Global Prosperity and Sustainable Development Goals

Abstract: Negotiations around Sustainable Development Goals and the post-2015 development agenda should go beyond just re-writing goals and targets that adhere to 'sustaining' the same old economic and social models. Instead, societies and governments should take this as an opportunity to advance more radical conceptual and practical approaches that challenge this reductive understanding of 'sustainability'. The paper argues that we should turn our attention to prosperity rather than to development per se, recognising the critical role political and social innovation should have in unleashing individuals' potential to flourishing in a context of finite resources. The interwoven, interdependent and ever-evolving nature of socio-ecological systems, together with the uncertainties and 'unknowns' that characterise contemporary reality, questions the relevance of one-size-fits-all goals. There is no single route to prosperity; diversity of objectives is essential and fundamental. Learning from initiatives in the Global South, such as the case of agroecology, might pave the way towards this paradigm shift.

Keywords: prosperity; sustainable development goals; global south; agroecology

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper argues that we need to rethink how we conceptualize, organize and transform the societies we live in, and in tandem, we will need to move away from established notions of development towards broader understandings of prosperity. Orthodox growth models presume the infinite consumption of finite planetary resources. We are on an unsustainable trajectory, and we do not seem to know how to get off. Since the 17th century, our economic models and social and political institutions have promoted a version of human flourishing and prosperity synonymous or concurrent with the growth of material wealth. We have now arrived at a historical turning point, and we need a profound paradigm shift, one that will force us to abandon some of our overly narrow and outmoded concepts and ideas and fundamentally rethink our responses to the environmental and social challenges we face across the globe. This need for change is increasingly widely recognized, and various new measurements of prosperity (Legatum Institute 2015), well- being (Gough & McGregor 2010; Holland 2008; Nussbaum 2000; UK Office for National Statistics 2015; UNDP 2015), happiness (Centre For Bhutan Studies & GNH Research 2015; Dolan 2014; Thale & Sunstein 2009; The New Economics Foundation 2015) and social progress (SPI 2015) have been proposed. But new metrics alone do little to change behaviours and values, and nor do they provide robust models and mechanisms for envisaging future societies and economies, or for understanding and addressing the conceptual, social and political barriers to the kinds of transformations in ways of living and social institutions that will be necessary.

The scale of transformation is daunting, but so too is the time frame for action. In 2015, the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) shaping national and international efforts around the most pressing environmental and social challenges of the globe in the next 15 years will be announced. But by 2030, world population will have grown from 6.8 to 8.3 billion, five billion people will be living in cities and the world will also require 50% more food, energy and fresh water. The years 2015–2030 is thus a time critical period, not only for carbon emissions and environmental change but also for social innovation.

However, will development theory and practice as we currently understand it provide the necessary social innovation (e.g. Rist 2007)? Will development lead to prosperity? Is development the same thing as prosperity? Critiques of development are legion, both as a discipline and as a practice (Chambers 2012; Hart 2001; Peet & Hartwick 2009). For a good 20 years and more, there has been talk of post-development (Escobar 2000; Pieterse 2000; Rahnema & Bawtree 1997; Ziai 2007). The major difficulty here is that while there are critiques, few alternatives are offered (Matthews 2004). If not development then what? If business as usual will not work, then what will? Economic fragility, armed conflict and now Ebola are all contributing to a sense of global risk and uncertainty, but such uncertainty is magnified by a lack of clear direction. There is evident political and theoretical poverty, as well as economic poverty.

The lack of clear alternatives and uncertainty of direction is reflected in negotiations over the post-2015 development agenda. In June 2014, the Open Working Group released the 'Introduction and Proposed Goals and Targets on Sustainable Development for the Post 2015 Development Agenda' (UN 2014), which proposed 17 SDGs to be attained by 2030, with 169 associated targets. This was something of an own goal! The range and breadth of the SDGs in their current form will generate real challenges for implementing coherent action (Norton et al., 2014). This wish list of 17 SDGs with 169 targets may, of course, be whittled down. The deadline approaches. What is interesting - but perhaps unsurprising - is that the online consultation on the post-2015 SDGs 'My World' produced a clearer set of priorities. The leading four were education, health care, job opportunities and an honest and responsive government. All of these came ahead of 'affordable food and nutrition' (UN, nd). The fundamentals are clear in many different contexts around the world and have not shifted. This is not surprising because whatever development is about, it must in some way be about standards, interventions according to some standard of improvement in certain areas. This is reflected in the Sustainable Development Solutions Network's proposal for action that the SDGs should 'leave no one behind' (SDSN 2014; SDSN 2015).

It seems impossible to imagine how there could be change of sufficient magnitude on so many urgent issues without setting standards and timelines for their attainment. So, we do need goals, but should the SDGs themselves be our only goals? Looking at the process of consultation that has gone on concerning the post-2015 SDGs, something much more hopeful than the enumeration of 169 targets has actually emerged. These are a series of themes that set out a potentially radical break with current Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): (1) localizing the agenda and the critical role of local stakeholders in identifying and investing in local levels of ownership, implementation, monitoring and accountability (Lucci 2015); (2) embedding citizen participation in the new agenda for design, monitoring and accountability; (3) the importance of culture and the need to harness values and diversity; and (4) a refigured role for government and business. The private sector must act as a major driver for sustainability—and not a net cost—but, most critical of all, government policy must reinforce the behaviours of progressive companies that take account of their social and environmental impacts.

These themes, if turned into principles, then models for action, then monitorable outcomes, could potentially set a whole new framework for action that would transform the implementation of whatever post-2015 goals are finally selected. They would change the way in which we all do business. But there is a simple proposition to be made here and that is that this framework and other changes in theoretical models, assumptions and framing devices should precede and not follow the setting of goals or standards. Goals and standards are a necessary, but not sufficient, condition. The problem in the past is that MDGs - the standards - became both the vehicle for and the desired outcome of development and of social change more generally, whereas the multiple challenges we face are not just the self-evident ones of climate change or environmental degradation or conflict or gender inequality, but a much more serious crisis of values and of ideas. In this sense, the MDGs worked within a given set of values and ideas and did not seek to challenge assumptions, but to make the system deliver.

This will not be radical enough for the period 2015–2030; we need to go beyond finding technical solutions to managing resource deficits and sustainability gaps and to speed up processes of socio-economic and political innovation. In discussions around the SDGs, there is a broad recognition that we need an integrated socio-environmental framework if we are to further prosperity in an era of growing environmental risks (e.g. Fitzpatrick 2014; Griggs et al., 2014), but there is little sustained attention to the social innovations necessary to deliver results. While the SDGs are of immense importance, not least because they are based on a consensus that the interconnections between inequality and environmental degradation will continue to exclude poor people from economic well-being in the future (e.g. Gower et al., 2012), the framework behind them still gives insufficient impetus to the need to find new ways of conceptualizing what development should deliver, and consequently insufficient recognition to the realization that we need new theories of society and of social change.

2. SHIFTING FROM DEVELOPMENT TO FUTURE PROSPERITY

I argue that we should turn our attention to prosperity rather than to development per se as a central organizing concept. Prosperity is not wealth or growth in the economy. It is not measured by gross domestic product (GDP). It is about flourishing, the health of society, inclusive political institutions, a guarantee of human capital development and civil liberties. It is about an educated and healthy citizenry who are actively involved in co-designing and co-producing their own futures within the limits of the sustainability of the planet's resources. Prosperity will be the outcome of social and political innovation. It cannot be limited to technical assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of development indicators because it must involve a broader examination of the very kind of development and social progress we would like to promote.
At stake is not only an agreement on the mode of sustaining and producing the resources required to live next to others but also some understanding of the way in which we want to live with others. What distinguishes prosperity from development is a focus on values, on the quality of life and on what makes life worthwhile in specific contexts. There have been a swathe of recent discussions about the

importance of capturing prosperity beyond GDP (see the preceding texts) and the importance of focusing on how to account more accurately all of a nation's human and physical resources, including leisure time, people's sense of community, equality of opportunity and quality of public services. However, these debates have tended to work with a rather normative and singular view of prosperity and how it could be achieved. In reality, prosperity is not a single goal because notions of the good life and the just life are culturally and historically specific. This means that whatever prosperity is, it will be plural and diverse, and while the challenges of prosperity may be global, the solutions will not be.

Focusing attention on the diverse forms of flourishing and the differing mechanisms through which they can be achieved marks a definitive break with dominant development discourse in two ways. Firstly, it challenges the idea that the development agenda should be based on a transfer of models or standards from one mode of flourishing to another, and most especially that this transfer should always proceed from the global north to the global south (Escobar 2011; Rist 1990; Young 2003). Consequently, it disputes the notion of development as a problem and a goal only for the global south, with all that this implies about hierarchy, catch-up models, transfer of knowledge and technology. This view has been under critique from within development theory for some time, but such critiques have had little impact on either development practice or development institutions. The challenge of global prosperity is itself premised on the idea that diversity of objectives is essential and foundational, and that because there is no single route to prosperity, there can be no single economic model of development (Leach et al., 2013).

Secondly, because development understood as prosperity is everyone's problem, we should use the challenge of sustainability and threats to the environment as an experimental nexus for the broader reform of values. Tackling SDGs while leaving current ideas of wealth, value and social progress intact will not deliver the scale and speed of transformation required in the next 15 years. The redefinition of prosperity as a set of systemically interlinked political and social projects will require us to reshape how social and environmental impacts are conceived, measured and

managed. It will potentially change the theory and practice of development by moving us away from the mainstream models of economic development based on growth assumptions. A quest for a form of prosperity that incorporates cultural and moral frameworks understood as diverse ways of tethering what is economically valuable to what is socially desirable would not involve a turn to tradition or the ossification of cultural frameworks, but rather a commitment to an approach that places values at the core of productive life. The focus would be on how to develop new cultural forms in diverse contexts, socially innovative forms of ethical engagement, both within and between communities.

3. RETHINKING THE ECONOMY

One point of departure for developing new cultural forms that place values at the core of productive life is to rethink the idea of the economy. In recent decades, we have arrived at a vision of the world where the social is crowded out by the economic, and where the economy flourishes at the expense of the social. The processes and structures of globalisation and the continual seeking out of cheaper labour and goods have crafted a situation where spaces of production and consumption are increasingly separated from each other, and where many communities find that their experience of labour and effort bears little relation to the quality of their lives.

Habermas (1984, 1987) argued that social well-being depends on a balance between economic and productive activities necessary for physical survival (the system) and the social processes that reproduce social structures and relations, cultural traditions and personal identities (the life world). He envisaged the life world as a space in which communication and meaning creation connect to identity production, and also to the setting out and resolution of ethical and normative concerns. In his formulation, the life world should ideally take precedence over the system, but he suggested that the advent of capitalist modernity had upset this balance leading to a situation where the demands of the system - profitability and growth - had started to displace and distort the values of the life world - community, moral integrity, social relations, aesthetics and forms of consociation. The result was a form of instrumental reasoning

fuelled by a false sense of heightened rationality based on profit maximization that inevitably consumed other forms of reasoning relating to the aesthetic and the ethical. Habermas termed this take over 'colonization', which he understood as the act of the imposition of one system's development principles on another. In Habermasian terms, much of the world is in a state of economic colonization, cultural systems, beliefs, norms, values and lifestyles that are structured and driven by the economic system's demand for growth.

A good example of this is the way in which the issue of sustainability is often treated. Mainstream models hold that sustainability is the key to future policy but continue to tackle the issue largely within a new politics of unsustainability (Blühdorn 2013). Whatever its declared commitments, the politics of sustainability is not powered by attempts to change individual lifestyles, economic values and societal structures in ways that sustain environmental integrity and the achievement of authentic well-being. Instead, its primary concern is to manage the inevitable consequences - social and ecological - of the resolve to sustain the established order. Sustainability in this reductive form is about maintenance rather than transformation. The ever-expanding needs of mobility, technology and shopping have become essentially non-negotiable. They are constitutive of the experience and meaning of self, identity and the social. Prevalent notions of well-being and quality of life demand that ways must be found to meet them. The resolve to sustain what is widely regarded as unsustainable is the central characteristic of contemporary politics, even eco-politics in many parts of the globe. The situation is also made much more complicated by the rise of a global middle class - particularly in China and India - who see no reason why they should bear either the costs of climate change or a reduction in the newly achieved levels of consumption.

The politics of unsustainability has many component parts, but a key element is the ongoing commitment to a model of the global economy based on continuous growth. Developments in late 2014 demonstrated this forcibly. In November 2014, the USA and China announced a greenhouse gas global pact ahead of the Global Climate Summit in Paris in 2015. China, the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world,

agreed to cap its output by 2030 or earlier if possible. Previously, China had only ever pledged to reduce the rapid rate of growth in its emissions, but it has now also promised to increase its use of energy from zero-emission sources to 20% by 2030. The USA pledged to cut its emissions to 26–28% below 2005 levels by 2025 (The White House 2014). These commitments followed the European Union endorsement of a binding 40% reduction of greenhouse gases by 2030 in October 2014 (European Commission 2014). However, at almost the same moment, the G20 announced their recommitment to growth. In their Brisbane communiqué, they committed to 2% increase in their collective GDP in the next 5 years, adding $2trn to the global economy and creating millions of jobs, including drawing 100 million women worldwide into the labour force by 2025. Most of this growth is envisaged as coming from India and China, despite the fact that growth in the emerging economies is slowing markedly (G20 2014). The International Monetary Fund has revised downwards its forecast for emerging market growth on six occasions since late 2011 (Financial Times 2014). This raises real questions about not only the attainability of this growth target but also its very rationality and raison d'etre.

The Brisbane Action Plan (G20 2014), which forms the background to this growth commitment, contains 800 measures in order to bring about this collective uplift. The proliferation of measures - like the proliferation of SDG targets - is not an indication of reservoirs of opportunity but rather of a form of desperation as to how the economic in its current formulation can be maintained. The challenge here for the international community is one about what the dream of a better future will look like if it is not based on unsustainable economic growth. Models privilege certain relationships and processes of transformation over others; consequently, there are likely to be very serious consequences of this complete failure to imagine what an economic system without growth or with very low rates of growth would look like (Heinberg 2011; Hepburn et al., 2014; Jackson 2011). Much more intellectual and policy attention, and resources, need to be focused on how to run economies in situations of sustained low growth, but given the connection between growth, jobs and votes, there seems to be little incentive for many governments to provide these inputs or to advocate for them in the international arena. However, perhaps more

worrying is the absolute resistance to rethinking dominant understandings of the economy, what it values and what drives economic change even in the face of the challenges of the environment.

Can we think about the economy differently? A starting point here is the recognition that the economy does not pre-exist economic models or actions but rather is constituted by them (Çalışkan & Callon 2009; Çalışkan & Callon 2010). The economy itself is a construct, a set of values and framing devices, animating particular practices and institutions. Selecting certain practices in the world, labelling them as the 'real' economy and then theorising the interactions between these selected practices as 'the economy' inevitably privilege certain trajectories and parameters of change. Anthropology has long argued that the separation of the economic from the social is historically and culturally specific. The current financialisation of the social—for example, the dependency of family and household reproduction on mortgage debt—is an example of economic colonisation, and also of the historical character of the shifting dependencies and overdeterminations of the economic and the social. Financialisation as a form of colonization or economisation changes how social institutions function and for what purpose (Davis & Kim 2015). The scale of concern with how the international economy functions, and with dominant notions of what constitutes the economic, as we move into the determination of the SDGs is readily apparent in the many efforts to recast the economy and to privilege different practices and processes of change: the diverse economy (Gibson-Graham 1996; Gibson-Graham 2002), the care economy (Eisler 2008), the foundational economy (Manchester Capitalism 2015; Williams et al., 2013), the circular economy (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2015), the green economy (Green Economy Coalition 2015), the doughnut economy (Raworth 2015), the sustainable economy and the dignity economy (Lindner 2012). Many of these productive ways of thinking through humanly sustainable lifestyles draw on older anthropological arguments about the embedded nature of economic practices and their connections to issues of social form. Such ideas have been around in different guises for a very long time, but it is sadly the case that none of these reformulations, or the alternative views of the economy derived from them, have as much traction as they should in policies or politics around

the world.

4. THE EXAMPLE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

A predominant concern within much of development practice and thinking is about rural households. Over the last 50 years or so, rural households and their hoped for processes of development have been set within a framework of mechanization, marketisation, proletarianisation and rural migration. This framework has set the parameters for understanding what should be the key drivers of change in rural economies, and within the terms of development policies, it has been envisaged as both unidirectional and globally applicable. However, recent work on diverse economies has emphasized - and not for the first time - that such frameworks for change obscure the fact that change processes in rural areas are not unidirectional and are situated within diverse economies, which change in different ways at different times (Gibson-Graham 2008). Despite these insights, in much development thinking and policy, the orthodoxy has continued that rural economies must connect themselves to markets and to global growth to pull themselves out of poverty. While it is clear that the eradication of poverty in the context of growing inequalities is a rising, not diminishing, challenge, despite improvements in human capital development, the idea that global growth is the only solution to poverty eradication continues to be maintained. The key here is a set of assumptions underpinning the idea of what constitutes economic progress or development. Broadly stated, these include a move from non-market to market, from farm work to non-farm work, rising agricultural productivity and the release of surplus labour into a diversified non-farm sector (Gibson-Graham 2008). In other words, a model of progress and economic development largely drawn from the historical experiences of Europe. Rural development policy is further based on ideas about an agency that assumes atomistic rational decision-making, maximisation, optimisation and profit. As Escobar has pointed out, the current models of development and the theories of economic transformation behind them erase the complexity and diversity of individuals, aspirations, experiences, capacities and circumstances, so that '… a squatter in Mexico city, a Nepalese peasant and a Tuareg nomad become equivalent to each other

as poor and underdeveloped' (Escobar 2011: 53). In short, the dominant development models for rural areas in the global south can be classified as an example of economisation or the colonisation of thinking by economic models associated with pre-theoretical assumptions about human motivation and agency. Worse still, if we look at those countries in the global south that adopted trade liberalisation, privatisation and fiscal discipline through the 1990s, their economic growth rates have turned out to be low not only in absolute terms but also relative to other countries that did not follow such reforms or only partially. China is a classic case in point. The World Bank's own review of policy in the 1990s pointed out that there was no single growth model or formulae or best practice (World Bank 2005). And yet, despite evidence and the widespread recognition that one model with a unified theory of key drivers for change and economic development was neither pulling large enough numbers of people out of poverty nor guaranteeing sustained growth, the mantra that the path to development was well understood and associated with continuous growth remained and remains relatively undented.

In fact of course, to counter such thinking, we have many resources to draw upon, including not only the critiques of market economics in anthropology alluded to earlier but also the work of Robert Chambers and others (Chambers 1988; Chambers & Conway 1991) in development theory in the 1990s on sustainable livelihoods, and recent work on sustainability and innovation (e.g. STEPS Centre 2010). The key to recent thinking on diverse economies in a number of disciplines has been the idea of reframing what counts as the economic to include many things such as unpaid domestic labour and care—here again we return to old debates in feminist thinking—as well as a huge diversity of non- market transaction practices that sustain rural households, including those concerned with ritual, aesthetics, poetics and aspiration. These arguments are not new, but they need re- making afresh, and repurposing for a new approach to prosperity and flourishing.

The framing of system dynamics and the delineation of processes of change is actually an area in which we academics play a key role, alongside our interlocutors around the world. This is in essence because such discussions are all about what

constitutes an economy, what drives an economy and what drives change. The World Social Forum's byline is 'Another world is possible'. The issue then is how can we make another world possible, what it might take to build on existing work to generate new insights, new conceptual and theoretical frameworks for imagining and enacting different futures? The key to this might be to envisage new conduits and forms of transactions through which resources are captured, used and passed around in rural communities to ensure well-being and sustainable prosperity. Rural communities around the world already provide lots of examples—in-kind labour remuneration, reciprocal labour exchanges, local currencies, neighbourhood care networks and ritual practices—that are well documented and well understood. There is an urgent need to rethink the singular dominant model of the economy that has underpinned rural development policies, and to work with local communities to enhance diverse mechanisms and pathways for the transformation of rural and urban communities in the future.

5. RETHINKING THE ENVIRONMENT

There are interesting parallels when we turn to the issues of environment. It is evident that we need to bring about social change and social transition to meet the challenges of resource sustainability and the environment (Leach et al., 2012). The scale of change is daunting, and a reconfigured environmental policy should act as an experimental nexus for a broader social innovation. The redefinition of prosperity as a political and social project—rather than a notion of development based on income and indicators—will require us to reshape how environmental and social impacts are measured. As we head into the SDGs, very little work has actually been carried out on the social and economic changes needed for sustainability, which are still poorly understood. There is continuing political and conceptual poverty in how we envisage and conceive of change, and the drivers of change in relation to future sustainability of planetary resources and social systems.

Much of the discussion on environment and resilience talks of planetary boundaries, resilience and sustainability. These discussions often focus on keeping ecosystems

within the range of their natural equilibrium, both social and ecological. Resilience is all about the ability to respond to change, especially sudden, unpredictable change, and then return to a stable state. In the academic literature, but rarely to be found in policy initiatives, or development projects, is the recognition that ecosystems are not organised around a unique 'natural' equilibrium, so the aim of ecosystem protection should not necessarily be to stabilise it or protect it from change and keep it close to equilibrium. Living systems cannot be isolated from change, and many of their future developments will be nonlinear and complex, providing not only new challenges and constraints but also new opportunities. Resilience in socio-ecological systems is often figured as if it were simply an attribute of existing systems that can be identified and improved. In reality, resilience is both an historical feature—arising out of previous system states—and an emergent property that is produced and performed when systems confront change (Cutter et al., 2008; Da Silva et al., 2012; Johnson & Blackburn 2014; Satterthwaite 2013).

Present and future socio-ecological systems are thus not characterized by stable states that represent the normal but by complex processes of transformation and adaptation that work through contingency, connectivity and multiplicity. This does not mean that all change is nonlinear or that all processes of extrapolation from the past to future states are invalid, but that the complex interdependencies within socio-ecological systems are constantly changing in ways that cannot be fully predicted or controlled. Considered alongside the anticipated and unanticipated impact of human agency, this ensures that transformability is a pervasive feature of all resilient socio-ecological systems. Prosperity and long-term sustainability will depend on the management of resilience that recognises complexity, keeps options open and enhances learning capacity in the face of these challenges (Bahadur et al., 2010; Mitchell & Harris 2012). A key issue here is how we envisage processes of change and seek to control them through policy implementation, trade-offs and other measures.

Prevalent models of economic development and social change continue to emphasize prediction and unilinear models of development based on focusing on known risks—deriving in large part from an economisation of socio-ecological systems. An obvious

example here would be carbon trading (Lohmann 2005; Newell 2008). Following the most recent crisis in 2008, it is evident that there are major difficulties in predicting behaviour using mathematical models and monitoring change using a command and control approach, resulting in quantitative predictions of likely future outcomes. Dominant models of socio-ecological systems implicated in policy development are still based on economic optimisation under assumed conditions where variables are held constant. The only problem is that in living socio-ecological systems, variables are not constant, and so these systems cannot be managed effectively by trying to maximise outputs and ensure optimal use of resources while staying within sustainable limits or resource boundaries.

Many smaller projects and nongovernmental organisations do work with local communities to ensure self-organisation based on local logics, values, adaptability and social and environmental transformations. But at the national and international policy levels, there is little recognition that change in socio-ecological systems is ubiquitous and that it might be better to focus on managing change rather than predicting known outcomes. This will mean acknowledging that the allocation of resources is unlikely to be optimal at any one point in time because sustainability and resilience will depend more on local social actors being able to interpret and respond to challenges. Models of sustainability and resilience - like those of the economy - will need to depend on diversity and on enhancing the potentialities of diversity (Leach 2008; Leach et al., 2013). Future prosperity, understood as well-being in the context of functioning socio-ecological systems, will be based on diversity, and on the role that agency, intentionality, conceptualisation and learning play in people's motivations and decisions. In other words, prosperity will depend on culture, values and diverse forms of social innovation.

6. LEARNING FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH: THE EXAMPLE OF AGRO-ECOLOGY

Diversity, nonlinear complexity and non-optimal use of resources do not mesh well with the current understandings of target attainment. Yet, established developments in

the global south offer ways forward that are not currently as well integrated as they should be into scenario-planning for future prosperity and sustainability. One very straightforward example is agroecology. Agroecology in Latin America and the Caribbean draws on scientific thinking and indigenous knowledge and management systems to enhance food security, biodiversity, resource conservation and social equity. It develops and deploys the diversity and complexity of farming systems, maintaining native seeds and local livestock, improving soil activity and water retention, and recycling nutrients and energy on the farm rather than relying on external inputs. It guarantees access to land, decent food and work. It aims to be both productive and resource conserving. In response to problems caused by agribusiness, including contamination of natural resources, soil infertility and rising food prices, agroecology has emerged as a collaboration between science, local farmers and social movements (e.g. Altieri & Toledo 2011; Ferguson & Morales 2010; Petersen et al., 2013; Rosset et al. 2011). Agroecology has a long history - including in Europe - (Wezel et al., 2011), but an international conference in Rome in 2014 was the first time that the Food and Agriculture Organization acknowledged and provided official support for agroecology globally (FAO 2014).

Agroecology has a local focus but involves about 500 million people worldwide, and research suggests that agroecological farmers produce more food. In South America, household-based agroecology farming takes place on 18% of the territory but produces about 40% of food required. In Ecuador, agroecological farming increased from 23,000 ha (56,810 acres) in 1996 to 403,000 ha in 2008, generating $395million (£231million) and creating 172,000 jobs. To put agroecological technologies into practice requires technological innovations, agriculture policy changes and socio-economic changes, but above all a deeper understanding of the complex long-term interactions among resources, people and their environment. Agroecology is a very good example of processes of sustainable change driven by local circumstances but linked to transformations on a regional - and potentially global - scale. Its great strength is that it ties economic value to social value. Social progress is a political task. It involves the collective elaboration of a social project, as the involvement of social movements in successful agroecology initiatives in Latin America and the

Caribbean suggests.

The SDGs are about the delivery of global public goods, and for targets to be met, there will need to be new forms of political coalitions and collaborations formed around good ideas that can deliver social, economic and environmental value for communities across the globe. There is no suggestion here that agroecology will be the only, or even the primary, solution to certain global challenges, but its clear value lies in its capacity for innovation across several dimensions. It incorporates scientific and technological innovations, offering new possibilities and opportunities for communities. It links local diversity and social agency to societies at scale. And, it depends on repurposing social institutions to meet changing circumstances, including new forms of collaboration between scientists, local farmers and social movements. It is a working example of how environmental challenges and enhanced human well-being require the reorganisation of social values and institutions. Culture plays a key role here, but it is not about a return to tradition or the safeguarding of unchanging life ways.

Also key here is a framework of collaborative experimentation and south-to-south/south- to-north learning. Historically, development has depended on exporting and imposing models with ‘known outcomes’ as solutions to the challenges in the global south. The prosperous societies of the future will be very diverse, because the principles of the good life, morality and values are diverse, as are the definitions of success, well-being, sustainability and aspiration. In such contexts, learning will not be about the transferability of whole models with ‘known outcomes’ - even with retrofitting for local circumstances - but about incomplete learning, experimentation and collaboration. This will involve social, economic and political experimentation, as well as scientific and technological experimentation. Sustainable prosperity for the future will require new cultural forms because it will require social innovation that begins from a reconceptualization of aims and means, outcomes and processes. This process will involve a new kind of public debate, based on a diversity of voices. Diverse opinions mean better ideas, and all good ideas need to be tested and subjected to critique. But, many new technological and social innovations are already arising in

the global south—for example M-Pesa in Kenya—with the potential for global-scale impact.

7. CONCLUSION

Human activity is the major driver of environmental change, and the SDGs offer a unique possibility for societies and governments around the globe not just to hit targets and bring human activity back into 'safe operating spaces' but also to institute social innovation to shape what the new human condition of the future might be. This will involve a broader examination of the kind of social, economic, political and technological progress we would like to promote. Taking global prosperity - diverse forms of sustainable flourishing - as a goal rather than development as it has historically been understood means focusing on how the examination of values that are constitutive of the good life informs the structures and processes of political communities at local, national and international scales. Localising the agenda, increasing citizen participation in design, monitoring and accountability, and refiguring the values and models through which we design change will be key. Social and economic innovations are essential and must themselves become the drivers of change because we can no longer deliver growth under the old model, nor do we have the mechanisms to deal with the obvious and undeniable planetary threats we face. Rather than focusing on the global south and improving its condition through target attainment—important though these things are—a much more serious engagement with the new forms of participation, the diverse models of flourishing and an experimental nexus for a new global political economy should be the focus of renewed effort as we work towards 2030.

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