

## Africa Asia Scholars Global Network

### Creating a Sustainable Future

Prof Colin Coulson-Thomas

We live in an era that is uncertain, unpredictable and volatile. Global risks and existential threats loom. Communities and societies are increasingly fragmented and polarised. More relationships are transactional.

We face inter-related environmental, geopolitical and technological challenges. Infrastructures and institutions are fragile and vulnerable. Individuals and organisations are often overloaded.

Many people are anxious, concerned and stressed. They feel exposed, marginalised and powerless. Authoritarian leaders offer to stand up for them. Lies, exaggeration and disinformation are widespread.

Multilateralism and collaboration are on the 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.

Hot and hybrid wars and grey zone conflicts abound. Raw power rather than principles determines more outcomes

Values and ethical considerations are articulated but not applied. Gaps between rhetoric and reality have reached epic proportions. More people do not trust their leaders. They seek refuge in virtual worlds.

Current activities and lifestyles appear unsustainable. Our warming planet cannot cope with us and our growing population. A mass extinction of other species is underway.

Our own survival is problematic. Our demise could be sooner than expected. Few if any countries could cope with a combination of crises, risks and threats crystallising simultaneously.

Perspectives on the global north and the global south need to change to accommodate contemporary realities and likely future trends.

The North includes: A USA led by a climate change denier; A Russian Federation waging an unprovoked, illegal and brutal invasion of Ukraine; A China that actively supports it to distract the USA; and an insecure Europe with democracy under continual cyber and hybrid attack.

The North is preoccupied, indebted and partly stagnant with aging populations. Governments cannot meet current expectations or take on new commitments. Rearmament is straining public finances.

Accountability for greenhouse gas emissions before a scientific consensus on human impacts emerged is questionable, and reparations are unlikely. Past emissions are history, and some could be in the atmosphere for centuries.

Our collective survival now depends on current and future incremental changes. Increases often come from developing countries with growing populations. The global south is the key to our collective survival.

In the North few governments could survive enforced reductions in living standards. Even if successful, further reductions in the UK would not make much difference.

Most of the world's young people reside in the Global South. Their futures will be prejudiced by a resurgence of drilling for oil and gas and the mining of coal.

Moving to a different and less materialistic development model in the south could be decisive.

Where the north is divided, the global south could cooperate. You could resist pressure to strike individual country deals on tariffs and trade. You could collaborate to scale up environmentally beneficial innovations.

Rather than defer and follow, the south could initiate. You have a shared interest in survival. 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. Rather than imitate and follow you could inspire and transform. You could tackle negative externalities and enhance biodiversity.

The global south is vibrant with pent up youthful energy. You could rethink, reinvent and create more resilient communities and infrastructures. You could offer young people the prospects of living in harmony with the natural world.

Don't be deterred by the enormity of current challenges. Grasp related opportunities. Inspire. Release the talents of your young people.

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

I know many in the north and the south who long for alternatives, options and choices. You could become the first post-industrial societies. Go for it!

Notes: Prof Colin Coulson-Thomas is President of the Institute of Management Services and an experienced chairman of award-winning companies, consultant and vision holder of successful transformation programmes. He holds a portfolio of international leadership and professorial roles and has advised directors and boards on improving director, board and corporate performance in over 40 countries. Details of his most recent books and reports on improving areas of performance can be found on: <http://www.policypublications.com/> and <http://www.academia.edu>

The AASGON event at the House of Lords in the UK's Palace of Westminster was the occasion for the launch of GSUA 25 and the presentation of awards.