



Can we adapt to survive?

How we manage our planet's natural resources is critical to ours and our children's future

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LIKE all forms of life on this magnificent blue planet, humanity's existence is determined by a finite set of boundaries.

The Earth's mean temperature, the composition of its atmosphere, the quantity and quality of its available freshwater, the health of its sea and soil – these are some of the critical factors that will determine whether, even with our advanced technological capacity to adapt, we are able to survive as a species on this planet or not. For, if one factor in the equation of the Earth's condition changes, the interconnectedness of planetary systems ensures that others will soon follow.

We are learning that it is not possible to push the boundaries of our survival beyond certain limits, for the Earth does not conform to humanity's will; it is humankind that must conform to the limits as set by nature. This is a lesson we are learning the hard way.

We are learning it with the forced displacement of millions of people around the world as the soil of their agricultural holdings becomes too exhausted to support their growing numbers. We are learning it with the loss of jobs as ocean fish stocks drop to levels that can no

longer sustain once-thriving fisheries. We are learning it with the destruction of livestock and property as violent storms lash the landmasses of the globe. We are learning it with food insecurity, water stress, rising mean temperatures and the extinction of species.

Sustainability as an ideological shift.

To state that we are living in a remarkable time, unlike any other in the history of the planet is not being overly dramatic. It is stating a fact. With more people now living and expected to be born on Earth than at any time in the history of our species, we are facing a unique predicament.

As the Earth's resource base sinks lower and lower in response to the needs of vast numbers of people and unrestrained consumerism continues to drive unsustainable consumption into the 21st century, ahead of us could well be a time marked by global insufficiency. Clearly this way of living cannot continue so where to from here?

The emergence of sustainable development in the 1980s as an ideological shift away from resource depletion towards resource safeguarding, conservation and thriftiness marked a profoundly

important shift in human consciousness, with changes in individual, corporate and government thinking, shared belief patterns and combined ways of relating to the world offering hope for the future.

Sustainability is a simple idea. Recognising that the planet has ecological limits to growth and that resource depletion occurs when resources are consumed faster than nature can produce or renew them; sustainability is a dynamic process whereby a balance is sought between society's demand on nature and nature's capacity to meet that demand, taking into account the ability of future generations to meet their needs. It is about a new global imperative: that of resource security as guaranteed by international, intergroup, corporate and individual collaboration.

In a nutshell, it means caring for natural resources so that they can be used indefinitely, thereby averting an ecologically insolvent future.

It means living within the means of our one planet in a way that is responsible and accountable; looking after people, protecting the environment and ensuring economic growth. And it is everyone's concern.

Sustainability as an emerging worldview. Shaped by bottom-up forces as against top-down ones, emergence is a dynamic, self-organising pattern that grows out of millions of individual beliefs, decisions and local interactions, to become a global order of discernible

macrobehaviour that responds to specific and changing needs.

Each of us contributes to these idea revolutions or this emergent intelligence and although it may not be possible to see the complete emerging picture it is possible to intuit, as now, when a culture is reaching a significant juncture or tipping point, changing from one defined state to another.

Certainly sustainability has become the overriding ethos of our present era. And as in any emergent trend it started with a few isolated people who recognised that the Earth's role as a life support system was changing; this early embryonic understanding progressing to increased levels of perception and awareness until it had reached a critical mass, becoming a significant global groundswell movement.

Although respected global thought leaders have questioned the validity of sustainable development as being too little too late for a planet that has already exceeded its carrying capacity, it is still the most relevant and promising construct yet devised to take us further into the 21st century.

Sustainability is increasingly informing and influencing many aspects of post-modern life, impacting on such diverse human activities as finance, city-planning, agriculture, technology, transport and education. As a worldview that is gaining momentum, it is set to have a profound effect on the future of our civil-

isation.

Agents of change. There can be no doubt that we are at an important crossroads and the decisions we make now will have momentous significance for our own lives and those of future generations. Meeting the challenges will require the harnessing of different insights and strengths from those we relied on previously.

It will require a heightened awareness and a changed global mindset. It will require different priorities, values and ethics. It will require a shared vision and an unparalleled degree of collaboration across national boundaries, between national leaders and among nations' citizens.

Nowhere is this more relevant than on the African continent, where more than 350 million people are on a collision course with nature as they depend directly on the environment for their livelihood.

The time for change is now and one organisation that is serious about being agents of change and is sincerely committed to finding sustainable solutions is Sustain our Africa (SOA), a collaborative sustainability platform that acts as a catalyst for change.

By cultivating awareness, showcasing inspirational stories and hosting practical tools for change, SOA aims to build an abundant, resilient Africa that can deliver Enough. For All.