Nygaard Notes

Independent Periodic News and Analysis

The Agenda for Sustainable Development

Back in 2006 I reported on something called the Millennium Development Goals, saying "In September of the year 2000, at a global summit at the United Nations, the world community endorsed a document called the 'Millennium Declaration.' This declaration included eight goals for human societies on the planet, which are referred to as the Millennium Development Goals. The aim, as agreed in the Declaration, was to meet these goals within 15 years, which would be by the year 2015."

I didn't report on it at the time, but in the year 2015 the U.N. put out a document called "The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015," which was a good-news story that was mostly ignored by media in the United States. I won't go into it here, but U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon said at the time that "The global mobilization behind the Millennium Development Goals has produced the most successful anti-poverty movement in history." The Report itself reminded readers that it 'will serve as the jumping-off point for the new sustainable development agenda to be adopted this year."

And, sure enough, in September of that year the UN adopted a resolution called "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". This Agenda for the next 15 years (2015-2030) was adopted by consensus; no vote was held. Here are four paragraphs from the Preamble to this remarkable document:

This Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom. We recognize that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.

All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan. We are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want, and to heal and secure our planet. We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets which we are announcing today demonstrate the scale and ambition of this new universal Agenda. They seek to build on the Millennium Development Goals and complete what they did not achieve. They seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.

The Goals and targets will stimulate action over the next 15 years in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet.

Before I list the 17 Goals (I won't even try to summarize the 169 targets!), I want to acknowledge that, seen from the United States, these goals may seem absurdly radical. Indeed, the Resolution itself says "In these Goals and targets, we are setting out a supremely ambitious and transformational vision." But take note of whose voices are being amplified here: "The Goals and targets are the result of over two years of intensive public consultation and engagement with civil society and other stakeholders around the world, *which paid particular attention to the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable.*" [Emphasis added] So, of course the following Goals are seen as radical;

Greetings,

   Here in the United States we are in the midst of a powerful push towards a new authoritarianism that seeks to silence the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable precisely because those voices dare to demand radical change.

   Faced with daily threats to our democracy, our livelihoods, and indeed our very lives, it's easy to forget that another world is possible. With this in mind, I decided that issue #674 of Nygaard Notes would feature some recent initiatives from the United Nations.

   The history, structure, and effectiveness of the United Nations are deeply flawed, I'll be the first to admit. Yet the United Nations remains one of the few places where the voices of the poorest and most marginalized people in the world can be heard. And those voices—when we choose to hear them—remind us that the world is an amazing place. So much more amazing than you'd think when you listen to the tired and constrained voices that dominate the daily news cycle in this, the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world!

   So sit back, relax, and let these voices spark your imagination, warm your heart, and inspire you to do your part to build a new world. It's time.

   Nygaard

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 any proposal to level the playing field is going to encounter fierce resistance from those in whose favor the playing field is tilted, and one form of that resistance is always going to be "It's too radical". That shouldn't stop us from being inspired by the "supremely ambitious and transformational vision" that again and always emerges when the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable are heard.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals

As adopted by consensus of the world's nations at a meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on September 26th 2015:

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
Goal 7 Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice
                                                             ↗↗↗

➜➜ for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

As the world's nations proceed with efforts to set the world on a path of sustainable development, there is broad agreement that "Nothing undermines development like a disaster." In that spirit, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) has

been working around the world to coordinate efforts to prevent future disasters, and to increase the resilience of communities and nations that will enable them to bounce back when disasters do strike. The drought report you read about in the last Nygaard Notes was the most recent publication of the UNDRR.

Six months before The Agenda for Sustainable Development was formally adopted, the world's nations met in Sendai, Japan, and came up with a plan for dealing with future disasters. Let's have a look at that initiative. ◆

The Sendai Framework

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 was adopted by UN Member States on 18 March 2015 at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture, Japan. There wasn't much about it in the media, but one news service report at the time reported that "Representatives from 187 UN member States today adopted the first major agreement of the Post-2015 development agenda, a far reaching new framework for disaster risk reduction with seven targets and four priorities for action." This new framework is known as the Sendai Framework. It's worth knowing about.

Here's a brief summary of the Sendai Framework's four priority areas:

Priority 1: Understanding Disaster Risk involves building "an understanding of disaster risk in all its dimensions of vulnerability, capacity, exposure of persons and assets, hazard characteristics and the environment."

Priority 2: Strengthening Disaster Risk Governance to Manage Disaster Risk states that "Clear vision, plans, competence, guidance and coordination within and across sectors, as well as participation of relevant stakeholders, are needed. Strengthening disaster risk governance for prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery and rehabilitation is therefore necessary and fosters collaboration and partnership across mechanisms and institutions for the implementation of instruments relevant to disaster

risk reduction and sustainable development."

Priority 3: Investing in Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience. Here we read that "Public and private investment in disaster risk prevention and reduction through structural and non-structural measures are essential to enhance the economic, social, health and cultural resilience of persons, communities, countries and their assets, as well as the environment. These can be drivers of innovation, growth and job creation. Such measures are cost-effective and instrumental to save lives, prevent and reduce losses and ensure effective recovery and rehabilitation.

Priority 4: "Enhancing Disaster Preparedness for Effective Response and to 'Build Back Better' In Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction." (Some of you may have thought that Joe Biden made up the slogan "Build Back Better" that he used in his 2020 presidential campaign, but he actually borrowed it—or stole it?—from the Sendai Framework. Who knew?)

Priority 4 highlights "the need to further strengthen disaster preparedness for response, take action in anticipation of events, integrate disaster risk reduction in response preparedness and ensure that capacities are in place for effective response and recovery at all levels. Empowering women and persons with disabilities to publicly lead and promote gender equitable and universally accessible response, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction approaches is key. Disasters have demonstrated

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that the recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction phase, which needs to be prepared ahead of a disaster, is a critical opportunity to 'Build Back Better', including through integrating disaster risk reduction into development measures, making nations and communities resilient to disasters."

We really get down to business when we look at the seven global targets for the new 15-year planning period. Here they are:

1. Substantially reduce global disaster mortality by 2030, aiming to lower the average per 100,000 global mortality rate compared to the period 2005– 2015;
2. Substantially reduce the number of affected people globally by 2030, aiming to lower the average global figure per 100,000 compared to the period 2005–2015;
3. Reduce direct disaster economic loss in relation to global gross domestic product (GDP) by 2030;
4. Substantially reduce disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services, among them health and educational facilities, including through developing their resilience by 2030;
5. Substantially increase the number of countries with national/local disaster risk strategies by 2020;
6. Substantially enhance international cooperation to developing countries through adequate and sustainable support to complement their national actions for implementation of the present Framework by 2030;
7. Substantially increase the availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster

risk information and assessments to people by 2030

Today, 6 years into the Sendai reporting period, progress has been decidedly mixed, as reported on the "Sendai Monitor" website of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Here is Mami Mizutori, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction, commenting on the increasing number of disasters challenging the world:

"The reports we are receiving are evidence that it is not just the number of extreme weather events that are on the rise but that there has also been a steady up-tick in the number of high-frequency recurrent low-to-medium intensity disasters that are taking their toll in terms of economic losses and disruption of basic services at the local level. This is further proof that the climate emergency is disrupting efforts to eradicate poverty and to put the world on a path to sustainable development."

When it comes to international affairs, political leaders in the United States tend to focus on real or imagined military threats to our country, be it China, Russia, North Korea, Venezuela, or Iran. It's past time for our leaders to let go of that focus, and to begin talking about the threats posed by poverty, inequality, and climate disruption, which threaten not only the United States, but all of humanity. When we start hearing our leaders talking about how we can implement the ideas agreed to in the Sendai Framework, we'll begin to know what real global leadership looks like. ◆

The New Urban Agenda

I grew up in a small farming community in Southern Minnesota, and as soon as I was old enough I moved to Minneapolis, the largest city in the state. I mention this because, unbeknownst to me, I was part of a trend. A really big trend that is worth noting: The world is rapidly urbanizing.

Here's historian Lewis Mumford, writing in 1956:

"The blind forces of urbanization, flowing along the

lines of least resistance, show no aptitude for creating an urban and industrial pattern that will be stable, self-sustaining, and self-renewing. On the contrary, as congestion thickens and expansion widens, both the urban and the rural landscape undergo defacement and degradation, while unprofitable investments in the remedies for congestion, such as more superhighways and more distant reservoirs of water, increase the economic burden and serve only to promote more of the blight and disorder they seek to palliate. ... ↗↗↗

➜➜ [Nevertheless] we have at least a hint of the future task of urbanization: the re-establishment, in a more complex unity, with a full use of the resources of modern science and techniques, of the ecological balance that originally prevailed between city and country in the primitive stages of urbanization."

I was only two years old when Mumford spoke about "ecological balance" and "urban patterns" that are "stable, self-sustaining, and self-renewing." Unfortunately, "the blind forces of urbanization" of which he spoke 65 years ago have been the default settings for much of the world since then, and the issues raised by uncontrolled urbanization become even more critical as ever-more people crowd into cities in every corner of the planet. And I do mean "crowd."

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) tells us that the urban population of the world grew from 746 million in 1950 to 3.9 billion in 2014. As of last November, more than half (56.2%) of the global population was living in cities. And by the year 2050 fully two-thirds of the entire human population are expected to be living in urban areas.

These billions of people need, and will need, clean water and reliable energy, decent work and health care. They are, and will be, generating waste, seeking shelter, confronting crime and violence, and struggling to avoid and/or adapt to the consequences of our ongoing disruption of the planet's climate systems.

It's past time that we have a serious, high-profile public discussion of how we can create a plan—a plan that we can execute—for fashioning urban environments that are sustainable, resilient, and shaped not by "the blind forces of urbanization" but by an inclusive and democratic process that responds to the needs of people. And that leads us back to the United Nations.

Goal Number 11

Elsewhere in this issue I talk about the Sustainable Development Goals that were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September of 2015. One of those goals was Goal Number 11: "Make Cities and Human Settlements Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable." A year later, in October of 2016, the world's nations gathered to come up with a plan to address Goal 11. Called "Habitat III, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development," the meeting was held in Quito, Ecuador. It was called "Habitat III" because there had been two previous UN Conferences on Housing (1976 and 1996). Habitat III was remarkable for the agreement that was adopted by the 30,000 attendees. That agreement is known as The New Urban Agenda, and it was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly at its sixty-eighth plenary meeting of the seventy-first session on 23 December 2016. Let's take just a brief look at what that agreement is all about. ◆

The Future of Cities

The New Urban Agenda—sometimes called the Quito Declaration, for the city in which it was adopted—begins by laying out the challenge:

"Populations, economic activities, social and cultural interactions, as well as environmental and humanitarian impacts, are increasingly concentrated in cities, and this poses massive sustainability challenges in terms of housing, infrastructure, basic services, food security, health, education, decent jobs, safety and natural resources, among others."

Then the NUA lays out the hopes embodied in the agreement:

"We adopt this New Urban Agenda as a collective vision and political commitment to promote and realize sustainable urban development, and as a historic opportunity to leverage the key role of cities and human settlements as drivers of sustainable development in an increasingly urbanized world."

"By readdressing the way cities and human

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settlements are planned, designed, financed, developed, governed and managed, the New Urban Agenda will help to end poverty and hunger in all its forms and dimensions; reduce inequalities; promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth; achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in order to fully harness their vital contribution to sustainable development; improve human health and well-being; foster resilience; and protect the environment."

And, since this is the United Nations, the NUA seeks to articulate a global vision while realizing that each city will have to make their own way within that vision: "While the specific circumstances of cities of all sizes, towns and villages vary, we affirm that the New Urban Agenda is universal in scope, participatory and people-centered, protects the planet and has a long-term vision, setting out priorities and actions at the global, regional, national, subnational and local levels that Governments and other relevant stakeholders in every country can adopt based on their needs."

Section 14 lays out the NUA's guiding principles:

a) *Leave No One Behind*, "by ending poverty in all its forms and dimensions, by ending the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, by promoting safety and eliminating discrimination and all forms of violence, by ensuring public participation, by providing equal access for all to physical and social infrastructure and basic services."

b) *Ensure Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Economies* "by leveraging ... high productivity, competitiveness and innovation ... by promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all, by ensuring the creation of decent jobs and equal access for all to economic and productive resources and opportunities and by preventing land speculation..."

c) *Ensure Environmental Sustainability* "by promoting clean energy and sustainable use of land and resources in urban development, by protecting ecosystems and biodiversity, including adopting

healthy lifestyles in harmony with nature, by promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns, by building urban resilience, by reducing disaster risks and by mitigating and adapting to climate change."

Despite the big words, I really like Section 24, which reads like this: "To fully harness the potential of sustainable urban development, we make the following transformative commitments through an urban paradigm shift grounded in the integrated and indivisible dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental."

This is followed by a list of more than four dozen commitments (!). I'll just pass on a few of my favorites here. The nations of the world said:

"We commit ourselves to promoting appropriate measures in cities and human settlements that facilitate access for persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment of cities, in particular to public spaces, public transport, housing, education and health facilities, public information and communication (including information and communications technologies and systems) and other facilities and services open or provided to the public, in both urban and rural areas.

"We commit ourselves to recognizing the contribution of the working poor in the informal economy, particularly women, including unpaid, domestic and migrant workers, to the urban economies, taking into account national circumstances.

"We commit ourselves to facilitating the sustainable management of natural resources in cities and human settlements in a manner that protects and improves the urban ecosystem and environmental services, reduces greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution and promotes disaster risk reduction and management,

"We commit ourselves to adopting a smart-city approach that makes use of opportunities from digitalization, clean energy and technologies, as well as innovative transport technologies,

"We commit ourselves to preserving and promoting the ecological and social function of land,   ↗↗↗

➜➜ including coastal areas that support cities and human settlements, and to fostering ecosystem-based solutions to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, so that the ecosystem's regenerative capacity is not exceeded.

"We commit ourselves to promoting international, national, subnational and local climate action, including climate change adaptation and mitigation, and to supporting the efforts of cities and human settlements, their inhabitants and all local stakeholders as important implementers.

And, finally, the recent collapse of the condominium in Surfside Florida makes the following statement from the New Urban Agenda terrifyingly poignant:

"We will also promote measures for strengthening and retrofitting all risky housing stock, including in slums and informal settlements, to make it resilient to disasters, in coordination with local authorities and stakeholders." ◆

Sustainability and Imagination

The word that occurs perhaps most frequently in The New Urban Agenda is the word "sustainable." And it's crystal-clear that the drafters of the NUA are aware that our cities will only work in the long term if they are set up to be sustainable in both the physical and the social senses. That is, they know that the Earth does not offer an infinite supply of food, water and land, and that our current systems and practices will soon be asking more of our natural systems than they can supply. That's the physical aspect of sustainability.

Social sustainability is different. Can we learn to think and act collectively, and make decisions that ensure the health and well-being—indeed, the survival!—of the human species? The New Urban Agenda repeatedly points the way here, using the words "planning" and "participation" almost as often as the word "sustainable." *Participation* is stressed in the following two paragraphs:

"We commit ourselves to urban and rural development that is people-centered, protects the planet, and is age- and gender-responsive and to the realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, facilitating living together, ending all forms of discrimination and violence, and empowering all individuals and communities while enabling their full and meaningful participation."

"The New Urban Agenda reaffirms our global commitment to sustainable urban development as a critical step for realizing sustainable development in an integrated and coordinated manner at the global, regional, national, subnational and local levels, with the participation of all relevant actors."

The previous paragraph will cause so-called conservatives to protest that such thinking will result in a loss of "sovereignty." No time to go into the whole issue of "sovereignty" right now. For now I'll just note that the NUA subscribes to the principle of "subsidiarity," which is the principle whereby an international body (e.g. the United Nations) does not take action unless it is more effective than action taken at the national, regional or local level.

I quoted Lewis Mumford earlier, who noted that our cities cannot achieve ecological balance by following "the blind forces of urbanization." I suspect he was referring there to "market forces," that is, capitalism, which is a system that is dollar-centered rather than people-centered.

The alternative to allowing our cities (or anything else) to be shaped by market forces is to practice participatory planning, which is almost a synonym for "democracy." As in this paragraph:

"We recognize that the realization of the transformative commitments set out in the New Urban Agenda will require enabling policy frameworks at the national, subnational and local levels, integrated by participatory planning and management of urban spatial development and effective means of implementation, complemented by international cooperation as well as efforts in capacity development, including the sharing

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of best practices, policies and programmes among Governments at all levels."

And the NUA doesn't have the specifics worked out, saying that "We will also strive to build flexibility into our plans in order to adjust to changing social and economic conditions over time."

Participation. Planning. Cooperation. Sustainability. Do such words really have meaning? Is there really any chance that humans can evolve beyond a world system based on Individualism and Competition

toward a system based on the Social and Cooperative values that we need?

Well, I wouldn't know the answer to that question! But I do think that we are approaching a time of crisis more profound than we have faced in many lifetimes. And if that's true, then we may be able to create change like we've never seen before. We'll have to use our imaginations, and we'll have to work together. Agreements like The New Urban Agenda—and the other global initiatives highlighted in this issue of Nygaard Notes—offer proof that plenty of people around the world are already imagining a better future, and are already working together to make it happen. Won't you join them? ◆

"Quote" of the Week: "*Utilities Must Be Public Goods*"

On June 4th House Resolution 457 was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. Sponsored by Rep. Cori Bush of Missouri and 8 other Congresspeople, the document calls for a transition away from for-profit utilities by "transferring ownership over to state, local, and tribal governments," or using "public funds to convert them to community or cooperative ownership."

In a one-page summary of the initiative, the sponsors make their point, which hereby becomes a lengthy Nygaard Notes "Quote" of the Week:

"The utilities crisis in Texas in February was not an isolated incident. Our energy systems repeatedly exacerbate disasters we know are worsening and take lives in the process of prioritizing shareholder profits over people's needs. This problematic structure of investor-owned utilities is our dominant way of providing energy. The problems of our current utility system are evident when people are choosing between turning on the heat in winter and buying cereal for their

kids. The problems are evident when poor maintenance designed to save money makes already devastating wildfires far more deadly. The problems are evident when power goes out after a flood and someone cannot turn on vital medical equipment. To save lives and to fight the climate crisis at the same time, utilities must be public goods for everyone. Every single person in this country should have electricity and temperature control they need for basic survival. The United States must re-imagine its power system to be just, equitable, anti-racist, and climate- and disaster-resilient through establishing a public power system. And we will. Public power offers a golden opportunity to break corporate power and to redesign the grid so that everyone, particularly those most marginalized by the fossil fueled system, has a voice in transitioning energy that is truly in the public's best interest. By investing in and democratizing the public and cooperative power we already have in the United States, we can also pave the way for renewables grounded on the principles of energy justice"