siloed goals. Progress on all five P's, with focus on their interconnectedness, is necessary to ensure sustainable development for all.

People - end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.

Planet - protect the planet from degradation, through sustainable consumption and production, sustainable management of natural resources and by taking urgent action on climate change, so that the planet can support the needs of present and future generations.

Prosperity - ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social, and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.

Peace - foster peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.

Partnership - implement the UN's 2030 Development Agenda through a global partnership, based on a spirit of global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders, and all people.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encompass the three fundamental dimensions of sustainability, namely: social equity, economic growth, and environmental protection. With 17 interconnected goals and 169 targets, these dimensions work harmoniously to reinforce each other. However, it's not unexpected that governments and other stakeholders often face challenges in prioritising these goals, as conflicts can arise between the policies, interests, and ideologies of different parties. This complexity can lead to trade-offs that require careful consideration. Goals and targets can furthermore contradict each other, and difficult choices must be made for example when the increase of agricultural production needed to feed a growing population requires increased energy consumption which contributes to climate change. The inevitable trade-offs become even more complicated when they also take the form of inter-state conflicts[28].

Given the wide-ranging issues tackled by the SDGs it is evident that the Agenda 2030 serves as a global framework intended to steer relevant stakeholders towards achieving sustainable development. The specifics of achieving each distinct goal and target were designed to be discussed in diverse supplementary agreements and forums. The Agenda 2030 calls attention to priority issues of common interest,

---

[27] Martinelli A., (2021) GLI OBIETTIVI DI SVILUPPO SOSTENIBILEDELLE NAZIONI UNITE 2015-2030
[28] Martinelli A., (2021) GLI OBIETTIVI DI SVILUPPO SOSTENIBILEDELLE NAZIONI UNITE 2015-2030

recommends appropriate strategies to address them and cautions against counterproductive actions that could hinder progress. As such it is in fact a brilliant compromise between the need for global governance and the defence of national sovereignty[29]. An example of this is the climate goal SDG13, and the subsequent Paris Agreements, that have been turned into binding policy in the recently adopted EU Green Deal.

The adoption of the Agenda 2030 has therefore started the process of embracing a new paradigm of sustainable and inclusive global development, a process that needs the active involvement of all sectors of society. It is a framework that aims to instil a new mindset in the population at large, to design new sustainable business models for the future and to promote research and innovation in the transformative, and possibly disruptive, technologies necessary to achieve the ultimate objectives.

---

[29] Martinelli A., (2021) GLI OBIETTIVI DI SVILUPPO SOSTENIBILEDELLE NAZIONI UNITE 2015-2030

Bibliography

Bavel J. V., 2013, The world population explosion: causes, backgrounds and projections for the future, Facts Views Vision, 5(4): 281–291, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3987379/

Bóka, É., 2012, The European idea of a supranational union of peace. Society and Economy. 34. p. 387-397.
Carson R.; Darling L.; Darling L.; (1962), Silent Spring, Riverside Press

Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, https://www.elysee.fr/en/french-presidency/the-declaration-of-the-rights-of-man-and-of-the-citizen

European Commission, Consumer rights and complaints: https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/consumer-rights-and-complaints/enforcement-consumer-protection/sweeps_en#2020-sweep-on-misleading-sustainability-claims

EU Consilium, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/70-schuman-declaration/

European Union, https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_en

Frank A. G., 1998, ReOrient - Global Economy in the Asian Age

Gates M. F., (2021) With the economic recovery failing women, now is the time to act on gender equality, Gates Foundation, https://www.gatesfoundation.org/ideas/articles/women-economic-impact-covid19

Henri C., 2018, Lawrence Tubiana, Earth at Risk, Columbia University Press

Harrison M., 2010, The Soviet Union after 1945: Economic Recovery and Political Repression, University of Warwick

History, https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/marshall-plan-1

ILO, Building Forward Fairer: Women's rights to work and at work at the core of the COVID-19 recovery, 2021

IEA, World Energy Outlook, 2020

IMF, https://www.imf.org/external/about/history.htm

Kaul I., 2013, The Rise of the Global South: Implications for the Provisioning of Global Public Goods, UNDP International Energy Agency, World Energy Outlook, 2020

Magna Carta https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/magna-carta

Manitoba Council for International Cooperation; Sustainable Foundations: A Guide for Teaching the Sustainable Development Goals (2018)

Martinelli A, 2005, Global Modernization – Rethinking the project of Modernity.

Martinelli A., 2021, Gli Obiettivi di sviluppo sostenibile delle Nazione Unite 2015-2030, Istituto Lombardo – Accademia di Scienze e Lettere

National Geographic, Why women have suffered more financially during the pandemic (2021) https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/history-and-civilisation/2021/07/why-women-have-suffered-more-financially-during-the-pandemic

Our World in Data: Income inequality, 2016 https://ourworldindata.org/income-inequality

Our World in Data: World Population Growth, 2019 https://ourworldindata.org/world-population-growth
Raworth K., Doughnut Economics, Cornerstone, 2018

Sachs J. D., Warner A. M., 1997, Sources of Slow Growth in African Economies; Harvard Institute for International Development; Journal of African Economies, Vol 6, Nr.3

Sinha S.P., 1981, Human Rights: A Non-Western Viewpoint, Archives for Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy Vol. 67, No. 1, pp. 76-91, Franz Steiner Verlag

Tucker R. C., 1957, The Politics of Soviet De-Stalinization, World Politics. Vol. 9, No. 4, pp. 550-578, Cambridge University Press

UNDP, Preventing the next Pandemic, 2020
https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ZP.pdf

UNDP, Sustainable Energy: https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development/planet/sustainable-energy.html

UNESCO, UIS (UNESCO Institute for Statistics), 2018 www.uis.unesco.org

UN, UN Charter: Preamble https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/preamble

UN, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

UN, Sustainable Development Goals: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/

UN, The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015

UN, The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019, 2019

UN, World Population Prospects, 2019
https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_Highlights.pdf

UN Environment's sixth Global Environment Outlook, 2019

UN, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

World Bank, Poverty and shared prosperity: Piecing together the Poverty Puzzle, 2018

World Commission on Environment and Development (1987). Our Common Future. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

WTO, https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/history_e/history_e.htm