

Africa Asia Scholars Global Network (AASGON)

GSDF High Level Virtual World Press Conference

Keynote Speech

Collaborating to Create a Sustainable Future

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Today's conversation about shaping the future is timely and important.

Currently, we are not in a good place. We live in an era that is uncertain, unpredictable and volatile.

Global risks and existential threats accumulate. Communities and societies are increasingly fragmented and polarised. More relationships are transactional.

We face inter-related environmental, geopolitical and technological challenges. Fragile international institutions struggle to cope with them.

Most global risks and existential threats result from human activities. Falling biodiversity, collapsing ecosystems, and global warming and climate change add to food insecurity and other concerns.

AI has emerged as both a security risk and an existential threat. Control and regulatory solutions to problems already experienced have yet to be developed.

Mega data centres required by AI consume energy, water and resources needed to address other risks and threats.

Bad actors and criminals, often with hostile state support, use AI to hack, steal, plant sleeping malware, disable, discredit and undermine. We are all at risk.

Critical infrastructures are especially vulnerable. So too are power supplies and undersea cables. Make sure you have a non-digital back up.

Many people are anxious, concerned and stressed. They feel exposed, marginalised and powerless.

Authoritarian leaders and demagogues offer to stand up for them. Lies, exaggeration and disinformation are widespread.

Multilateralism and liberal democracy seem in decline. Cooperation and collective responses are more difficult to achieve.

The common good is giving way to the pursuit of narrow national and sectional interests.

Grey zone conflicts and hot and hybrid wars abound. Raw power rather than principles determines outcomes.

Values and ethical considerations are more articulated than applied. Gaps between rhetoric and reality have reached epic proportions.

As net zero continues to appear elusive, governments promise unsustainable growth.

Many people do not trust their leaders. They seek refuge in virtual worlds.

Current activities and lifestyles appear unsustainable. Our warming planet cannot cope with the increasing population and ecology depleting growth ambitions. A mass extinction of other species is underway.

Our collective survival is problematic. Our downfall and passing could come sooner than expected. Few if any countries could cope with multiple crises, risks and threats occurring simultaneously.

On global warming, we are already in overshoot territory. We urgently need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Could the global south where emissions per head are lower than those in the developed north be the key to our collective survival?

90% of the world's young people reside in the global south. They will suffer the most from global warming in their lifetimes. Yet many of them could have opportunities to live more sustainable and satisfying lives.

The Equal Earth projection presents the scale of Africa and its land more accurately. In the global south there is space to try new approaches in a variety of different contexts.

This opportunity should not be taken for granted. Evidence suggests that land degradation might affect almost 95% of the world's stock by 2050

The global south offers multiple possibilities for innovation, and the development of alternative lifestyles, eco-friendly built environments and more resilient infrastructures.

Grassroots circular economy innovations are already enabling vulnerable communities that lack resources to make the most of what they have.

Moving to different and less materialistic development models across the global south might change current trajectories. Collaboration might help the scaling up of environmentally beneficial innovations.

Rather than imitate, the global south could initiate, inspire and transform.

Countries have a shared interest in survival. They and you could lead and work together on collective responses to common challenges, global risks and existential threats.

More of the same will lead to our demise. You could act collectively to tackle negative externalities and enhance biodiversity.

The global south is vibrant with pent up youthful energy, latent talent and untapped wisdom. You could rethink, reinvent and create more resilient communities and infrastructures.

You could offer young people the prospect of living simpler, healthier and less stressful lives in harmony with the natural world. You could give the excluded and marginalised a purpose.

The UN Environment Programme is headquartered in Nairobi in the global south. It reports options for recovery and pathways to limit the period of peak warming if enough of us enable their implementation. It warns that accelerated collective and global action is now required.

Materialism, consumerism, hubris, and a lack of concern for consequences have led to an expanding agenda of common problems.

Current arrangements, mechanisms and institutions have not effectively confronted them. We need to do things differently.

When situations develop, events happen and crises arise, getting current, authoritative, objective and independent counsel on options, possibilities and responses is challenging.

Past practices are often inappropriate or too inflexible. We need practical and holistic solutions to inter-related problems.

Circumstances that were once intermittent have become more common. Qualities, perspectives and resilience of another kind may now be required.

Many people are deeply concerned. Often, they are unsure of what they can do to make a difference. They may doubt if enough people will change their lifestyles in time to prevent climate Armageddon.

Will those whose aspirations, behaviours and consumption have caused multiple problems for others and the environment adopt what could be a more satisfying and sustainable existence?

Even where and when better and more inclusive options, choices and possibilities exist, people may still feel alone, excluded and helpless. Something is missing.

Effective collective action to address multiple challenges, risks and existential threats demands international cooperation and coordination, and whole of society responses.

It requires networks and perspectives that can supplement and energise legacy institutions that struggle, are deadlocked, or have lost their way. It is also needed now.

Challenges and problems are often accompanied by opportunities for imagination, enterprise and entrepreneurship. What is often lacking are mechanisms for networking, collaborating and partnering with others to prepare proposals, secure funding and scale up new ventures.

Our convenor has worked tirelessly over many years to harness diverse and hitherto unconnected talent across the global south.

Today's announcements provide opportunities for potential contributors to complement, work with and support people, organisations and institutions intent on creating a responsible and sustainable future.

Likeminded potential collaborators exist in growing numbers around the world.

Crises sometimes bring out the best in people. Don't be deterred by the enormity of current challenges.

Now is the time to step up. The global south could champion more sustainable, inclusive and responsible development. You could pioneer alternative and fulfilling lifestyles.

We face common challenges, risks and threats and have a shared interest in survival.

I know many in both the north and the south who long for alternatives and better options and choices. We need to collaborate to create a sustainable future.

Long-term success often comes to those who are bouncing balls. When knocked down they get up, learn from their experience and go again. Rather than moderate their ambitions, they become more determined.

Your contributions and collaboration could be a beacon of hope for humanity.

By working together your countries could become the first truly sustainable societies.

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