



A Path to Achieving U.N Sustainable Development Goals

By Colman Hands

As each new headline overwhelms us with a depressing narrative of inequality, conflict, food or financial deficit, it is hardly surprising that a growing number aspire to follow a different path. The seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, put forward by the UN, invite us to follow a road less taken. Balance, harmony and decency.

Drilling down deeper into these admirable targets, it is all too easy to dismiss them as worthy, but naive and unachievable. The first Goal sets out an aim to end poverty. With the increasing global traction currently enjoyed by the concept of Universal Basic Incomes, something described by former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis as, 'liberty's main prerequisite', ending poverty could be, like the second SDG of eradicating hunger, more a matter of redistribution than revolution.

Zero Hunger follows a similar trajectory to that of poverty. The world creates enough income to sustain the planet, but its distribution is wildly skewed, often in countries where the ones left behind need it most.

The "Gini Index" is calculated based on the range of cumulative family incomes, where 0 stands for perfect equality and 100 stands for perfect inequality. According to "Business Insider", the most unequal country using this formula is Namibia, with a stunning inequality ratio of 71, but other developing countries also demonstrate the same levels



of income imbalance such as South Africa with 65 and both Lesotho and Botswana with 63. Compared to the United States with a score of 45, which is admittedly uncomfortably high for the world's biggest economy.

Northern European countries such as Sweden, Denmark and Norway give a tantalising glimpse of how the SDGs could be achieved, although the issue of high taxation remains a thorny issue. The number one country for income equality, Sweden, asks its citizens to pay 12% more tax than natives of the UK, yet along with its Nordic neighbours, it rates consistently high in all measures of societal success. This suggests that citizens are prepared to invest their income into the type of SDGs that bring out the best in global communities.

Equally ambitious, the following fifteen UN targets set out an agenda promoting fairness, decency and respect. Who would deny a fellow human being access to good levels of health, education, sanitation and water, supported by affordable and clean energy whilst living in sustainable cities and communities? Which parent could support a life for their children absent of gender equality, decent work, reduced inequalities, peace and justice?

Further goals lay down protection to society and governments on the macro level. Promoting industrial innovation and infrastructure, encouraging responsible

consumption and production, taking climate action to sustain life, both below the water and on land, through creating partnerships to achieve these goals encompass the mightiest of governments, and the smallest of households.

So, what is required to achieve these ambitious goals? Governments and their private sectors have a moral obligation to invest their immense financial, labour and innovation capital into the seventeen steps outlined by the UN. With global frictions and fractures such as that between the UK and Europe during an increasingly acrimonious Brexit “divorce” process, it is easy to despair; but there is hope.

The exponential pace of growth in solar power shows how, using different governmental models, huge steps can be made if there is a will to do so. China’s centrist approach has its critics but, as shown in the massive centralised investment in the Chinese Super League football, it can drive through a project unhindered by regional variations of political affiliation.

Last year China produced 78,100 megawatts, almost double that of the second biggest producer, Japan. Incredibly, China increased its photovoltaic capacity by almost 46% in 2016, more than doubling the output of the runner up, the United States. These figures are staggering alone. But what makes these figures truly outstanding only comes into full focus when you reflect on the sheer scale of China’s upward trajectory. At the start of this century, the country produced a mere 19 megawatts of solar power; a figure that barely reached triple digits in 2007. In the decade since then, its production has essentially doubled every year and shows no signs of slowing. In fact, it is much more likely to head northwards at even more breakneck speed. Increasing solar production by a factor of four thousand since the start of the century is a brain melting statistic and shows what can be done to support SDGs

when even a Communist system sees the merits of supply and demand.

Countries in the Middle East and Asia are throwing their vast resources at becoming solar market leaders, sensing a unique opportunity to eclipse the USA after Presidents Trump’s intention to withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord. The one hundred and ninety-four-member group becomes a new market and other fast developing countries like India to address the one fifth of global emissions created by the US as a potentially lucrative business challenge.

It is simply too easy to give up hope in the face of a few environmentally isolationists and hectoring voices condoning social inequality. “Monster” hurricanes like Irma occur with increased ferocity and frequency, feeding into a process that some feel has already established its own terrifying momentum.

The seventeen UN Sustainable Development Goals invite enlightened individuals like Bill Gates, powerful governments from the developed and developing worlds and individuals to invest in their dreams and aspirations. To leave the planet in a better condition when we die than when we were born could be the true SDG legacy. Achieving all seventeen targets may be, to some, fanciful, but nobody ever said saving the world would be easy.