



Ten Essential Ideas for Sustainability Leaders in the 2020s

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Abstract

This Discussion Outline was prepared for the WAAS-organized March 17, 2019, Special Meeting on Global Leadership for the 21st Century—Ideas That Can Lead to Action, which followed the VII Global Baku Forum, March 14-16. Its statements are derived from or supported by the contents of The Security & Sustainability Guide (www.securesustain.org; in development) and include current and emerging ideas deserving more attention from leaders: 1) we cannot have security without sustainability, and vice versa; 2) security is worsening worldwide, making sustainability more vulnerable; 3) still, an under-appreciated transformation to sustainability is underway; 4) but fragmentation within the transformation is widespread; 5) the intensifying global information explosion is out of control; 6) global population in 2050 will likely grow by 30% to 10 billion people; 7) a new political continuum is needed to supplement traditional “left-right” thinking; 8) a new economics for the 21st century is needed to supplement and eventually replace industrial-era economics; 9) new sources of non-polluting energy and new foods and food production methods are emerging; 10) the climate change problem is understated, but climate is only part of a wider set of urgent environmental problems.

The 21st century is already a time of complex and intensifying turmoil. Drivers are the consequences of new technology, accelerating climate change, a global environmental emergency, rising and spreading inequality, unprepared and incompetent governance, and the absence of appropriate institutional capacity to respond.

The S&SG profiles 40 leaders who have promoted thinking and/or action about security and sustainability issues in recent decades. Many of these leaders are still addressing the overlapping and interconnected challenges that we face. But progress is slow and uneven, and some issues, such as democracy and human rights, are clearly in retreat. Many more leaders are needed to step up and join what needs to be a global campaign to improve and sustain evidence-based discourse for humanity’s well-being, and to pioneer new ways to do so.

The following statements express several ways and means that the new leaders who do step up can choose from, based on personal and professional strengths, to make a significant contribution.

1. Acknowledge a fundamental fact. ***We cannot have security without sustainability, nor sustainability without security.*** Too few national and international leaders and opinion-makers see this connection to promote steady progress on global wicked problems such as climate change—a powerful multiplier of the damaging effects of other problems—and cyber-insecurity, where governments only now are beginning to consider laws and policies to cope. Sustainability can be better advanced if seen as a matter of global and national security. And security can be better achieved when climate change and other sustainability concerns are included in a broader framework that also includes cybersecurity.
2. Address grim realities. ***Security, in all its forms, is worsening worldwide, which means that sustainability is becoming more vulnerable.*** The major powers (the United States, China, and Russia, but especially the US), are clearly engaged in arms racing, which all three deny. Trillions of dollars being spent and planned to be spent on nuclear upgrading, other arms, and military infrastructure displace funding for increasingly urgent actions to deal with climate change and inequality. Nationalistic unilateralism, a fading commitment to multilateralism, a UN paralyzed by outdated structures and processes badly in need of reform, and the political and financial power of the multinational arms industry all impede any serious debate to slow and stop the arms race, focus on humanity's needs, and consider the most cost-effective ways to promote real security. To cite a recent *New York Times* editorial (11 Feb 2019), "No Winner in a New Arms Race."
3. Progress is being made that should be built on. ***An under-appreciated transformation to sustainability is underway.*** Several thousand organizations—including international NGOs, research institutes, government agencies, foundations, investors, and national militaries—are increasingly concerned with climate change, energy resilience, food security, conflict, threats to human rights and democracy, and/or serious damage to biodiversity and oceans. Notably, many businesses are “going green” to various degrees, prodded by green business groups, ethical groups, public opinion, organizations urging new accounting procedures, new accreditation schemes, green consultants, and proliferation of green investing opportunities. See, “Greening Capitalism, Quietly: Seven Types of Organizations Driving the Necessary Revolution,” (CADMUS, 3:2, May 2017, 150-166), **Better Business, Better World** from the Business and Sustainable Development Commission (2017, 122p), and the annual **State of Green Business Report** from GreenBiz. Capitalism can and should be usefully seen as bi-furcating into organizations pursuing the “triple bottom line” of People, Planet, and Profit to some degree, vs. traditional business focused only on the bottom line.
4. But, ***Fragmentation within the transformation is widespread, even embedded.*** Many organizations ignore the existence and work of others, some viscerally committed to defending their turf. This regrettable situation is amplified by the number and the variety of terms for the many overlapping goals of sustainable development (which may not even refer to the current UN flagship list—the 17 Sustainable Development Goals): low-carbon society, deep decarbonization, circular economies, green growth, no-growth, transformation, Global Green Deal, Green New Deal, green economy, new

climate economy, and others. Similarities and differences between these goals need to be examined, and a global guide to transformation objectives, action agendas, various cost estimates, and other related information can illuminate and reduce this fragmentation.

5. ***The intensifying global information explosion is out of control.*** The information environment has changed beyond recognition in just three decades, and the emerging Internet of Things will further the ever-growing array of entertainment and useful information. Every day, more people use more non-stop media to produce more information: some true, some false; some of profound importance but most arguably trivial and distracting. Good news for security and sustainability does exist: many of the organizations engaged in the transformation offer free online reports that are authoritative, handsomely produced, and amply documented. The bad news is that most of these reports are unknown, ignored by much of academia, the media, businesses, and competing “S&S” organizations. To cut through the clutter, frequently updated “Top Ten” or “Top 20” lists are needed to prioritize our thinking (see **Scientists Reporting: Top 20 Recent Online Reports on the Global Environmental Emergency to be published in the October '19 issue of Cadmus**).
6. Barring nuclear war or pandemics, ***Global population in 2050 is likely to have grown by 30%, from 7.6 billion today to 10 billion.*** This is not the population “bomb” widely feared—and scoffed at—some 50 years ago, but growth must not be ignored or pooh-poohed. Fertility rates are declining, but so are mortality rates as medicine and health improve. An extra 2.4 billion people will surely add to planetary stresses and consumption of resources. In addition, and already clearly underway, the space for humanity to live and work in the absence of fear and want is declining due to coastal flooding, drought, desertification, and contamination by military and civilian activities. The recent IPBES report on land (See Scientists Reporting) notes that degradation “is negatively impacting the well-being of at least 3.2 billion people.” As climate change continues, human displacement will increase, provoking many more millions to seek better ‘space’, even though they are often unwelcome or even barred by more and more right-wing, nationalistic governments. A global population and migration strategy is urgently needed, more than ever. Reaching widespread consensus on this issue will test all of us.
7. ***A New Political Continuum is needed to supplement traditional “Left-Right” thinking.*** Science-based thinking in the public interest, which focuses on the “needed,” “the tested,” and the “good,” should be contrasted with authoritarian, corrupt, plutocratic, simplistic, willfully ignorant “Gangster Governments” that favor special interests and keep inept leaders in power. There will still be a need for debate between left and right about the “how” and “how much” of government intervention in society and the economy to reduce growing inequality and promote well-being. But good governance must be derived from the flood of evidence-based books, reports, papers, essays, and blogs issued by academics, researchers, and activists. The climate deniers of the fossil fuel industry (oil, gas, and especially coal), the big polluters (mining, chemicals, and big agriculture, especially meat producers), and the Security Industrial Complex of

well-funded arms producers, must all be constantly exposed for their distorted and self-interested views and actions that do not serve the public interest or majority desires.

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8. ***A New Economics for the 21st century is needed to supplement and eventually replace industrial-era economics.*** The economics profession is yet another embedded interest group that refuses to consider appropriate measures such as the Genuine Progress Indicator or the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare that give a more accurate picture of well-being. WAAS has sponsored a wide-ranging New Economics Working Group (see CADMUS, May 2017, pp10-44), but it lacks a strategy that focuses on actionable options or differentiates itself from several dozen other ‘new economics’ groups. For the most part, all the groups ignore the others, unless one of them openly criticizes their procedures and output. ‘New economics’ will arrive and endure only with wider cooperation among dissident economists, and an effective strategy to promote the value of nature’s services, calculating costs of pollution, alternative measures to GNP, the role of social capital, and costs and benefits of plausible climate policies. The need for an appropriate 21st century economics is perhaps best articulated by **An Introduction to Ecological Economics** by Robert Costanza, Herman Daly, and five others (CRC Press, 2nd edition, 2015, 337p).
9. ***New sources of non-polluting energy and new foods and food production methods are emerging.*** All have offsetting effects, but most are still preferable on a cost/benefit basis. Solar panels and onshore and offshore wind farms (and better battery systems for storing this energy) are increasingly competing for attention with hydrogen and other fuel cells, algae and other biofuels, wave and tidal systems, nuclear fusion, low-energy nuclear reactors (LENR), and small nuclear reactors (SNR) as options for displacing coal, oil, and natural gas. None are easy or cost-free to establish, whether due to politics, public opinion, vested energy interests, space limitations, or interference with established activities. A level playing field is needed so all options can fairly compete. New foods such as meat replacements based on vegetables, large-scale provision of foods from insects and/or seaweed, organic agriculture, and produce sourced in vertical farms or mobile mini-farms, face challenges of scale and embedded public tastes. Protocols for dealing with the contradictions provoked by new and different energy and food forms have yet to be established.
10. Climate change is certainly a major problem, and reducing and capturing carbon emissions is a major and widely-articulated response. All well and good, but ***the climate change***

problem is understated, and climate is only part of a wider set of urgent environmental problems. The climate outlook is consistently downplayed by omitting estimates of methane from thawing Arctic ice and tundra. As warned by Cambridge physicist Peter Wadhams, “a major climate warming boost from methane is inevitable” (**A Farewell to Ice**, 2017) and he calculates extra temperature rise due to methane alone by 2040 at 0.6 °C. Does this make tackling climate change hopeless? Not necessarily, but still greater urgency should underlie climate prescriptions. Even if substantial progress is made in slowing climate change (forget “solving”), other major environmental issues must also be addressed. This was articulated ten years ago by the “planetary boundaries” concept of Johan Rockström *et al.*, but the concept is not easily conveyed and has not been picked up. Recent major science reports on global risks, land degradation, biodiversity loss, changing oceans, accelerating Arctic ice melt, threats to public health, and feeding 10 billion people strongly reinforce the planetary boundaries overview, all too briefly presented in the SRC/CoR **Transformation is Feasible** report mentioned below.

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In sum, “Innovation,” arguably the most hyped solution to almost every problem, needs a reset for a problematic world. **Less narrow innovation is needed and more cooperative aggregation, coupled with more outreach efforts in a crowded infoworld.** Everyone seeks to be “original” and educational institutions insist on it, to the neglect of integration and outreach to bridge ever-growing fragmentation. Despite the glut of books and online reports on security and sustainability topics, progress is problematic.

Strategic foresight is valuable, demonstrated by the recent report by the Stockholm Resilience Centre to the Club of Rome. **Transformation is Feasible: How to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals within Planetary Boundaries** (Oct 2018, 58p) analyzes four future scenarios in depth: Same, Faster, Harder, and Smarter. But how many people have heard of this inspiring report, let alone read it? And how many are moved to action? Online publishing alone is insufficient. For starters, more op-ed essays, spin-off articles, and regular appearances on TV talk shows are needed.

There are probably many more “essential ideas” to prepare for and shape the coming decades. But before gathering them, time might be better spent on improving expression of the ten statements above, and identifying the interconnections and overlaps among them. No problem is an ‘island’. And no problem can be “solved” and forgotten. Indeed, even making significant progress on any of today’s problems, is likely to create new problems. We should not abandon hope, but the emerging world problematique demands more realism and resolve.

Bibliographic Note

Tomorrow's new leaders can benefit from reading books by two very different authors.

The Art of Leading Collectively: Co-Creating a Sustainable, Socially Just Future by Petra Kuenkel (Chelsea Green, 2016, 290p. Foreword by Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker) argues for changing the traditional leadership paradigm focused on individuals, to building the capacity of groups to move issues of common concern—collective leadership for sustainability, or what David Harries calls “leadership.” (Reviewed in *Eruditio*, 2:2, July-August 2016; www.worldacademy.org)

A very different approach to leadership, addressed to political leaders and “all who are worried about the future of humanity,” is provided by Israeli political scientist Yehezkel Dror’s For Rulers: Priming Political Leaders for Saving Humanity from Itself (Westphalia Press/Policy Studies Organization, Aug 2017, 103p), which focuses largely on “the cascading power of science and technology” for better or worse, as regards robots, nuclear war, human enhancements, climate change, etc. This “urgent memo” (reviewed in *CADMUS*, 3:3, Oct 2017, 169-171) is an updated and far shorter version of the near-encyclopedic Avant-Garde Politician: Leaders for a New Epoch (Westphalia Press, 2014, 350p; reviewed in *CADMUS*, 2:3, Oct 2014, 170-179).

IMPORTANT NOTE: Due to space considerations in this issue, publication of the companion essay, “Scientists Reporting: Top 20 Recent Online Reports on the Global Environmental Emergency,” has been postponed until the Fall 2019 issue of CADMUS. The “Top 20” reports are organized in five categories: Climate, Health, and Energy; Land and Seas; Food, Water, and Biodiversity; Agendas for Action; and Overviews. They represent the collective efforts of IPCC, IEA, IPBES, IUCN, NOAA, WRI, UNESCO, WWF, UNEP, CoR, etc., and amply illustrate “Essential Ideas” #9 and especially #10. A pre-publication draft can be requested from mmarien@twcny.rr.com.

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