CLUB OF ROME 50TH CELEBRATION

It is amazing how small beginnings often become turning points. A dinner table of concerned global citizens 50 years ago led to the formation of a non-organization, the Club of Rome. This non-organization was to later commission a modelling program at MIT that led to the groundbreaking report – The Limits to Growth, which challenged a complacent world.

The Limits to Growth was a wake up call by a group of individuals who set out on a mission "to rebel against suicidal ignorance of the human condition". Suicidal ignorance was born of the arrogance of those in leadership in both the public and private sectors. These leaders believed and acted in a manner suggesting that our planet and universe has unlimited resources to be exploited at will. The Limits to Growth told a new and rebellious story. We are here today to pay tribute to the pioneers of the Club of Rome for their efforts to alert us to the dangers of breeching planetary resource boundaries.

I am a proud member of the Club of Rome from the African continent, the cradle of humanity. The cradle is rocked by the rhythm of the storylines of fables, songs and poems. Each of the stories the human race grew up on, carries invaluable messages of wisdom across generations, boundaries and epochs.

My siblings and me grew up on fireside fables narrated by our great-grandmother. She was totally illiterate, but exuded wisdom. We drank of the wisdom of her fables drawn heavily from the natural world. The stories made no distinction between animals, birds, vegetation and humans. My great-grandmother made animals speak our language and made us enter into the psyche of animals to understand our own psyches.

The moral lesson at the end of each story was clear - those who care for others and the environment, and learn lessons from nature, triumph. Even though many of the
paths walked by those keen to learn are often strewn with pain and sorrow, perseverance is the only way forward. Story telling is an art.

Today the CoR is challenged to consider how we become new rebels in an environment in which “suicidal ignorance” continues to be promoted as "science" and rational policy. Recent reports to the Club of Rome not only confirm the central thesis of Limits to Growth, but challenge the very notion of “growth” that is spread by the neo-liberal capitalist system as the only raison detre for human development efforts.

**Time for a New Vision**

The Club of Rome is challenging humanity to reimagine a world beyond the conventional wisdom spread by the pseudoscience of neo-liberal economics. As members of the CoR we need to articulate a compelling vision of the world we would like to leave to our children’s children.

Kate Raworth, in her book, *Doughnut Economics*, points us in a more desirable direction. She quantifies the social foundation for a human economy based on meeting the basic needs of all humans. She lays out how humanity must operate below the planetary boundaries but above the minimum foundation needed to ensure human wellbeing and dignity. She calls this the sweet spot, the “safe and just operating space for humanity.”

I am encouraged by the growing convergence of those seeking to reimagine and shape a vision of a more sustainable world around a core set of values. For example, The WEF Global Agenda Council on Values has studied these issues over many years and determined that some values transcend religion, nationality and politics. The core values to which most faiths and enlightened civilizations subscribe are:

The concept of **human dignity**, encompassing human rights and responsibilities;

The **common good**—the idea that all institutions should be pursuing the common good; and

**Stewardship**, both of the planet and of resources for future generations.

These core values form the foundation of enduring holistic indigenous cultures across the globe, as well as in those countries and regions that have deliberately invested in inclusive, well-being orientated and political economic models. Japanese and indigenous people in both Asia and the Americas have retained these values at the core of their cultures. The African cultural setting I grew up in instilled these core values into us, and continues to do so in those parts of the continent that have resisted the false narrative of the “me, myself, and I” culture.

Africa has the opportunity of taking advantage of the strong affinity to the core values of human dignity, common good and stewardship in most of its diverse cultures to join the growing progressive movement leading the way to reimagine a more sustainable future.

The critical success factor in Africa’s socio-economic transformation to more sustainable prosperous development models would be to embrace ownership and stewardship of its future. Ownership and stewardship require concerted effort to move away from mind-sets inherited from authoritarian models of social relationships (pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial) to more egalitarian ones. Such mind-set shifts would enable African citizens to actively take ownership of shaping the futures they desire rather than continue to be passive subjects of corrupt unaccountable leaders.

We know that mind-set change is difficult and requires long-term investment in promoting a reconnection between the spirit, mind and body. **The Nordic Secret** details the journey Nordic countries had to walk from the mid-1800s to the 1930s to emerge from amongst the least developed European countries to the top performers in
The shift from the feudal system mind-set to embrace the egalitarianism of social democracy reflect emerging wisdom that equality is good for everyone – rich and poor\(^2\).

Mind-set shift is the missing link in Africa. The tragic reality of African continent’s persistent poverty and inequality affecting the majority of its people despite its rich endowed with the resources can only be ended when this essential shift occurs. Regenerating values based governance models that promote human dignity, common good and stewardship by all citizens would lay the foundation for a new narrative in Africa, by Africans linking them as co-creators of a world that can live its commitments to sustainable development goals.

A Reimagined Africa

I dream of an Africa that has rediscover the greatness that made it the cradle of humanity. I dream of an Africa that leverages its relative under-development to adopt regenerative economic models that are being piloted across the globe to reposition itself as a front –runner in building sustainable cities and rural settlements.

UN-Habitat suggests a three-pronged approach to sustainable cities, based on effective and comprehensive urban legislation, proper urban planning and design, and adequate financing for projects. The three principles can be levers for the transformation of cities and human settlements into centres of environmental, economic and social sustainability.

The Africa I dream of would stop generating stranded assets such as the detructive coal mines and coal fired power stations being built in my own country. The tragedy is not only the wasted billions invested by the state, but the destruction of the most fertile agricultural land in

Mpumalanga province. Africa has an abundance of sun, wind and large waterfalls that should make reposition it as a renewable energy user and exporter on note.

The Africa I dream of would turn its huge slum areas, estimated population of 200 million, into smart cities by deploying the latest building technologies and its abundant renewable energy sources. Africa’s poor infrastructure should be turned into an opportunities for utilizing modern more sustainable materials to create millions of jobs and training facilities for its youthful population.

A reimagined Africa would be one of the most sustainable food baskets in the world. Modernizing the existing large organic food production base, 70% of which is run by women, could create a carbon based agricultural system equal to none. Secure ownership models would be needed to incentivise women and young people, the majority economically active population, to become sustainably productive.

The Africa we dream of should not be disposing of the continent’s rich land resources through undermining long-term leases to foreign countries for extractive purposes of mining and agriculture. African citizens should assert their rights to ownership of the land and responsibility for stewardship for the benefit of future generations of Africans.

The Blue Economy models popularised by Gunter Pauli, would find fertile groud for local and large scale production of goods and services to make the country sustainably prosperous. Breaking with the neo-liberal development models that have perpetuated extractive industrial practices that have benefitted elites, would usher in the age of inclusive regenerative development.

**Conclusion**

The CoR is well positioned to continue the role of championing new narratives that challenge humanity to become better stewards of planetary resources made available to us. We have the knowledge, the technology
and the capacity to collaborate on a large scale across the globe. What is needed is the political will and dedication to champion the new story of values based regenerative development models.

50 years of experimentation provides us with a good base to accelerate the momentum for change. We need smart ways of challenging the pseudo science of neo-liberal economic orthodoxy that continue to be taught to young people today. We need to be proactive in mobilizing support for the teaching and practice of regenerative socio-economic development models. Our future depends on this.

Mamphela Ramphele
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