

## Economic Growth and Sustainability

With a population approaching 7 billion, over a quarter of whom are online, the world is facing a number of global challenges and we are all increasingly aware of the need to act urgently. Climate change, poverty, inequity and social exclusion, biodiversity loss, species extinction and regulating systems collapse (such as forests) are all consequences of the way we run our economic systems and society.

To match our appetite for more energy, more food and more water, which are essential for economic and social development, a globally sustainable solution requires a level of cooperation and interdisciplinary thinking on a scale we have never seen before.

Global sustainability does not translate into a justification for limiting economic development in the emerging or developing countries but rather a new economic paradigm for us all. We need to develop a model that allows us to manage environmental risks whilst developing a just society for all.

On 9 August 2010, the United Nations Secretary-General launched the High-level Panel on Global Sustainability to bring together expertise that could tackle this issue and outline a way forward and will complete its work by publishing a report at the end of 2011. The panel has no small task and the following was used to set out the background for the creation of this panel.

*“Increasing strains and crises in recent years point to the deterioration of the natural environment. The changing climate is one key manifestation. We are reaching, and increasingly overstepping, planetary boundaries. Efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals and other social and economic targets are hampered by the inability to agree on decisive and coordinated action in national and multilateral fora. This reveals the weaknesses of our governance structures and our outdated development models. It shows the limits of our current approach, which continues to deal with individual symptoms rather than the causes and their interrelationships.”*

**However, sustainability** can only be delivered through real change on the ground. So while the output from the Panel is eagerly anticipated the “*Think Global, Act Local*” mantra is ever more true.

Understanding entrepreneurship as a concept is very important. To be able to unpack what we mean by sustainability and how it relates to innovation and creation is key to building an economy that we desire, as opposed to one that we just end up with.

If we were truly a risk taking economy we would face our most serious global challenges and take risks in creating the solutions that are needed. We would not have a system which measures success in terms of pure economic growth such that the response to real crisis, such as the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, actually adds to economic growth.

Entrepreneurial activity is rarely led by the desire to make money but by an underlying desire to create something new. So we need to widen our definition of entrepreneurship beyond the drivers of our current economy and bring it down to the individual level. What drives an entrepreneur forward? If an entrepreneur is driven by their own desire to

create and innovate and is not operating in the machinery of the economy then are they operating in a sustainable way?

Therefore we need to start by using a different definition for our underlying economy. The Global Sustainability Institute at Anglia Ruskin University defines the economy as one that meets sustainability principles and 'sustainability envisages a just society of innovation, opportunity and wellbeing which manages the full diversity of environmental risks'. If we use this definition to describe a sustainable economy then entrepreneurship within that economy innovates and creates opportunities and products that have no negative impact on the environment and have a positive impact on all people. No small task - this is risky entrepreneurship.

To really tackle this type of entrepreneurial activity needs an interconnected view of the world and its systems. In our drive for ever more complexity our academic disciplines have become ever more specialised. We have lost the ability to think more widely about how we fit into the 'system' and how what we do can influence change. We have lost the ability for individuals to be cross-disciplinary in their approach to problem solving.

Today's challenges needs entrepreneurs operating at the individual and community level. Entrepreneurs who are real risk takers. Whether this is through social enterprise, individual craft or something else there are still plenty of challenges to be overcome before we end up with a just and environmentally benign society. There are many opportunities for failure and without finding all of these opportunities, and then stumbling across the solutions, we will never be true sustainability entrepreneurs and unlock the opportunity of global growth.

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