

# **Brundtland Report: A 20 Years Update**

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It is my pleasure to address this conference. This conference on European sustainability policies takes place in a extremely challenging period:

- 20 years after the release of the Brundtland Report,
- with the report of Sir Niklas Stern and the recent IPCC findings,
- with a new generation of National Sustainability Strategies,
- on the eve of the G8 summit at the end of this week and the upcoming negotiations of a Kyoto follow up.

These are milestones of the period of transition we are in, with lots of things having changed in the last 20 years. That is why I am inviting you to make further use of a Report which had been released 20 years ago. I think, the key Brundtland message continues to challenge the ignorance and inadequacy of mainstream politics. I invite you:

- To criticize sustainability policies where they seem to miss the point.
- To discuss what should be added or expanded, or what needs to be rethought.

- And to draw conclusions to upgrade the impact of sustainability strategies in politics, in the economy and in the civil society.

## I

20 years ago, the World Commission on Environment and Development, in which I had the honour to be a member, released its report. The report was called “Our Common Future. A global agenda for change”. Gro Harlem Brundtland chaired this World Commission. In those times she was the Prime Minister of Norway, later she became President of the World Health Organisation. I had the pleasure to meet her recently in New York and to share experiences down the road of the last 20 years. I am glad to tell you that Gro Harlem Brundtland is back in the arena of global policy making. She is now appointed Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General on Climate Change.

The Brundtland Report marks a point in our history when awareness was growing around both the concept of environment and the concept of development. But even today – 20 years later - tensions, controversies, and gridlocks between development and environment still exist. They will continue unless we really respect the notion of sustainability. The challenge of meeting the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs was moulded by the Commission into the concept of sustainable development. 20 years ago, this was totally new.

- New was the notion of equity and justice within and between generations.
- New was the clear idea of developing a shared understanding of the long-term goals for human life on earth.
- New was the idea of new governance instruments and of building collective action.
- New was the resoluteness with which we advocated the need for leadership and building trust with others.

Under prevailing circumstances, all this is still a challenge today.

- We overstep limits of the long-term carrying capacity in the one world we share. – There is no common future, unless we adapted our use of natural resources.
- The majority of the world’s population only has a small share in this overuse of resources. – There is no way towards environmental responsibility, unless we addressed unequal opportunity and unequal distribution of prosperity.
- Mainstream policies are still centered on administrative command and control approaches. – There is no sustainability politics, unless we overcome this reduction and find new ways to include civil society and the private sector.

Bernhard Chidzero – one of my colleagues in the Brundtland Commission from Africa – told us: “Poverty is the main reason for the pollution of the environment”. 20 years ago I was not sure if this is true. Today I know that this is definitely true for the developing and emerging countries. And while humankind doubtless had the capacity to destroy life on earth, humankind had never had greater capacities and possibilities to safeguard the environment and to improve the living conditions for all people on earth.

Question is how to make that happen.

The most powerful recommendation we came up with in our Report was the following: “Within an appropriate period of time after the presentation of the report to the General Assembly an international conference could be convened.” This brought the Rio-process on the agenda. It provided momentum. We experienced high expectations. We also experienced the downs in the global follow up of Rio. There was a multitude of gatherings, from Kyoto to Marrakech. The world adopted the Millennium Development Goals. Johannesburg openly displayed both frustrations and unwillingness.

For updating the Brundtland-Message we have to acknowledge that the world has changed dramatically: The Cold War ended and the stalled two-block confrontation gave way to a multipolar world. The Third World is on the move. With powerful economies emerging the Third World countries are no longer a coherent unity. They differentiate actively the patterns of globalisation. Totalitarianism is on the rise and persistent wars add to the opaqueness of world politics. Communications opens new ways into a totally different culture. Globalisation has added new opportunities and new questions.

I'm convinced that the Brundtland-Report holds a basis that is still solid today. To name six key issues:

- **Conflict Prevention:** The Report does not at all underestimate the issue of proliferation of nuclear arms. However, the situation has even worsened. Probably, the spread in use of nuclear weapon systems is already out of control. In general, arms trade is the one single problem with the most anti-development impact.
- **Poverty:** The Millenium Development Goals are a remarkable effort. There is progress in many places in the world. However, it is very clear: The business-as-usual approach will not come to meet the MDG requirements.
- **Growth:** Our pledge was that growth is about choice, about quality, and that means: about sustainability. Up until today, it is not yet understood nor implemented that dependence on finite resources and environmental damage is anti-growth politics. The perspective on growth is still deteriorated by inadequate economic thinking. It was Albert Einstein who told us: „You cannot solve the problem with the same thinking which created the problem.“
- **Energy and climate:** In 1987, we compared climate change with the threat of nuclear war. This statement was highly criticized. But today we know: We were right. Now, the scientific evidence is overwhelming, and the economics of climate change are clear. The Stern report tells us, what has to be done. It is time for action for a low carbon economy.
- **Food security:** Twenty years ago, the world produces more food per head of population than ever before in human history. However, food security and safety are today more on the brink than 20 years ago. Linking the oil price to the pricing of food is creating a new problem. That is exactly the most urgent problem of bioenergy strategies.
- **Urbanisation sprawl and megacities** are putting themselves at risk in terms of resource consumption. In the international arena, we misjudged the importance of soil. Once soil devastation has already turned into decreasing access to agricultural land, this is likely to produce aggression. The Convention on Desertification and Soils has started out too weak and with no adequate governance.

These are six issues of the Brundtland Report which are still valid today.

But: The most powerful recommendation of our Report was not on substance but on procedure. It brought the Rio-Summit on the agenda. The Earth summit influenced all subsequent United Nations policies. Today it is beyond any doubt: Sustainable development has all characteristics that qualify for a major political momentum. And there are positive and encouraging trends.

- Take a closer look into Europe. The enlargement of the European Union is a great move. It is a smart revolution. The Aquis Communautaire is an invitation to democracy and peace. We are on a good way to make it an invitation to sustainability policies as well. The EU sustainability strategy encourages us to think harder and to implement sustainability more effectively.
- Take a closer look into what happens in Asia in terms of growth and sustainability. It is encouraging to learn that nowadays we discuss sustainability at eye level. We have all opportunities to merge what we still wrongly perceive as development aid into what I would say ought to be a mutual learning.
- Take a closer look into what happens in the United States on the regional level and in particular in the private sector. What you see are bottom-up movements with fantastic and inspiring initiatives. You see emission trading, renewables energies increasing their share of energy supply, efficiency gains and the prospect to commercialise a low carbon power plant.

## II

What does all this mean to us today? A couple of days before the Heiligendamm G8 meeting I would like to be crystal clear that now we need to draw a line in the sand.

In the run up to the G8 summit, the German EU Presidency negotiated hard for all I know. As Chair of the German Sustainable Development Council I advocated making the G8 summit a benchmark for a broader global strategy to reduce carbon emissions. This should involve both developed and developing countries, the business sector and civil society. The German negotiators introduced ambitious targets for curbing greenhouse gas emission. They proposed for G8 to commit to limit global temperature rise to below 2°C compared to pre-industrial levels.

Now, President Bush has tabled his initiative for the G8 summit. He suggests for like-minded countries to talk about an approach replacing the Kyoto-Regime. And he laid out what his approach would be about. It is technology: Technology without any CO2 limits and without any capping mechanism.

Some say that the Bush initiative is an opening. But I have to say, sorry, I am not convinced.

Remember Albert Einstein? There is no solving the problem with the same thinking which created the problem.

President Bush is missing the point because he does not see the economics of CO2 reduction. Market economy created the climate disaster as it once created the environmental pollution. Fixing the problem means providing market economy with a frame, and giving it directions. That is exactly what the European ETS, the emission trading system, the carbon capping and the other climate regulations are about. We need caps and targets for market economy to function for the environment. At the end of the day, we need it under the umbrella of the United Nations.

There is no solution without any regulatory frame. Technology needs economy. And economy needs some framing.

What we do not need is continued lip service for another 18 months.

The hazards of climate change can't be neglected; they can't be rejected or ignored. Those who ignore the effects of climate change – I want to be very clear – they act irresponsible, irrational and immoral.

From my point of view, those who are committed to bring climate change to a halt should no longer wait for other big emitters to jump on the band wagon. I know that effective action against climate change has to be global action. So, we'd better have the big emission countries on board. But I also know that to just wait for them to step on board does not make sense. It is one of the key European historic lessons of the last century: Appeasement politics tends to be part of the problem, not part of the solution.

I call it an appeasement policy to talk helplessly around the issues of climate policy. We can not afford any more of this climate appeasement. Avoiding straight language

is wrong. Avoiding a clear language towards the US Administration as regards the climate policies is as wrong as avoiding clear positions when you talk about human rights in China.

And, European economy is strong enough to lead the way forward if they link up with the emerging economies in Asia and Africa and even with some regional initiatives in US. I suggest for European politicians to feel self-confident enough to build a global low-carbon-community. Europe can achieve to be the most competitive and the most dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world – but only if Europe is actively setting the standard. A low-carbon economy is as close as you can get to set new standards and to create new markets. This is what policy makers all over the world have to learn.

I advocate two new approaches in global governance.

- First, we awfully need a revival of multilateralism. There is no doubt that we have to rethink the global governance and UN institutions as regards the environment and sustainability issues. The future of multilateralism is bound to legitimacy, credibility, and trust – all of which I do not see well guarded in the current system.
- Second, I suggest new stimulus and initiatives at the national level. National action towards global sustainability is the one most important factor. It has been neglected for far too long. Europe can no longer afford to wait for global conventions. From a German perspective I can tell you we know how to design a business case for sustainability. Take the example of renewable energies. To introduce a lead market for innovative technologies we do not want to wait for a world wide level playing field. Rather, it should make use of regulatory competitiveness in creating lead markets.

Globalisation does not render national state policies unnecessary. National pioneering is internationally rewarded. Sustainability strategies play an important role as drivers for innovations on sub-national, national, regional and global level. The transition towards a low carbon emission society needs to develop long term predictable policy frameworks at the national level. This is exactly what sustainability strategies are for. For this, we need comprehensive management tools, and new political thinking. Sustainability strategies are key to overcome the climate crisis.

Many are reluctant to agree to obligations that others will escape. We must be sensitive to such concerns as we move forward. But we should not be blinded or lose faith in the cause. We must build trust, and find the common ground.

### III

If I were to single out the one most important overall challenge for sustainability strategies, the management instruments would be it. In the past we have missed this point; we have underestimated the management aspect of sustainability. This was an error. For sustainability strategies the management approach is the crucial part. Measurement is a prerequisite for good management. You can only manage what you can measure. And all you can measure is therefore not already managed. You need management skills. You will need them excessively the more you deal with complex sustainability indicators, targets and performance criteria.

Since the days of the Brundtland report a lot has happened in this area. I see two management cultures emerging, one in the private sector, the other one in the public sector.

- Private Sector: Frontrunner enterprises improved sustainability - and corporate responsibility – performance. We have sophisticated forms of sustainability reporting, supply chain management, and corporate sustainability indices. We see improved rating and ranking tools for measuring efforts in the business community. Best practices are used as stimulus for organizing learning processes.
- Public sphere: In the public sector instruments such as quantified targets and indicators, national sustainability strategies, independent national Councils for sustainable development are worthwhile managing tools.

My assessment: There is more momentum today in the private sector than it is in the public sector. With all limitations that I clearly see and with all legitimate fears as to possible window dressing, it is my assessment that the private sector is far ahead of the public sector. Granted, it is only a minority of enterprises taking action. But at the end of the day, this minority will be setting the benchmark.

My point is: These two cultures have hardly any point of linkage. But they ought to have. In the future we should try and compile and combine these instruments. Integration of segregated policies is at the heart of the Brundtland mission. Thinking



in silos is the basis for failure. The Brundtland Report addressed the management of the Commons. That's what we called it: The Commons.

I do not see the missing link between private and public management tools addressed adequately. We missed the point in the Brundtland Report. And in the past 20 years no powerful initiative was taken to fill this gap. The all too fragmented policies towards energy efficiency are a good example. I am afraid we will not be in the position to achieve the ambitious targets of energy efficiency if we do not develop new instruments that link the business case to the regulatory framework, and to the demand-side approaches and consumption patterns. This challenges our current policy making and administration. The challenge is to interlink administration and civil society. The challenge is to develop a new brand of management tools.

This is a challenge for elaborating and debating sustainability strategies. We have to qualify those strategies where they exist and to ask for sustainability strategies where they do not exist. From my point of view, those strategies should be empowered to create a framework for an integrative approach that binds together the public community with both the scientific as well as the business community.

We need more fantasy. We need more courage and trust to experiment with sustainability strategies.

I advocate taking sustainability strategies serious. Participation and dialogue between stakeholders from government, business, science and civil society is crucial. Leadership develops where sustainability strategies provide for public visibility and ambitious processes.

For this the Brundtland Report had laid the seeds successfully. Today, we have to move on. Today's challenge is to engineer the common responsibility and to design new tools.

At the core of it I see independent stakeholder Councils. I encourage every Member of the European Union to involve civil society and the business community in that kind of Council. It is of high importance to create platforms for ongoing network, dialogues and sharing experience on sustainable development.

For me it is clear that an Advisory Council needs a counterpart on the side of the administration with high-level leadership. It is also mandatory that a Council is not only reporting to Government, but develops also a standing in the public debate on

sustainability. Communication is important in a society which is highly influenced, sometimes even determined by the media.

I appreciate the initiative of the European Commission promoting the concept of peer reviews. I would like to see it expanded into what I would like to call a mutual learning experience. In this sense, peer reviews can add innovation to a national strategy.

From my experience, to find the way to cascade political action is one of the big mysteries of politics. We need the magic key to open doors for long term transition of society. We need to open doors so that business community will be attracted and encouraged to get themselves involved. The lesson of Sustainability Councils is: There is no way to attract the awareness of the private sector unless you involve civil society thoroughly and in a transparent way.

The key to open this door is leadership. This is the core of the problem of sustainability policies - constantly since 20 years. And as for celebrating the 20 years anniversary of the Brundtland Report I ask you to keep the words of the great French Jean Jaurès in mind: "Tradition means to keep the fire alive and not to admire the ashes."