

Abraham Lincoln is quoted as saying, “You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today” and he could never be accused of procrastination.

The 16th president of the US, Lincoln took office in 1861 just prior to the American Civil War and is regarded as one of the US's greatest presidents. He was an astute leader and military strategist who fought to preserve the Union of the US following the Civil War; his Emancipation Proclamation resulted in the abolition of slavery; he strengthened the federal government; modernized the economy; and his Gettysburg Address is still one of the most famous speeches in American history.¹ He believed in liberty and freedom and was ahead of his time in seeking equal rights for all citizens. And notably, his time in office was for a period of four years cut short by his assassination.

Today we could benefit from more great leaders like President Lincoln to inspire and fight for what is right to drive forward what is needed to achieve a more sustainable and peaceful world. Unfortunately, current US President Donald Trump has opted out of the Paris Agreement however, most other leading and key players are part of this international treaty of 196 countries established at the end of 2015 to address global climate concerns with targets to reduce green-house gas emissions and hold global temperatures to 2 degrees celsius below pre-industrial records.²

But what is the role of business, governments and society to ensure we do not evade our responsibilities of today to ensure a better and more sustainable world tomorrow?

Governments and Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs)

The role and responsibility of government includes ensuring the protection of its people, the environment, wildlife and their existence. Climate change, natural disasters and protecting our endangered animals have directed our attention to environmental systems and the need to develop and improve our Sustainable Development, which can also be a way of unison through new partnerships and cooperation among governments, industry and NGOs.

Governments around the world are leading the way in sustainability and sharing the same goals and responsibilities of ending hunger, gender inequality and dealing with climate change for a better world for everyone. They are doing this formally through the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³ towards ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring that all people enjoy peace and prosperity, as well as economic equality, innovation, sustainable consumption and peace and justice.

Goals are a path and way to ensure clearer direction and accountability and can be benchmarked and measured. From the Millennium Development Goals, for example, governments far exceeded the goal of reducing global poverty by half which was 36% of the world's population in 1990 but instead of reaching the goal of 18%, the world's poverty was reduced to 12% by 2015 through economic growth.⁴

The SDGs of today and tomorrow SDGs can be achieved not only by economic growth but also by social progress.

To prioritize social progress, we need to ensure:

1. Basic human needs including nutrition, water, shelter and safety
2. Foundations of wellbeing including education, information, health and a sustainable environment
3. Opportunity to improve human rights, freedom of choice, freedom from discrimination and access to the world's most advanced knowledge

In countries like China and India, there has been rapid economic growth however they are underperforming socially with China still having a poor record on human rights and India too has developed rapidly investing in a space program but at the same time, a staggering number of its population are without toilets.⁴

Economic growth can help alleviate global poverty but alone will not help reach global social goals. Norway is a country to follow leading the way both in terms of its GDP and social progress. We can additionally learn from countries like Costa Rica who have achieved improvements in social progress in areas of education, health and the environment. But what can be done to improve their GDP? What if every country made it their mission to turn their wealth into human wellbeing like Costa Rica?⁴

Eradicating poverty also means expanding the richness and fullness of life with people having more choice and opportunity through better access to education, which can reduce inequality and poverty. According to UNICEF:

- In 2015, there were 264 million primary and secondary age children and youth out of school: 61 million children of primary school age (9% of the age group), 62 million adolescents of lower secondary school age (16%), and 141 million youth of upper secondary school age (37%).
- There is no globally agreed standard for measuring reading and mathematics proficiency yet, but substantial efforts have been made since 2016 through the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning.
- Less than one in five countries guarantee 12 years of free and compulsory education; this guarantee is most common in Latin America and the Caribbean (47% of countries).
- Data on student learning outcomes should be adjusted for socio-economic background and follow students over time. But doing this well is hard even for high income countries and extremely challenging for low and middle income countries, where capacity is low and setup costs are high.⁵

Goals are therefore an effective way of aiming for accountability, transparency and demonstrating progress and through benchmarking we can see where we are today from where we have come and which way we need to go.

Climate Change and its Effects on Health

The UK is already experiencing the impact of the climate crisis with warmer winters and hotter summers as well as rising coastal sea levels according to a 2017 report to Parliament by the UK Government. In 2003, the hottest summer in 500 years, 2,000 people died in the UK as well as in Europe, with many countries there also greatly affected. In addition, warmer conditions will also bring pests and new disease carrying insects.⁶

Lord John Krebs, chair of the Committee on Climate Change (CCC)'s adaptation sub-committee, told the Guardian: "We are not sufficiently prepared and we need to do more now, even for the [Paris Agreement] scenario of 2.7 C of warming. Many impacts are affecting us now, as climate change is already happening."

He also added that heat-related risks to health are compounded because most hospitals, elderly care facilities, and other care homes were not designed to deal with extreme heat – and many are located in flood-prone areas. The young, old and chronically ill as well as workers who work outdoors are at a higher risk.

Furthermore, due to urban heat island effect, residents of major UK cities can expect even more dangerously hot conditions. Without assertive global climate action, many experts fear heat waves could reach temperatures of 48 degrees Celsius in London by late this century.⁶

Countries Leading the Way

The top countries leading the world in sustainable responsibility according to the **Environmental Performance Index [EPI]**, a scorecard ranking countries based on 24 environmental performance indicators including air quality, water quality, sanitation, biodiversity, climate change and energy, in the categories of environmental health and ecosystem vitality⁷ are as follows:

1. **Switzerland** ranks top based on its performance to overcome climate and energy and air pollution.
2. **France** reaches No 2 due to changes in environmental policies to reduce emissions with renewable energy at 30%.
3. **Denmark** at No 3 has a main goal to create an environmentally sustainable community; is a world leader in new technologies in wind energy, aims by 2020 to use 50% energy from wind; and tops air quality due to its action on climate change and energy. Copenhagen has around 400 km of cycle paths and almost 40% of the city's population travel by bike.
4. **Malta's** Government in 2012 adopted the Sustainable Development Act reframing the law and order to mainstream sustainable development in its politics. Currently, 70% of the country's energy is from natural gas and the rest is from renewable sources with top scores also in water and sanitation.
5. **Sweden** is developing technologies to obtain 100% of its energy from renewable and recycled sources with most of the energy source from harnessing heat and sunlight. An example of this achievement is at Stockholm's Central Station through a passive building, a geothermal system which can capture the heat of over 250,000 daily commuters.⁷

Whilst not reaching the top five, I would also like to highlight the great work being done in the UK and **Scotland** in particular, which has grown into a global leader in wind energy with plans to produce 100% of its gross annual electricity consumption through renewables by 2020.⁸

These European governments and societies are taking responsibility for a more sustainable future and are role models for those countries who not fairing well such as Pakistan, Qatar and Afghanistan due to their urban areas being the most polluted.⁹

Society's Leaders Embracing Today

It also takes great visionary leaders, humanitarians and risk taking entrepreneurs and business leaders to achieve a vision for a better world.

Environmentalists and leaders like **Sir David Attenborough** and **former US Vice President Al Gore** have made it their mission and responsibility to inspire and lead us to do the right thing today for a better tomorrow.

Attenborough, now 92 years old, continues to be an awe-inspiring force representing the voice of the world's people through the UN's people's seat initiative and recently told 200 delegates at the UN Climate Change Summit in Katowice, Poland in December that the collapse of civilization and the natural world is on the horizon. The goal of the Summit was to negotiate how to turn pledges made in the 2015 Paris Agreement into reality. Attenborough says: "Right now we are facing a manmade disaster of global scale, our greatest threat in thousands of years: climate change"; "If we don't take action, the collapse of our civilisations and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon."¹⁰

Gore talked of an inconvenient truth with regards to the delicate future of the planet and the truth is, the sustainability of our planet is everyone's responsibility. He speaks of a new revolution in sustainability with more accessibility to renewable energy, electric vehicles, cheaper battery power and a changing world through the Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence. He also highlights the world's climate crisis as it continues to deepen with 16 of the 17 warmest years on record happening since 2001 with solutions not able to match these problems.¹¹

In fact, as part of the **Climate Reality Project** you can join to "train as a Climate Reality Leader and work with Al Gore and renowned climate scientists and communicators to learn about what's happening to our planet and how you can use digital tools, powerful storytelling, and personal outreach to build real momentum for solutions and inspire communities to act."¹²

Today's Business for Tomorrow

On a grand scale, a great example of not evading today is **The World Bank**, an international financial institution providing loans to countries. It was announced in December, following the UN Climate Change Summit in Poland, that \$100bn (£78bn) of climate funding from 2021-2025 will be distributed to cut emissions and protect people from the floods, storms and droughts that global warming is making worse. Kristalina Georgieva, World Bank CEO said, "We are clearly the last generation that can change the course of climate change, but we are also the first generation with its consequences."¹³

It can be difficult to **change businesses** as they stand but a way forward for tomorrow could include:

- Adopting cultures of creativity, imagination and the ability to envisage a different and better world
- Creating and providing great products and services with positive impacts on the environment and community
- Aiming for value creation by management and staff for all stakeholders
- Ensuring employee inspiration, engagement and inclusivity with ongoing conversations about being good citizens
- Empowering stakeholders to think for themselves, their purpose, values and ethics
- Embracing conflict, challenges and critique and coach those who push back against those values

And the **best businesses** will have a reputation as demonstrating:

- Corporate citizenship and responsibility: i.e how a company manages and measures environmental impact and similar topics
- Corporate governance: relating to a company's leadership quality and structure

Stella McCartney, Fashion Designer and animal rights activist is featured in this month's Wired magazine. She is designing the future of clothing; the future of sustainable companies; and is an excellent example of a leading force today for tomorrow.¹⁴

As she became more aware of the impacts of the fashion industry on the environment, mostly that global textile production spews 1.2 billion tonnes of greenhouse gases annually, which is more than international flights and maritime shipping combined – she set strict sustainability goals to use organic cotton, avoids endangered forests, and reduced the use of oil-based synthetics.

In 2012, she appointed a director of sustainability and innovation to help her company move to a more sustainable way of working. Their first achievement was to source viscose from sustainable sources which she continues to guarantee. She is a sustainable leader with other fashion brands now following her and she has made sustainability her responsibility.¹⁴

Sustainability of Retail

In following Stella McCartney's lead, "**Burberry** is very wise to be ending its association with fur and it joins the ranks of an ever-increasing number of top designers like Gucci, Michael Kors, DKNY and Versace, who have also realized real fur has no future in fashion."¹⁵

But after consumer and media backlash, British fashion label Burberry, who burned more than £28 million of unsold products for the year after continued downturn in sales, has reported it will immediately stop this practice as part of a five-year plan to work towards higher ethical standards, including reducing waste. The fashion industry has slowly woken up and Burberry plan to reuse, repair, donate or recycle all unsaleable products.¹⁵

Greenpeace also state: "the fashion industry has the power to influence trends and also has the power to play a positive role in protecting the planet. Since July 2011, Greenpeace has secured commitments from international brands, retailers and suppliers to eliminate hazardous chemicals, including help to trigger policy changes in Europe and Asia. Eliminating toxic chemicals is just the start. From fast fashion to textile waste, we need the global textile industry to be a true 'trend setter', and take a stand on the environmental and human impact of fashion."¹⁶

Remaining with the Fashion Industry, over the past two decades, cheaper production costs have meant **fast and mass produced fashion** and according to sustainyourstyle.org: "We now have 5 times more clothes than our grandparents had. It felt great until we found out what was hiding behind this trend. In reality, this continuous accumulation of cheap garments is only possible because of a constant reduction of production costs. This, in turn, has serious consequences on our health, our planet, and on garment workers' lives."¹⁷

What can we do to change this?

We should **buy less; buy sustainable garments** albeit they are currently more expensive and not so easy to come by but this will help towards changing the supply and demand thereby further leading to changing fashion trends; and **invest in better quality garments** which one would expect to last longer.

In the past, some people would not be seen in second hand clothes but today is a different story and era and people are reusing and upcycling their clothes, renting more and swapping especially the Millennial generation who have little interest in owning assets outright, preferring to rent them for short intervals, or share them with others.¹⁴

At NYU Abu Dhabi, there is a second chance pop up store for people to **donate clothing** to allow other people to take advantage of them. This is mostly aimed at outsourced workers but expanding this to the entire community would be a way forward for tomorrow. We should also consider how often our clothes need to be washed to further save the environment from chemicals and microfibers and the use of water.

Sustainability Trends Report – 2018

“Informed consumers are demanding more sustainable products. Businesses are responding. The result is a transformation that we believe marks the beginning stages of the **Sustainability Revolution**.”¹⁸

This is empowered by new digital tools, the internet of things and machine learning. The report highlights more businesses are adopting sustainable approaches to business to benefit the planet and society as well as increase their profits and are doing so in the following ways:

- Companies are embracing technology to help **produce more sustainable products and services**.
- **Urban Mobility** for consumers and businesses is rapidly changing with new, cleaner types of transportation with cycling slowly becoming more popular. Car and bike sharing schemes are more common and popular than a decade ago. Electric vehicles are greener and accessible and are as practical as those running on petrol. Society is seen to be shifting with more renting or sharing assets than owning assets completely such as bikes or cars.
- Consumption matters with consumers globally adopting more sustainable lifestyles be it through **conscious purchasing** for less environmental impact to what and how they eat with increases in vegetarianism and veganism. However plastic consumption continues to grow but is still taking centre-stage.
- **Renewable energy** such as wind and solar power has become more reliable and accessible due to more awareness and cost efficiencies with record levels of installations in 2016. Renewables are quickly becoming an important source of energy in many countries with households and businesses investing to reduce their consumption of energy. But more needs to be done. Some governments are embracing measures to discourage carbon emissions, though progress has slowed. The report indicates more action is needed.¹⁸

Society's Responsibility

It is everyone's responsibility to ensure the health and sustainability of our planet and its people and we need to work on this collectively. Sustainability is about choices made within environmental, economic, social and cultural contexts and which are global by nature. Our actions are impactful and important and as individuals, we all have a part to play in making our world a better place.

Education is naturally linked to transformations of society and growth and is at the forefront of Sustainability which is a topic now embedded in courses, is an area of extensive research and procedures and policies are continuously improving to ensure a more sustainable future.

Academia's role and responsibility is also to help impart basic and applied knowledge as well as create new understanding and provide opportunities to achieve a greater sense of social and economic well-being and sustainable success. Faculty, researchers and students help to drive important change in areas of sustainable importance including clean and renewable energy; health; global economies; education, wildlife conservation; urbanization; world food production; and future technologies.

Academic communities work to coordinate areas of energy conservation, waste reduction and campus preservation amongst faculty, staff and students as part of the community and culture of university and college campuses. Education's role is to create philosophical approaches and this begins on campuses with cultures changing there first.

And at the University of Queensland, Australia, for example, staff at all levels within the University have responsibility for minimizing environmental harm. These responsibilities are principally based on the Environmental Protection Act (1994) (QLD) and related legislation. The University's Sustainability Policy and Environmental Management Policy further reinforce these responsibilities.¹⁹

Society's Obligation

Sustainability is an ongoing process requiring multiple transitions in energy, use of resources, corporate behavior, governance, knowledge production as well as lifestyle and way of thinking. "Sustainable Development is not about achieving some kind of balance, it's a moral obligation," said Kemp, professor of Innovation and Sustainable Development at Maastricht University.²⁰

And a well-known example is Erin Brockovich, an American legal clerk and environmental activist, was instrumental in building a case against the Pacific Gas and Electric Company of California in 1993 due to contamination of drinking water in the southern California town of Hinkley. At the center of the case was the Hinkley compressor station built in 1952 as a part of a natural-gas pipeline connecting to the San Francisco Bay Area. Hexavalent chromium was used in the cooling tower system to fight corrosion with the wastewater discharged into the regular groundwater. The case was settled in 1996 for US\$333 million, the largest settlement ever paid in a direct-action lawsuit in US history.²¹

And finally, returning to the Paris Accord and the withdrawal of the United States, according to the terms of the Paris Agreement, the earliest the US can completely leave the agreement will be one day after the US 2020 election. However, alongside the international actors moving forward without the Trump administration, there are a number of non-federal players joining movements such as [We Are Still In](#), the [US Climate Alliance](#) and the [US Climate Mayors](#) and this includes some US states and cities as well as businesses with many joining forces to try to fulfill the US climate pledge to the Paris Agreement.²²

It is indeed [the responsibility of every citizen on our planet – we are in it for the long haul ...](#)

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