



# United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

June 6, 2012

## How can we create a sustainable future?

In May this year, in the run up to the Rio Conference, a new report to the Club of Rome was launched, entitled: *2052 – A Global Forecast for the Next Forty Years*, in which author Jorgen Randers tries to answer the question about the state of the world in forty years' time. The Report raises fundamental questions about the challenges facing humankind, and whether the planet can survive if we continue to over consume, the same question behind the Rio negotiations.

The report: *2052* is pragmatic, but its predictions are sufficiently unsettling and startling to start the debate about the need for fundamental change, and this is what we should be talking about at the Rio Conference.

Humanity's systems, which uphold "business-as-usual" are very resilient towards real change. Rapid change does not happen until people's patience caused by the negative consequences of "business-as-usual" (climate change effects, inequity, resource depletion) runs out. The challenge is that society's main institutions: democracy and economy are based on short-termism, resulting in a slow societal response to challenges. However, what we need are long-term solutions and investments.

Randers believes, that

- Humanity is in overshoot (mainly climate-related) and that while the results will not be as hard as some had feared, we are still in for a bumpy landing. Humanity has a forty-year window to avoid the most serious negative consequences of its decades-long overconsumption splurge.
- The process of adapting humanity to the planet's limitations may be too slow to stop planetary decline. Currently the human demand on the biosphere exceeds the global bio-capacity by some 40%
- Global population will grow, peaking at 8.1 billion people in 2042 because of rapid decline in urban fertility
- Global GDP will grow, but much slower than generally expected because of slow productivity growth in mature economies, and lack of take-off in the 186 poorer countries.
- Global GDP will peak after 2052, and investment share of the GDP will grow as society is gradually forced to handle issues of depletion, pollution, biodiversity decline, climate change and inequity, slowing growth in consumption growth will slow, with fall in disposable income in some places
- Global energy use will reach a peak in 2040, because of continued increase in energy efficiency

- CO2 emissions will peak in 2030, because of a shift toward low-carbon sources of power and heat. Nevertheless, CO2 concentrations will grow, and the global average temperature will pass the danger threshold of +2 C by 2050, and peak at 2.8 C in 2080, which could trigger self-reinforcing “run-away” warming with a possible collapse in the second half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- The United States will experience the greatest stagnation, while the process of stagnation will occur more gradually in the other OECD countries. China and Brazil, Russia, India, South Africa and ten leading emerging economies will progress, but this will still leave 3 billion people in severe poverty.

### **The need to fundamentally change our ways**

Today's cataclysmic climatic effects demonstrate that regardless of modern society's many achievements, we could be on a path of un-managed decline. We have the opportunity to fundamentally change our ways, but it seems that rather than controlling our destiny, we are merely drifting into our future.

The fundamental questions are:

- Where is the world heading?
- What world do we want to live in and how do we get there within the time available?
- Are our main societal systems: capitalism and democracy capable, in their current form, of leading us into an equitable and sustainable world? Are they truly fit for purpose?

Over the next 18 months, when the Rio conference is just a memory, the Club of Rome will be holding a debate on the future of the planet. It will be asking: What will the world be like in 40 years time? Where will the current dynamics lead us? Will it be the sort of world in which we want to live? What world do we want to live in and how can we make it a reality?

The debate will address the root causes of the systemic crisis from a number of important aspects: the need for a different set of values underlying society and economy; the need to change economic theory and practice and safeguard resources; the need to create a more equal society, which also produces near to full employment; and the need to redesign governance systems that put people at their centre.

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