

A Global Approach for Sustainable Growth

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This year, the Global Footprint Network has declared September 27th as "World Overshoot Day". It was only September, yet all of the Earth's natural resources for the year had already been used up. Our planet's clock is ticking.

Today, we are using 1.5 times the amount the planet has to offer. But, there remain people that are suffering from hunger and lacking access to water and electricity. As a matter of fact, the poorest and most vulnerable countries take the largest hit from environmental deterioration. They too are the least responsible for it.



Geographically, the South is being disadvantaged by the industrialisation of the North. The vulnerability is twofold: the countries most at risk are the most dependent on natural resources. E.g. many indigenous people who live in ecosystems, such as small island states, arctic regions and high altitudes, are especially susceptible to the effects of climate change. The economic and ecological interdependence thus created a systemic imbalance at different levels that needs to be corrected.

The access to clean drinking water is a human right and shall be guaranteed in the coming years. The same is valid for the access to electricity, due to its crucial role in development. As the recently published UNDP Human Development report highlights, we need to address the interlinkages between sustainable and equitable progress. The aspirations of those less affluent need to be fully taken into account in achieving greater environmental sustainability. The concept of distributive justice as inter- and intragenerational equity needs to become part of mainstream thinking.

By the mid-21st century, we expect the global population to reach 9 billion. 9 billion people on a planet with shrinking resources. Therefore it is an essential global challenge to use natural resources in a sustainable, fair and efficient way within the next decade.

The European Union is responding to this challenge with its Resource Efficiency Roadmap. Its vision for 2050 includes growth of the European economy in a way that respects planetary boundaries and resource constraints. To be more specific, the overfishing of seas, the overconsumption of natural resources and our impact on ecosystems shall be decreased drastically. Furthermore, the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of land shall be halted. Simultaneously, the quality of water and air, climate protection and our overall ecological footprint shall be improved considerably.

In order to make this vision become reality, we need to involve all stakeholders: Governments shall commit to ambitious national resource efficiency targets; industries need to realise that sustainable business is the way forward and consumers shall make sustainable choices.

Last but not least, we shall take the crisis as a chance and pave the way for a sustainable future. We need to replace the myth of perpetual growth and the associated increase in consumption with a new concept of "good life for all" and its measurement beyond GDP which shall be the new guarantor of prosperity and jobs.

This column is part of the Sustainability in the Good Society Online Debate jointly run by Social Europe Journal, the [Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung London Office](#) and [Compass](#).

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