



NEWSLETTER

ISL NEWSLETTER March, 2017



From the editor's desk

I recently opened a twitter account (follow us on @honeybeeleaders) and have uncovered a whole new world. Much of the discussion I currently follow is about the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals - from a surprising source: the leaders of big corporations. Yes, big business has discovered that pursuing the SDGs is good for business, opening new markets and opportunities. This issue focuses on the SDGs, particularly in relation to business. Honeybee firms have always looked beyond their own boundaries developing their strategies.

Gayle Avery



At ISL, the honeybee symbolises sustainable leadership through collaborative, constructive practices, which the community values, while achieving high performance. Photo: Harry Bergsteiner

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS WHY SHOULD BUSINESS GET INVOLVED?

Last year, the United Nations introduced 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to replace the eight [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs) set at the turn of this century. According to the then Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, the MDGs had achieved mixed success over the 15 years they were in force. Yes, the MDGs helped lift more than one billion people out of extreme poverty, made inroads against hunger, enabled many more girls to attend school, began to protect the planet, and forged valuable partnerships in the struggle to improve the world. However, much more needed to be done to reduce inequality on many fronts.

To this end, 17 SDGs were adopted for the period 2016-2030. To effect this new agenda, the UN recognised that it needed to rely on more than just governments. It needed business too for finding innovative solutions and funding the estimated \$4.5 trillion per year cost of achieving the SDGs. Beyond that, business can assist in the complex process of social and economic development - and reap many rewards from it. And business has responded enthusiastically. According to a [PWC survey](#) in late 2016, 71% of businesses surveyed said they were planning how to get involved with the SDGs. About 41% said they would embed the

SDGs into their strategy over the next five years, and 13% claimed to have already identified the tools they needed to assess their impact against the SDGs. Many of these companies and related organisations, such as the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, see enormous opportunities beckoning at the so-called "bottom of the pyramid" (BOP) with its hidden market of about 4.5 billion people. These people, though individually poor, spend US\$2.3 trillion on food and beverage each year. With business on board in implementing the SDGs, the world could become a better place.

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SUFFICIENCY THINKING IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (STiSD) OUR SUCCESSFUL TRIAL RUN

ISL is delighted to have been asked to design the Sufficiency Thinking in Sustainable Development (STiSD) program that Thailand is offering to G77 countries this May.

Sufficiency thinking underpins a sustainability approach developed by Thailand's late King Bhumibol Adulyadej, known as the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP). The SEP has wide applicability - from agriculture to community development, environmental management, health, education and business. During 2016, Thailand chaired the United Nations' G77, whose 134 member countries come from the developing world and include India and China. G77 delegates displayed great interest in learning more about the SEP at these earlier meetings.

Inaugural program

The inaugural STiSD program will be held in an eco-cultural resort outside Bangkok called the [Sampran Riverside Resort](#), between 14-19 May. The program content has been carefully crafted to focus on the practical aspects of sufficiency thinking once sufficiency concepts have been explained. Participants will be encouraged to apply their learnings first to five successful Thai projects where they will meet and discuss with the leaders of those living cases. Themes covered include: organic farming and marketing, community development, cultural conservation, environmental management and business. In addition, delegates will see how Thailand is reforming its entire school system to promote sustainable thinking in students, teachers and school administrators. They will also learn about applying the SEP in a hospital setting. During the program, participants will be helped to apply sufficiency thinking to a suitable project in their home country.

Trial run

ISL has just returned from conducting a trial run of the program. During the trial run we held a training session for all speakers and project directors to ensure that everyone is familiar with the program aims and methods, as well as with the SEP process and concepts. A fun part was visiting the training venue and discussing how to involve traditional Thai cultural events like sword fighting, bamboo dancing and cutting fruit into flowers as energy reviving breaks for participants. And of course we visited the inspiring projects and met with their directors.

Our partners

Once again ISL is delighted to be cooperating with the [Thailand Sustainable Development Foundation](#) and [College of Management at Mahidol University](#), as well as with the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs via the [Thailand International Cooperation Agency](#). We are very thankful to their representatives and to the project directors, who have all expressed so much enthusiasm for the program.

Scholarships

As part of its legacy, Thailand is offering scholarships for up to 20 representatives of the G77 countries to attend the first six-day program.



At Amphawa Cultural Conservation Project: Left: Harry Bergsteiner & Gayle Avery from ISL pose with Director Khunying Srichalerm Kanjanapoo before seeing the revived coconut sugar processing. Below: Dr Priyanut Dharmapiya is shown traditional hat weaving by a rare expert.



LIVING CASES IN STiSD PROGRAM

Real projects, called living cases, are an integral part of the STiSD program. The living cases were selected to cover the four key domains where outputs are measured in sufficiency thinking: economic, environmental, social and cultural:

[Amphawa Conservation Project](#) – Cultural conservation + community development, organic farming.

[Laem Phak Bia Royal Project](#) – Environmental conservation - restoring mangroves and sea ecology, recycling waste and sewage for a local town of 40,000 people using simple technology.

[Sampran Riverside Resort](#) – illustrating business-driven agriculture + community development. This case is particularly interesting because it was initiated by the private sector.

[Sufficiency school Initiative](#) – Education for sufficiency introduced to 23,000 of the 40,000 schools in Thailand.

[Theptarin Hospital](#) – A health entrepreneur used sufficiency thinking to challenge the system and develop an internationally acclaimed diabetes hospital.

[Siam Cement Group](#) – An example of large, publicly-listed corporation following sufficiency principles.

CRITICAL VIEWS ON SDGs IN AGENDA 2030 TOO BROAD, TOO COMPLEX, TOO CONTRADICTORY

While the UN'S SDGs have been widely welcomed, some experts are cautioning against too much euphoria.

Omissions + too slow

Dr Gabriele Koehler acknowledges that the process followed in establishing the Agenda 2030, its aim of transformation and the marriage of economic, social and environmental goals are impressive. However, she questions just how transformative the actual goals are. Koehler identifies numerous omissions and clashes, but is particularly distressed by the timeline. She says that the 15 year timeline means that "yet another generation is to grow up before acute poverty or hunger is eradicated, maternal or child mortality reduced to any meaningful degree, or environmental destruction reversed" p. 3). Koehler laments that the social and

environmental domains should override economic considerations, but do not. Finally, she concludes with a call for injecting radical thinking and action for economic, environmental and social justice subversively into the SDGs. Make them work!

Too complex

Another avenue of criticism comes from groups such as the [Copenhagen Consensus](#) who argue that it would be better to work smarter. Instead of chasing all 169 targets set under the 17 goals, the SDGs would have more chance of success if the UN focused on fewer targets. An expert group associated with the Copenhagen Consensus concluded that if the UN were to concentrate "on 19 top targets, it could get \$20 to \$40 in social benefits per dollar spent". This contrasts with

allocating the budget evenly across all 169 targets, which would reduce the estimated return per dollar spent to under \$10. Simplify!

SDGs are contradictory

Others point out that the SDG's strategy for development relies on endless GDP growth to raise the standard of living of the poor, whereas the world needs less growth to be sustainable. The SDGs are based on achieving more than 7% annual growth in least developed countries and higher economic productivity across the board. In fact, Goal 8, is devoted entirely to promoting growth.

See: Koehler, G. 2016. Assessing the SDGs from the standpoint of ecosocial policy: Using the SDGs subversively. *Journal of International & Comparative Social Policy*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21699763.2016.1198715>.

WHAT ACADEMICS WRITE BUSINESS AND THE SDGs

Abstracts from articles on business getting involved with the SDGs and sustainable development (SD) are listed below.

Does business understand what SD is about?

Various authors question the adequacy of definitions of SD put forward, including some contradictory ones, complicating business' understanding of how to proceed with SDGs. For example, Ralf Barkemeyer examines to what extent Brundtland's original SD principles are still embedded within key business guidelines like the UN Global Compact, OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, ICC Business Charter, CAUX Principles, and the CERES Principles. Findings suggest that these guidelines for business emphasise the environmental over social aspects of SD, and fail to prioritise the needs of the poorest. Attention to environmental aspects stresses win-win situations and has a clear managerialist focus; giving little attention to more conceptual environmental issues concerning systems interdependencies, critical thresholds or systemic limits to growth. For more detail see: R. Barkemeyer, D. Holt, L. Preuss & S. Tsang. 2014. What happened to the 'development' in sustainable development? Business guidelines two decades after Brundtland. *Sustainable Development*, 22(1), 15-32.

Priorities must be set

Francesca Pongiglione says that businesses and others must focus primarily on goals that, along with being ends in themselves, also serve as means for achieving other objectives – making themselves of instrumental value. More detail is at:

F. Pongiglione. 2015. The need for a priority structure for the SDGs. *Journal of Global Ethics*, 11(1), 37-42.

Equal role for the private sector

Scheyvens et al. discuss the challenges that SDGs pose to business. These include the potential for more sustainable and responsible practices as well as the limits to change. The private sector brings strengths in delivering on the SDGs, such as innovation, responsiveness, efficiency and specific skills and resources. Read more at:

R. Scheyvens, G. Banks & E. Hughes. 2016. The private sector and the SDGs: The need to move beyond 'business as usual'. *Sustainable Development*, 24(6), 371–382.

Need for an aware workforce

Sustainable Development Goals will guide the global development agenda for the coming years. Under this premise, these academics explore the role that higher education (HE) has been assigned in contributing to sustainable human development. It concludes that the vision of HE offered is too narrow and is unable to capture the essence and full meaning of sustainable human development. Moving away from problematic indicators and thresholds that understand HE as a producer of human capital, the authors propose placing the concept of human development at the centre of HE. In particular, the article argues that its main elements (its normative approach, the idea of capability, functioning and agency) can provide a valuable and sound footing for a more transformative institution. Read further at:

A. Boni, A. Lopez-Fogues & M. Walker. 2016. Higher education and the post-2015 agenda: A contribution from the human development approach. *Journal of Global Ethics*, 12(1), 17-28.

BUSINESS, TWITTER AND THE SDGs BIG BUSINESS IS CHANGING - FAST

Before Donald Trump brought Twitter to everyone’s attention, leaders of big business were already tweeting about the need to improve the world and, in particular, how to bind the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals into a firm’s strategy and daily business. The World Business Council on Sustainable Development suggests that doing so could even help restore trust in the business sector ([see report](#)).

The [BTeam](#) is one example, a not-for-profit initiative formed by global business leaders to encourage a better way of doing business for people and the planet. BTeam members include corporations such as Allianz, Dow Chemicals, Huffington Post, Salesforce, Tata, Unilever, labour unions and many other groups. Co-founded by Richard Branson and Jochen Zeitz, the BTeam has focused on multiple issues, including renewable energy. The BTeam regularly heralds the certain death of [fossil fuel-based energy](#): “Almost 90% of new power in Europe was from renewable sources in 2016, a sign of rapid shift away from fossil fuels”. They offer [three reasons](#) why clean energy will be unstoppable in 2017, and remind us that to secure a sustainable future for all, we need earth-[competent boards](#).

Business has expertise that can be used for financing the SDGs. According to the BTeam, meeting the SDGs will cost between \$90 trillion & \$120 trillion by 2030 - creating huge [opportunities for financial services](#).

Investor group [Abraaj](#) is a major participant, noting that there are only 13 years to go to achieve the



GlobalGoals and explaining [why the time is now](#).

[Unilever](#) is pursuing SDGs on multiple strategic fronts, not only in terms of its products. For example, President Paul Pohlman points out that [long term markets](#) would not only make financial sense but are essential for solving today’s big problems. The BTeam joins in this theme by reporting McKinsey’s report on how business leaders can build an alliance [against corporate short-termism](#).

Gender equality is another SDG. As the Australian CEO of Konica Minolta tweeted: Research shows link between gender equality & better organisational performance, the business case can be found [here](#). The [World Business Council on Sustainable Development](#) is looking at the sustainability of food: WBCSD and EAT bring more than 25 companies together in [sustainable food program](#).

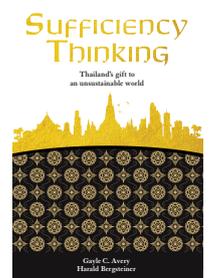
But other companies are doing their part as well. [Airbnb](#) is mobilising its hosts to provide [temporary housing for refugees](#) and others in urgent need. A group of corporations has set up

the [Business Commission](#), chaired by Unilever’s Paul Pohlman. The Business Commission’s mission is: “to make a powerful case —supported by sound evidence, rigorous research and compelling real-world examples—for why business leaders should seize upon sustainable development as the greatest opportunity of a lifetime.”

BOOK LAUNCH

SUFFICIENCY THINKING TO BE LAUNCHED AT MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

ISL is delighted to announce that its latest book, *Sufficiency Thinking: Thailand’s Gift to an Unsustainable World* (Allen & Unwin, 2016) is to be officially launched at Macquarie University on 28 March., together with the Thai Consulate-General in Sydney.



HEAR MORE ABOUT ISL’S RESEARCH

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY INTERVIEWS GAYLE AVERY

Gayle Avery was interviewed as part of Macquarie University’s Pioneering Minds podcast series. You can access the podcast [here](#). Gayle talks about the concepts behind sustainable leadership, and some of the work that ISL has been doing in Thailand on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy.

