Editorial: The Time is Now

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I recently heard a US economist suggest that in terms of sustainability what we are really looking for is the equivalent of the iPhone; a technology that solves environmental issues in one readily applicable device that can be reproduced and mass marketed throughout the world in a seamless, high tech/global market fix. While he may well have been speaking tongue-in-cheek, I suspect that quite a few people out there think that high technology via the global market mechanism is going to produce the answer to global environmental and social ills. It is precisely this type of expectation that is leading us into a false sense that all those daunting global problems are in the domain of 'to be solved by others in the future'. Big issues such as climate change, polluted waters, increasing inequality and poverty, violence and conflict are, we think, deep down, the responsibility of scientists, governments and possibly financial investors who know far better than the ordinary person what is going on and no doubt will get their act together soon. Meanwhile, we can go on in our small corner of the world trying to do our best: Some of us coping with immediate tragedy and its fall out; others with an eye on the blogs, media, their social network or twitter pulled by solidarity into action; and some again engaged in trying to shape the outcomes of UN resolutions, conferences and declarations. As the same economist observed the current financial and climate crises are just not bad enough to shake those that rule the world (he was speaking of banks rather than Presidents or Prime Ministers) into actually doing anything other than business as usual.

So beyond wondering just how many disasters have to happen, the question is how long do we have to wait until the top 1 percent of 1 percent that control the world's wealth decide we need to change economic models? When do we expect their ok to tackle inequality and climate change and invest in solar and wind energy, provide funding for all the wonderful rights-based ecological culturally sensitive people-centred ideas for sustainable living? Just how do we pin down the world's elite to acknowledge that they too live on this Earth, and have responsibilities? How long do we dream on?

The message from the 50 contributors to this journal is that we can no longer wait. We have to act now. Sustainability is not about future generations, it is about now and the citizens of today's generation. The real challenge is to change the lifestyles and expectations of the (today) comfortably off in the world. We all need to start coping with global disasters and they are all of our responsibilities. The Earth is collectively shared by humanity, as is the future. We can forget any promise of high tech solutions, indeed we should instead be aware of the very real dangers of technological solutions that we cannot control, we need only look at the nuclear disaster in Japan. On the other hand,

we need to use technology to shape and design our lives in keeping with changing environments, our well-being and our global community needs, as long as we finally acknowledge the limits to growth, ecologically, socially as well as economically.

We are living in difficult times, undoubtedly, but there are signs of change and therefore hope in working in our localities, conscious of how the global shapes our lives. We have to be acutely aware of our interconnections with others, what we share as well as what is so diverse in our lives, environments and cultures. John Feffer has named the moment we live in as the age of activism (Feffer, 2011). Beginning with the Battle of Seattle in 1999, the age of activism is manifest not only in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region but also in Wisconsin, in the favelas of Rio and on the streets of Athens, the marches in the Eastern Congo against gender-based violence, in the Chiapas protecting indigenous culture. They are the peace movements, the food sovereignty movements, that anti-globalization, and women's rights movements. They are the attempts of local communities to hold governments accountable to the scarcity imposed by ecological and economic limits and the demands for social justice, indigenous rights, gender equality and a truly democratic state. These are the struggles to construct a new political entity, the 'activist state' that sustains women and men, the Earth and democracy. These struggles are often led, as the articles in this journal indicate, by women in community organizations that practice the personal is political, by young people who feel they have nothing to lose, and by indigenous people whose ways of living have been all but destroyed, but whose vision is inspiring many to believe that another world is possible. We live in, as Feffer warns, a 'do – or – die' moment, before we sink 'inexorably into an Age of Apocalypse'.

Many voices and many locations will lead the pathways to sustainability that is why this issue of *Development* features 50 short opinion pieces from 30 countries. The issue aims to capture the variety of voices, positions, passions and interests

that have shaped *Development* over the years and are urging all of us to move forward to act. The sense of urgency can be heard in each of the articles from authors of all ages whether based in the research community, international and national policymaking arena, local and global civil society movements or in the development profession. Produced for The Society for International Development World Congress in July 2011 in Washington, DC, the issue aims to bring multiple views into the dialogue there on 'Our Common Challenge: A World Moving Toward a Sustainable Future'.

The contributions have been divided into four sections. In the upfront section, members of the editorial board boldly outline the challenges they see for transformative agendas towards sustainability. The second set of articles take up the vital issue of ecological sustainability with insightful critiques of current development patterns. The Dialogue section gives voice to eight activists deeply involved in the World Social Forum process with their candid views of what happened in the latest WSF held in Dakar in February 2011, where over 70,000 social movement activists and NGOs gathered to strategize to make another world possible just as the protests in the MENA region were heralding regime changes. A fourth section sets out the challenges confronting peoples in the struggle for their well-being and livelihoods in marginal places and positions. Throughout the journal the analysis is marked by a strong gender, rights and alternative positioning. Three in-depth book reviews pick up issues of sustainability in relation to ecology, rights and economics followed by a brief overview article showing how sustainability has long been a focus of discussions in *Development*. The journal issue concludes with a strong statement from the Great Transition Initiative, which has written a manifesto with a title taken from the famous song by John Lennon, 'Imagine'.

From many points of view, the message that emerges from the journal is clear, the time is now, we have to act with other citizens in multiple ways to make the change to sustainability happen.

Reference

Feffer, John (2011) 'The Age of Activism', *Foreign Policy in Focus*, <http://www.commondreams.org/view/2011/03/17-13>, accessed 17 March 2011.