IV

Sustainable development: First, do no harm

BY MARINA LENT, GLOBAL POLICY FORUM

Fulfillment of the vision laid out in the 2030 Agenda means creating conditions in the inextricably related economic, environmental and social dimensions of life that enable people to individually and collectively create and enjoy their vision of a good life in a manner that also permits the flourishing of the planet.

Individual and collective visions of a good life will occasionally conflict or even preclude the realization of one over another. But the essence of good governance is to collectively prioritize difficult decisions. Based upon consensual rules, authorities must inevitably choose among policies and actions that concretely affect the lives of individuals, community life and the health of the environment that gives us life.

The 2030 Agenda aims at "a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity … of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity". But in what instances and in what ways is governance – as the mechanisms by which a government weighs and evaluates competing claims and chooses a path – itself a confounding factor that undermines the aspirations articulated in the 2030 Agenda?

This chapter examines the role of governance in maintaining the obvious chasm between aspiration and reality through the experience of the loss of indigenous peoples' territories.

The 2030 Agenda: New paradigm or same wolf in a sheepskin coat?

All nation states, regardless of ideology or convictions– capitalist, communist, colonizer or newly independent nation, foreign power or domestic, regardless of religion or creed – have all engaged in despoiling indigenous peoples' essential basis of existence: their territories. This continues to this day. Everywhere we look, on every continent, national and local governments are paving the way, both physically in the case of roads and legally in the case of government agreements with industries, for mono-cultivation for export, fossil fuel (petroleum and gas) extraction, mineral extraction, energy projects, including so-called 'green' industries such as large-scale wind farms, infrastructure and tourism.

All of these expanding industries are destroying historic indigenous cultures and peoples.

This largely unfettered access to natural resources and territories also represents the type, scale and global spread of activity which has led to the systemic threat posed by anthropogenic climate change to all this planet's life forms. Is the 2030 Agenda capable of breaking this pattern? Or is it just the next iteration of destruction?

The word **'development'** itself implies progression: ideally, progression towards socioeconomic and political systems more capable of delivering fulfillment of the human being within stable societies.

Applying the terms **'developed'** and **'developing'** to countries of the global North and global South, however, implies that the outlines of 'development' are to be sought in industrialized countries.

In recent decades, **economic development**, ever-increasing productivity enabling ever more intensive and extensive production for ever more widespread and momentum-gathering consumption in a positive feedback loop of economic growth, has become an end in itself instead of a means to healthy societies.

The quest for universal economic/industrial development along these lines presents an insoluble dilemma. The current level of consumption in so-called "developed" countries is made possible through intensive use of domestic resources, plus the ongoing flow of resources from so-called "developing" countries. Positing this level of consumption for all people on earth is a manifest impossibility. That it can never be achieved is overlooked or explained away by blind faith in the ability of technology to circumvent the limitations of this closed-system planet over and over again, while the human population continues to swell in numbers.

From colonialism to climate change via economic development

Even in the early days of natural resource plunder by colonial powers, the earth's limits were apparent – using up centuries of guano accretion to power a few decades worth of agricultural intensification in Europe, for example,[1] or causing "commercial extinction" of whales as a source of lamp oil, or eliminating the vast North American buffalo herds with the overtly genocidal intent of destroying the subsistence of the plains Native American tribes,[2] while innovations in tanning in England and Germany enabled Europe to use the millions of hides to make shoes and industrial-production conveyer belts.[3]

Thus the extinction of the dodo bird is the harbinger of climate change – and still, humanity clings to its near-consensus on the elusive promise of development plus technology to finally enable *all* humans to consume without consideration.

So here we sit: with no dodo bird, having brought on earth's sixth "great extinction" era, the Anthropocene, while climate change is wreaking havoc the world over with its storms, floods, droughts, heat waves, fires and mudslides, polar vortex, and melting ice packs.

Before too long, millions of people in (mostly) global South countries rendered uninhabitable by climate change[4] are expected to become internally displaced, migrate to overcrowded cities or poorly-supplied refugee camps or die in their hundreds of thousands, while people in the global North are advised to develop "resilience" to overcome the disruptions of climate change. And many of them, too, will become dispossessed, displaced and will die.[5] The conditions that accompany such disruptions will greatly accelerate the further development of antibiotic resistance, and infectious diseases we have little ability to treat will become ever more common. We've only just begun.

But indigenous peoples have been experiencing this level of devastation on a local scale for centuries, and its pace is not slowing. On the contrary: the globalized economy and the entry into global markets of major new economic powers has accelerated and threatens to complete the destruction that was begun by European colonizers centuries ago.

'Doctrines of dispossession' such as the Doctrine of Discovery – a concept dating back to the era of Columbus through which colonial powers laid claims to lands occupied by indigenous (non-Christian) peoples[6] – were egregious in their overt racism; but today's doctrines of dispossession centre on economic development and are no less effective at

---

1 Giaimo (2015); see also Galeano (1973).

2 Taylor (2007).

3 Phippen (2016).

4 Markham (2019).

5 Bendell (2018).

6 See https://www.un.org/press/en/2012/hr5088.doc.htm.

dispossession and destruction of the independent, vibrant cultures of indigenous peoples in the territories within which they have traditionally lived. What is the common thread in the governance of these profoundly different nations and empires, that allows them to justify continuous dispossession and destruction?

The 2030 Agenda: what would make this a new development paradigm?

By making the break from the past and stating that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) apply to *all* countries, there is at least a glimmer of understanding that 'development' does not mean duplicating the social, economic, political, and cultural patterns of countries of the global North. Recognition is dawning, perhaps even at the World Economic Forum, that doubling down on the accumulation of wealth and power among the wealthiest, powered on the one hand by the middle-class greyhound pack racing desperately to catch the mechanical rabbit in the form of the promise of at-will consumption, and on the other, by the working poor who are just trying to get through the month, the week, the day without becoming destitute, is a dangerous and unstable path to follow.

The 2030 Agenda recognizes – at least in theory- that the countries of the North are *not* developed, not until they eradicate multidimensional poverty and hunger, provide culturally-appropriate, globally-aware education and universal healthcare to all of their residents, reduce inequality between their richest and poorest citizens, face up to their role in creating global climate change, and aggressively pursue the necessary changes in production and consumption that will moderate the effects of human activity on the planet.

How will the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development translate into positive lasting changes for people at the household/community level? This is where reality takes place: where people individually and collectively experience a flourishing or deprived existence.

Governance means making space for choice

The SDGs are characterized by the call to "leave no one behind". However, indigenous peoples have not been accidentally 'left' behind; they have been systematically pushed behind by economic and political systems which devalue their contribution and then dispossesses them of the very things that make them strong – their relationship to their land, or territory.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights, granting reparations to the Kaliña and Lokono peoples in Suriname in 2015 affirmed that indigenous peoples are ethnic peoples with the particular characteristic that their life *within their specific territories* most essentially defines them.[7]

Elaborating on this the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights stated that 'survival' must be understood as the ability of the indigenous peoples to

> 'preserve, protect and guarantee the special relationship that [they] have with their territory', so that 'they may continue living their traditional way of life, and that their distinct cultural identity, social structure, economic system, customs, beliefs and traditions are respected, guaranteed and protected'…[8]

Thus it appears that indigenous peoples' right to survive as ethnic peoples is not explicit in the 2030 Agenda, in that the indissoluble link between indigenous peoples and their territories is nowhere reflected directly.

Indigenous peoples' relationship to their territories and to the societies of the nation state(s) within which their territory is located is complex and cannot be boiled down to a simple "either/or". Indigenous peoples' relationship to the larger society occurs

---

7 Inter-American Court Of Human Rights Case of the Kaliña and Lokono Peoples V. Suriname Judgment, 25 November 2015 (www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_309_%20ing.pdf), p. 82.

8 Indigenous Peoples, Afro-Descendent Communities, and Natural Resources: Human Rights Protection in the Context of Extraction, Exploitation, and Development Activities, 2015, http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/ExtractiveIndustries2016.pdf, p. 82.

along a *spectrum*, from voluntary isolation within the ancestral territory to full-scale integration of individuals, who, while knowing their cultural roots in their indigenous identity, for all intents and purposes live as individual members of the larger society. The point is that *where people individually or collectively fall on this spectrum should be a choice.* Taking away the territory wipes out almost all of the spectrum of choice, almost always leaving only involuntary exile in an often hostile social, political and economic society.

The issues surrounding indigenous lands and natural resources concentrate some of the most difficult governance challenges simultaneously. The country's need for investment, the national government's need for revenue, pressure from foreign governments, international financial institutions and corporations, land-hungry people looking for bare subsistence, drug cartels looking for land and looking for cover, all of these come to bear on the territories of indigenous peoples. This makes the survival of indigenous peoples within their territories a pivotal test for the integrity of governance.

Poverty, dispossession and subsistence

Among indigenous peoples, poverty is frequently concentrated among people who have been dispossessed – those whose ancestral territories have been rendered unlivable through development or outside settlement, and whose family and community structures have been forcibly torn apart.

The frequently noted inadequacy of counting 'poverty' solely in financial terms implies that all people's living circumstances are comparable, Viewing economic well-being solely in terms of the ability to conduct financial transactions for commercially available goods and services assumes away all community-based subsistence activity, thereby missing some of the most crucial determinants of well-being.

On the one hand, this could be good news, in that some who appear to be abjectly poor and deprived in the statistics relating to their financial status are actually living a life that allows for a certain amount of independence, creativity, health and well-being.

On the other hand, however, it means that the determinants of their well-being, the communities and practices which sustain them, can be destroyed overnight by actions of the public or private sector without leaving a trace on measurable indicators, in fact, making it appear (as they move to the cities and seek paid employment, if they are fortunate enough to find it), as though their well-being has increased, when it most emphatically has not.

Subsistence activities such as barter, sharing of resources, growing and gathering food, or hunting and fishing for personal/household or extended family and community use are strong patterns of living in most rural communities in *all* countries, including industrialized countries. It is activities such as these, not ideology or national identity, that most closely tie people to each other to form a community and build a shared identity.

These patterns of living are deeply intrinsic to indigenous traditions, values and development approaches, and characterize indigenous peoples' collective ownership and management of land and natural resources.

Governance in practice: What makes it work?

The commitment of the 2030 Agenda to empower marginalized people (if taken seriously) requires a fundamental change for governments. When government officials, elected or appointed, allow their responses and decisions to be guided by the calculations of relative power of the interested and participating parties, the "vulnerable" groups identified in the Agenda will lose out against more powerful interests *by definition.* And isn't this precisely what the clarion call to "leave no one behind" is meant to address?

In order to deliver on the pledge to "endeavour to reach the furthest behind first",[9] governance must change its current mode of operation. Empowering vulnerable groups means changing their position in the calculation of power to purposely endow their

---

9   UN (2015), para. 4.

interests with the priority that their economic, social and political power alone will not give them. This could be effected with the universal implementation of progressive free, prior and informed consent models in the face of development and investment projects.

In the case of indigenous peoples, however, this process labours under a history where, as the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples Victoria Tauli-Corpuz has noted, "severe conflicts and violence have occurred in the context of projects that have been undertaken without good-faith consultations or the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned".[10] In addressing the complex issues around consultation and free, prior and informed consent in 2018, the Special Rapporteur pointed to "deep divergences on the nature and contents of the rights to consultation and consent among the various actors involved, notably between States and indigenous peoples, and on appropriate ways to operationalize those rights." Her recommendation points directly towards governance, stating: "... dialogue should be undertaken between indigenous peoples and State actors about the nature and content of the relevant international standards, while taking into account indigenous peoples' views on how to implement them." She then highlights the underlying concerns of indigenous peoples as "the need for strengthened respect for and protection of their rights to lands, territories and natural resources, their culture and their development priorities".[11]

Indigenous peoples in the crosshairs of development

Discrimination and persecution of indigenous peoples have always had the dispossession of their territories at their roots. The survival of indigenous peoples as ethnic peoples with their culture and identity intact is rooted in their territories and ecologies, which together form their ideological and spiritual cosmo-vision, and are the substrate of their economic, cultural, social, spiritual and physical survival as unique ethnic peoples.

Reporting to the Human Rights Council in 2018, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples highlights the way in which large-scale development projects, including mining, hydroelectric dams and logging have led to increasing violence against indigenous peoples. She points out:

> Large-scale development projects are major drivers fueling the escalation of attacks and the criminalization of indigenous peoples. The frequent undertaking of such projects without genuine consultation or measures to seek the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned must cease.[12]

She further stresses that collective land rights of indigenous peoples need to be recognized as the root causes of attacks and criminalization, involving

> accessible, prompt and effective procedures to adjudicate land titles; the review of laws on expropriation; adequate mechanisms to resolve land disputes; effective protection from encroachment, including through early warning systems and on-site monitoring systems; and the prohibition of forced evictions.[13]

Territory: a living organism or a natural resource depository for the taking?

The pre-colonial indigenous way of life has generally been premised on an indefinite (i.e., sustainable) relationship consisting of use and tending of the territory as a whole. That Whole, not just the human element of that whole, forms the essence of the culture of the peoples belonging to that territory. The territory inherently includes all of its plants, animals, cycles of water and nitrogen, seasonality and sun, fungi, insects, land features, minerals, soils, micro-biome and geologic substrate. The elements of the whole are indivisible. Together, they can be viewed as an organism, and people are an essential element of that organism.

---

10 Tauli-Corpuz (2018a), para. 12.

11 Ibid., para. 13.

12 Tauli-Corpuz (2018b), para. 90.

13 Ibid., para. 91. See also Tauli-Corpuz (2019).

In contrast, the use of land under what is conventionally understood as 'development' or 'economic activity' tends to focus on a particular resource within or use of that land. The narrow, targeted action to use, extract or acquire intervenes decisively into the entire rest of the fabric of the life of the land, frequently severely impoverishing its diversity and vitality, sometimes forever.

But this recognition of the natural environment as an integrated and indivisible whole, rather than a wide-open larder full of items for the taking, is difficult to discern, even in faint outline, in the 2030 Agenda. It is not clear that it is definitively understood *and accepted* that the survival and identity of indigenous peoples is contingent on their continued existence within the intact territories that have sustained their ancestors – although target 15.9 under SDG 15 on the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems does open the door to changing the conception of the natural world: "By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts."

Governance matters: people and peoples in the balance

As citizens of the nation state, indigenous peoples are entitled to the social services which are the responsibility of government to provide equally to all residents. And yet, time and time again, the process of "consultation" over large-scale development projects in indigenous territories presents a trade-off of by-right social services in exchange for "consent" to a development project which displaces people from their land.[14]

Considering indigenous peoples only in light of their economic deprivation, social discrimination and exclusion, without reference to the all-important factor of territory, allows for the presumption of eventual complete dispossession of remaining indigenous territories while making provision for the survival of the affected human individuals by securing their

existence at the very bottom of the social and economic scale of the nation.

For indigenous peoples, the stakes could not be higher: nothing less than their survival as distinct ethnic peoples, along with their identity and livelihood and that of their forebears and progeny. So no matter what redress, compensation or access to services are provided for them, if their territories are not under their control, history shows that these territories will be relentlessly exploited and destroyed in the process.

And when they resist the takeover and destruction of the territory on the basis of *rights they have* under law, they are portrayed as 'anti-development', 'anti-state', 'traitors', 'terrorists' or 'criminals', as the Irish human rights organization Frontline Defenders points out.[15] People are threatened, beaten and repressed by both state and private forces, with no recourse to protection, let alone justice. Criminalization, often leading to lengthy jail sentences of indigenous leaders aims to intimidate and silence dissent and opposition.

Indigenous peoples have historically already paid far more than their fair share for 'development'– paid with the lives of millions of people, and with territories in all corners of the globe destroyed or overtaken by others and irretrievably changed. They must not be forced to continue to pay for a model of national and international economic development where the rich get the lion's share of the proceeds and the poor are vying for what's left over.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a guide to governance

Governance means engaging with individuals, groups and independent entities who affect and are affected in the common (national) space. It also means having the judgment, insight and foresight to set a course that equitably addresses different sectors' needs and rights by making decisions according

14 Yriart (2016), pp. 30-31.

15 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/resource-publication/global-analysis-2018, p.6.

to principles, values and, to the greatest extent possible, a common understanding of shared benefit and shared burdens among different sectors of society.

When it comes to the processes by which society and governments engage with indigenous peoples, however, they are highly dysfunctional. Despite the principles and framework for decent governance in relation to indigenous peoples provided through the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the process of disrespect and dispossession continues with many hundreds of violent conflicts over indigenous territory happening throughout the world.

Can the international community and the 2030 Agenda process succeed in sufficiently engaging all the groups and individuals, especially at the national and local level, to de-escalate and transform the explosive and conflict-prone situations which continue to deprive indigenous peoples of their land?

Indigenous Peoples at the UN

UNDRIP forms the basis for understanding and elaboration of the human rights of indigenous peoples. As described by the Secretariat to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,

> The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples constitutes a framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity, well-being and rights of the world's indigenous peoples and provides guidance on incorporating the rights and priorities of indigenous peoples into the development paradigm.[16]

Central to UNDRIP's articulation of fundamental human rights in relation to indigenous peoples is the right to grant *or withhold* their free, prior and informed consent. Article 32.2 of UNDRIP states that:

> States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.

Overall, the 2030 Agenda is mixed with respect to the aspirations of indigenous peoples. The balance between non-discrimination and self-determination, a thread that runs throughout the work of the UN on indigenous peoples, and is strongly reflected in the contributions of the Indigenous Peoples' Major Group,[17] is largely missing in the 2030 Agenda. For example, while virtually all the goals unambiguously affirm equality of access, opportunity and treatment, "many core norms of indigenous peoples' rights are missing from Agenda 2030, including the right to self-determination and collective rights".[18] In addition, certain targets and indicators raise alarming prospects of accelerating land-grabbing in the name of sustainable development such as indicator 9.1.1 under SDG 9 on infrastructure and industrialization, on the "proportion of the rural population who live within 2 km of an all-season road". When it comes to the experience of many remote communities, roads can spell encroachment, environmental degradation and displacement[19] but can also provide needed access to the benefit of communities. Other than in the case of voluntary isolation, then, both indigenous peoples' own mechanisms of governance and local/national governance would have to work in concert to prevent the risks and ensure the benefits that a road can represent.

No means No, Yes means How

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to delve deeply into the intricacies of the right to consent, it features prominently in the challenges of governance, sustainable development, and the survival of indigenous peoples within their territories.

---

16 UN Doc. E/C.19/2018/2, para. 2.

17 https://www.indigenouspeoples-sdg.org/index.php/english/
18 Gilbert and Lennox (2019).
19 Laurence (2012).

A recent report of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) opens with the statement that FPIC

> is a human rights norm grounded in the funda-mental rights to self-determination and to be free from racial discrimination guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination.[20]

However, this apparently solid foundation becomes soft as the report finds itself unable to clearly specify any circumstances under which lack of consent will *of necessity and immediately preclude* moving ahead with a proposed project. Although reference is made to the burden of proof being on the State to demon-strate the necessity to override refusal to grant con-sent by indigenous peoples (para.39), the fact that the report sees a legal opening for a State to circumvent the *right to withhold consent* to a large-scale project in indigenous territories is of grave concern, given the track record of States with regard to indigenous territories.

A recent expert group meeting of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,[21] pointing to the increased violence against and resource appropria-tions of indigenous peoples, highlights issues of peace and security, food sovereignty and improvements to current and future trade and investment agreements as priority issues for indigenous rights, and stresses the importance of active involvement of indigenous peoples in the 2030 Agenda review and implemen-tation process. The Permanent Forum also recom-mended development of core indicators for indige-nous peoples in the global indicator framework, in particular the inclusion of an indicator on the legal recognition of the land rights of indigenous peoples under Goals 1 and 2.[22]

20 UN Doc. A/HRC/39/62, para. 3.

21 UN Doc. E/C.19/2018/7.

22 UN Doc. E/C.19/2018/2, para. 9.

Where sustainable development exists, *leave it in the ground*

If an indigenous people's territory were to be viewed as being already sustainably 'developed' according to the principles and vision of the 2030 Agenda, and were taken out of the 'sustainable development' equation for any additional activities deemed by the indigenous peoples of that territory to be damaging to it, what effect would that have on efforts to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda?

SDG 12, "Ensure sustainable production and consumption patterns", implies that the planet's resources must be used as efficiently as possible. This is reflected in the strong emphasis on waste reduction in its targets and indicators. But waste is low-hanging fruit, as only very few people vociferously defend the need to maintain a large waste-stream as a quality-of-life issue and a right.

Leaving it in the ground means not consuming the resource in question. Under existing governance mechanisms and power relations, having a goal of reducing total consumption would lead powerful countries to squeeze less powerful countries even harder in the name of achieving this goal; and power-ful individuals within countries would do likewise to ensure that their interests are supplied before those of the poorer sectors of their societies. Hence the need for prioritizing the reduction of consumption of the heaviest consumers *first*.

Given the harsh limitations on the use of land and natural resources posed by the devastating local effects (especially on indigenous peoples) and pro-foundly threatening global effects of human activity on the world's ability to sustain life as we know it, changing existing consumption patterns through more equitable distribution of access to consumables is imperative if we are to fulfill the primary com-mitment of the 2030 Agenda to end poverty in all its forms everywhere.

But here already, the 2030 Agenda's resolution begins to waver. While reducing consumption of natural resources is implicit in some of the goals and targets, for the most part, increased production is seen as

the solution to equitable consumption, and a goal that would aim to reduce consumption, starting with the heaviest consumers *first*, of similar weight and stature to the goal to reduce poverty, starting with the furthest left behind first, is not a feature of the 2030 Agenda.

If even extreme poverty cannot be eradicated with the proceeds of economic activity available for public use after the rich have had their share, it begs the question of *distribution*. Distribution is most directly addressed by SDG 10 which calls on states to "Reduce inequality within and among countries". On the face of it, the fact that SDG 10 was unanimously adopted by all the world's governments gives reason to hope that the current phase of ravenous inequality among and within nations may be turning. But the goal's targets are very cautious in addressing the policies, subsidies and measures that created today's stunning levels of inequality.[23]

If the economic system governments operate under can successfully compel giving priority to share-holder returns over social, environmental or human rights concerns, then there remains less and less space for a government, *even if it wanted to*, to bend policy towards the well-being of the poorest, let alone act decisively to stem environmental destruction to moderate the damage of climate change.

There is a way forward. In order to shift incentives and cultural expectations around consumption, production and distribution, we need a way to define 'progress' other than through traditional economic indicators. The 2030 Agenda begins to conceptualize and measure progress in more holistic ways, but is itself still somewhat reliant on the fallback macroe-conomic indicators, as are the international financial institutions and governments themselves.

Ideally, the international community could orient itself towards defining sustainable development as the optimal balance between the greatest possible natural resource efficiency and widespread human well-being, rather than the greatest possible human consumption and production within 'acceptable' limits of destruction.

Final thoughts:
The real costs of compromised governance

If the wealth of the richest humans on the planet and of the institutions they operationalize to get that wealth is off limits, other than through donor-di-rected philanthropy, and, more to the point, if the rules and policies that created the current metasta-sis of wealth among the richest humans are barely more than hinted at in the 2030 Agenda, then we are depending on growth, and growth alone, to finance the transformation that is so desperately needed. And this is an unmitigated disaster for indigenous peoples, their territories, and for any hope of moder-ating the most devastating consequences of climate change.

The ardently desired de-coupling of growth from environmental harm (target 8.4) exists only in such small instances that it does not even put a dent in the ongoing destruction of the planet and its people. Even if it were possible to scale up these examples, success-ful de-coupling at scale is so far off on the horizon as to be a dangerously irrelevant distraction given the impending catastrophe of climate disruption.

We are not on a political timeline with the changes that climate disruption will wreak on our subsist-ence as a species, we are on nature's timeline. Nature doesn't accommodate people's political constraints and perceived necessities. Time and tide wait for no one, and now millions of ordinary citizens are begin-ning to experience the reality of climate change in the form of storms, droughts, fires and floods.

As obvious as this seems, it has not changed the political calculus of governance. Many people firmly believe that we do not stand a chance of systemati-cally and deliberately taking comprehensive meas-ures to mitigate the disaster that is bearing down on us in the form of climate change, and are thus reduced to pleading with the rich to recognize that they could get even richer by investing in less-de-structive forms of economic activity. In other words,

---

23 See Donald (2016), CESR (2016), Fukuda-Parr and Smaavik Hegstad (2018).

we are supposed to believe that the benefits of the current distribution of wealth outweigh the costs, and that we need to maintain the incentive of their current disproportionate share of the world's wealth for the rich to continue to support our economic survival. "Put a tax on someone's wealth, and you'll get less savings, investment and wealth. Those with wealth and know-how if threatened will, in essence, go on strike."[24]

One can only conclude that the world is being held hostage at this time. Perhaps it is a form of Stockholm Syndrome that large parts of the population, not themselves wealthy, believe it would be counterproductive to purposely create a different distribution of wealth and income, starting with the wealthiest *first.* Or maybe it is the recognition of our relentless and deepening dependence on mass-production for our *own* means of subsistence that makes us feel helpless, fearing that we are not capable of surviving a transition.

Whether preserving the accumulation of personal wealth by the few richest individuals of the world takes precedence over being able to address the most urgent needs of humanity and the planet[25] is a governance question of the highest urgency. Political and economic choices made in the last few decades have enabled inequality to flourish to levels that rival the greatest extremes known in history. Governments, willingly and not willingly, have increasingly turned themselves into handmaidens to smooth the way for operations of the private sector, and have not prevented increasing consolidation of power in a very few hands which now has all of us backed into a corner.

So perhaps it is primarily a problem with governance. Perhaps the levers of power are so tightly captured and tied up with the personal fortunes and status of the decision-makers that we have already experienced a 'revolution within the form', and

no longer have space for what we used to think of as government of the people, by the people, for the people. Further, when core government functions are outsourced to the private sector (schools, prisons, military, intelligence, public health and environmental assessment and investigation, so-called public works, drinking water, sewage treatment etc.), then government loses skill and capability and becomes not just a handmaiden to the private sector by philosophy and function, but becomes entirely dependent on the private sector and itself degenerates into a contract-writing agency. It then substitutes elaborate paper trails for actual accountability, and ceases to govern.

But government is not the only key player whose credibility is in question. Doubts about integrity in science, medicine, major media outlets, court systems and law enforcement abound. When scientists are seen to be 'for sale' to courts, companies and regulators; when news outlets pander to a base of support, when doctors can be lavished with emolument by pharmaceutical companies and their prescription patterns can be traced accordingly, then all of these key social institutions become unstable and no longer work in concert and in reliance upon each other to build a stable and credible foundation for society.

Credibility is a currency that once lost is not easily earned back, and power relationships in political life make changing course challenging at best. But power always has a fluctuating margin of unpredictability, which is a territory we have now also decisively entered into. This unpredictability can be expressed in the election of populist leaders who are not necessarily devoted to maintaining all aspects of the status quo, are willing and eager to justify disruption, destruction and cruelty, and are not risk-averse, to say the least. (Under the status quo, the cruelty was there, of course, but it was not considered civilized to revel in it. It was understated where possible, not touted as an accomplishment, and not used to galvanize a public response in that direction.)

Is there opportunity in today's unpredictability? What is the future for the nation-state and public sector? Can the degeneration of the public sector and of governance be rolled back in an ordered, consid-

---

24 "Wealth Tax: Sen. Warren's Latest Bad Idea Will Slow Growth and Kill Jobs" editorial, Investor's Business Daily, 1/25/2019 (www.investors.com/politics/editorials/wealth-tax-sen-warren-envy/).

25 Donald and Martens (2018).

ered fashion? Under what terms is that even desirable at this point? Or will the reassertion of national governance (or something entirely different) unfold with cataclysmic, destructive political upheavals alongside catastrophic destabilization of the economic and social basis of human life on earth by the ravages of climate change?

The rule of law with the full spectrum of human rights as its immutable foundation is severely compromised in governance as we know it today. More often than not, government acts as a power broker, using natural resource-cash as currency. Objectification of all elements of the planet, including animals, plants and people as labour or consumers is at the heart of governance and commerce as it is practiced today. The jury is still out as to whether the 2030 Agenda can play a role in tipping the balance towards a paradigm of government as the core entity responsible for facilitating social consensus and fostering joint stewardship of our planet.

References

Bendell, Jem (2018): Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy. Institute of Leadership and Sustainability (IFLAS) at the University of Cumbria (IFLAS Occasional Paper 2, July 2018). www.lifeworth.com/deepadaptation.pdf

CESR (2016): From Disparity to Dignity. New York. www.cesr.org/sites/default/files/disparity_to_dignity_SDG10.pdf

Donald, Kate (2016): Will inequality get left behind in the 2030 Agenda? In: Spotlight on Sustainable Develop-ment 2016. New York. www.2030spotlight.org/en/book/605/chapter/ii10-will-inequality-get-left-behind-2030-agenda

Donald, Kate/Martens, Jens (2018): The increasing concentration of wealth and economic power as an obstacle to sustainable development – and what to do about it. In: Spotlight on Sustainable Development 2018: Exploring new policy pathways. New York. www.2030spotlight.org/en/book/1730/chapter/1-increasing-concentration-wealth-and-economic-power-obstacle-sustainable

Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko/Smaavik Hegstad, Thea (2018): 'Leaving no one behind' as a site of contestation and reinterpretation. New York: UN (CDP Background Paper No. 47). www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/post/CDP-bp-2018-47.pdf

Galeano, Eduardo (1973): The Open Veins of Latin America. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Giaimo, Cara (2015): When the Western World Ran on Guano. In: Atlas Obscura, 14 October 2015. www.atlasobscura.com/articles/when-the-western-world-ran-on-guano

Gilbert, Jérémie/Lennox, Corinne (2019): Towards new development paradigms: the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a tool to support self-determined development. In: The International Journal of Human Rights. https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2018.1562921

Helliwell, John F./Layard, Richard/Sachs, Jeffrey D. (2019): World Happiness Report 2019. New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network. https://worldhappiness.report/

Laurence, William (2012): As Roads Spread in Rainforests, The Environmental Toll Grows. In: Yale Environment 360, 19 January 2012. https://e360.yale.edu/features/as_roads_spread_in_tropical_rain_forests_environmental_toll_grows

Markham, Lauren (2019): How climate change is pushing Central American migrants to the US. In: The Guardian, 6 April 2019. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/06/us-mexico-immigration-climate-change-migration?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

Phippen, J. Weston (2016): Kill Every Buffalo You Can! Every Buffalo Dead Is an Indian Gone. In: The Atlantic, 13 May 2016. www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2016/05/the-buffalo-killers/482349/

Tauli-Corpuz, Victoria (2019): Enhancing and Promoting Indigenous Peoples. Knowledge and Innovations for Climate Resilience and Sustainable Development. Keynote Address: Indigenous Peoples' Forum in IFAD, 4th Global Session, 12-14 February 2019. Rome.
http://unsr.vtaulicorpuz.org/site/index.php/en/statements/276-ifad2019

Tauli-Corpuz, Victoria (2018a): Indigenous peoples and self-governance. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples to General Assembly 2018. New York: UN (UN Doc. A/73/176)
http://unsr.vtaulicorpuz.org/site/index.php/en/documents/annual-reports/256-report-ga2018

Tauli-Corpuz, Victoria (2018b): Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples. Geneva: UN Human Rights Council (A/HRC/39/17).
www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/IPeoples/SR/A.HRC.39.17.pdf

Taylor, M. Scott (2007): American Buffalo Wiped out to Serve European Market of the 1880s. University of Calgary, 31 July 2007.
https://works.bepress.com/taylor/96/

UN (2015): Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. New York (UN Doc. A/RES/70/1).
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld

Yriart, Monica (2016): Memorial de Amicus Curiae, "El Derecho de Decir No: el caso LT Moyobamba-Iquitos". Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Perú (CONAIP).

Marina Lent is Vice-Chair of the Executive Board of Global Policy Forum.