

My name is Jens Wandel. I have worked for the United Nations in many different countries and in a number of senior roles. The topic I want to discuss today is sustainable development. This is the area in which I've been engaged practically all my career. A fun fact is that I sat in the general assembly the day that the 17 development goals were approved, it was the 25th September 2015. And we knew at the time that something had happened. We had been giving a framework for progression that built on our experience and it built on many consultations. So, what is sustainable really about? Sustainable development is about moving all of us in a direction where - some of the goals say - where we can live our life. We can get educated. We can live healthy lives. We have access to good food - we know what it is. We have access to shelter etc. This is how we live, our houses. And these goals they had been with us for a long time, and I think it is important to understand that while there is some poverty left in the world, there has been made tremendous progress in this area that means that most people on earth today, they live lives that are reasonable from a material point of view. And the average lifespan of a person in the world is today probably 71 years old which is considerably longer than for example just 4-5 generations back in the country where I come from which is Denmark.

The other part of the goals concerns themselves with how we make money to have that living standard, if you can use that word, and how we produce and the quality of the work, the quality of our production. And it speaks to the point that it makes no sense to make a living in a way that is either killing you or killing the planet. So therefore we need to find ways of having sustainable jobs, decent jobs, we need to, when we produce, we need to do it in a way that regenerate what we do, regenerate the soil, and does not destroy. We also need to produce in a way that is inclusive that people have access to the economy. And we also need to do it in a way that is sustainable.

And that brings us to the third area of goals. And those are the area saying: when we produce, when we work, but also when we consume, we put a lot of pressure on the environment. Best known today is the climate crisis which technically is a pollution of CO₂ and methane in particular of the atmosphere. But we pollute in many other ways. And we also pollute the land and the sea for example with plastic. But also, we put enormous pressure on water resources. We put pressure on our environment. We destroy biodiversity. And it is that complexity, we today call the, "we live in the *Anthropocene era*" that means we as human being are so influential on the planet, so the way we live and the way we work determines whether the planet can continue as a balanced system or whether we are tipping it with what we know as global warming but there are other tipping points also on biodiversity etc. we need to keep an eye on.

And the fourth area of sustainable development, this is how we organize ourselves. This is very much about inequality but it's also setting targets for how we organize ourselves in cities, the quality of those cities. But it's also how we organize ourselves politically. Do we give access to people? Do people have a meaningful voice in a political sense? Do they have a meaningful voice in determining their own lives? This is the essence of participatory politics. And the specific goals for that because in a sustainable society it is the collective that determines the way forward and it is very important that each and everyone in the collective, they can find themselves in the participation. It is meaningful. This is what this is about.

So, if one were to take the 17 goals and kind of summarize them. One can say that the first part of the goals - technically the first 6 goals - this is how we live, this is the quality of the life, this is the living standard. And some of the other goals, they concern themselves with how we work and how

we produce. And then the third area of goals – there are 3 – they concern themselves with water, with air, and with land. Just putting goals and reminding us that these are resources that we consume, and we must learn to consume in a way, so we're in balance with the planet. Because there is only one planet, and we now live in the Anthropocene era so that means we are responsible for a lot of things that happens to that planet. And we need to take responsibility for that. And that's where you can say where the fourth set of goals, they come in. Because a lot of the way we construct our societies is something we did. It is something we can change and it's also something we can understand and do something about.

So, this is the universe of the 17 goals but then there's a very important principle and that is that we gave each other a promise that while we're striving to go towards sustainable development, we should ensure that nobody's left behind. And that concept is very important because this is how the sustainable universe, you can say, or the framework meets human rights. This is where we promise that we do not discriminate as we make those changes in society and we keep an eye on what is the impact of the change. Are people disproportionately affected? Are there ways that we can take a different look on things? And do something differently, making sure that the change and the society we are striving for is inclusive. And what is new in this type of thinking is also that we bring in the future generations. That means that leave no one behind implicitly also say make sure that the next generation is not left behind. And it builds a lot of responsibility on current generation to make sure that while they are, you can technically say borrowing the planet, they leave it in good shape when they pass it on. And that sits in sustainable development and that sits in leaving no one behind.

But still to understand the concept of sustainability, and the 17 goals, leaving no one behind – let's take one step back. And that is that behind the thinking and the goals sits systemic thinking. It sees the planet, it sees the interaction between us as human beings, nature - it sees all this as a system. That allows us to understand the complexity of the society we live in. And that's a very important insight because it is by understanding the complexity of society, we can also start understanding our role in society and that is the basis for action or put a bit more abstractly, human agency. And the concept of human agency is exactly that we - at the end of the day - should strive to live a life that we value, as individuals. We should strive to live a life that we value with others, and we should do it in such a way so whatever I do does not prevent others from also achieving what I have achieved. In other words, there's one planet and we need to find a way of creating space for all of us. That is the fundamental idea in sustainable development and that's the fundamental view that we take on who we are and why we are here.

Now one of the groups, the second largest group in the world that is excluded, is people who live with disability. And here I think we can also look to the UN to understand what does that mean. The UN definition of disability it's sits in the convention for people with disability. And it talks about impairments and barriers - either in attitude or in the environment that relates to you as an individual. So, in other words that it is a person experiencing an impairment, meeting attitudinal or real barriers in the real world. So, what is the advantage of this type of definition? The advantage is it gives two set of areas where we can move because it's relational. I as a human being, I may have an impairment but if we change certain things in the environment that impairment may not be experienced as an impairment by me. And I as a person, I may be able to do something myself so that impairment either improves or it's less. But there's more spaces for action. And therefore if we bring it back to sustainable development. Sustainable development and the 17 goals they really

cover all aspects of life - our physical life, our health, our education, our ability etc. So, it gives enormous amount of space for action and at the same time at the center of sustainable development sits human beings. It sits, that human beings should through - you can say agency - through action determine and try to live the life that they value. Progression is when more people report that they have that possibility. When more people feel they changed. And more people feel that it can possibly get better for their children. That's progression. And the sustainable goals themselves have some indicators that allow us to - in a sense - very clearly see whether we are getting more sustainable or less sustainable. But ones we kind of bring in the 17 goals. We bring in the systemic thinking. We bring in that whole world that systemic thinking brings to us like feedback - like that one must have a complex understanding of the thing you wanna change if you wanna act, if you wanna be able to act. Then let me try to take it down a notch and say that probably 3 or 4 areas where maybe we could look to more concrete action. The first one is that we today are not in a world that is sustainable. It is not in balance with itself and many people in this world we live, including you can say the Danish society I sit in now. They do not feel included. They do not feel that this is a place where both they and maybe future generations can develop. And the climate crisis is a stark reminder that we need to make some fairly big changes to our real economy. So, we need to embrace innovation more. We need to sit down together and find new solutions to old problems. And here I'm not talking so much about economics, I'm thinking more about the solutions that we need to find for human beings to participate so we leave no one behind and we're inclusive. And here I believe there's a very interesting concept from the world of architecture which is called Universal Design. Universal Design is fundamentally saying that if design is the process through which you create functional things, spaces, ideas. You make sure they're functional. They are produced in a sustainable way, and you think that they are accessible in different ways. If that's design, then Universal Design is the same concept but just for all people instead for some people. This idea that we try to mainstream design thinking. We try to innovate. We know we need to do things differently. I think that that can be a very important source of change that is increasing inclusivity. And we should remember that inclusivity can create a lot of growth. In my country, one cannot understand the wealth of Denmark without understanding women entering the labor force in 50's and 60's. Similarly, if we can create more inclusion in our economy, more people can participate in a meaningful way then I think that's an important way forward. The other thing is we need to focus on people today that experience disability and report difficulties in living the life that they live. And we need to work together and find pathways so people with disability can participate more in the real economy. I'm not equating that that's the only way to live a fulfilling life, but I am saying that there is space in our society to make changes. Applying maybe Universal Design. Applying innovation. Investing in inclusivity. And if we do that, we can create very interesting positive economic, process to economic growth and it's a very important part of moving our economy forward in a sustainable way.

Let me now just try to round up the argument. The argument is fundamentally saying that we must and should pursue sustainable development as it meets the criteria for development for both us and future generations. And it also allows space for all of us to be here - and here I mean on the planet because there is only one of them. And in the Anthropocene era we must take responsibility for the development of this planet, and we need to do it together. But while doing this we should focus on inclusivity. Make that an important source of our newfound wealth and sustainability. We should invest in it. We should apply ideas like Universal Design. We should apply innovation as a method.

We should focus on creating value through inclusion and see where that would bring us. And then my hope is that not only do we help people with disability, but we help many other groups that for a reason or another feel excluded in our everyday life. Because at the end of the day, creating meaningful and sustainable societies is a commitment to most people in that society find that they can live a way that they value. But we need to be very conscious that some people have barriers – either attitudinal on our side or very physical barriers that they experience. And that creates a problem for them to participate. And we need to just make sure that we bring them along. And in doing so we at the end of the day help all of us. Because the truth is ability is temporary.

Thank you very much.