

SoCap10: International Development Track
Fort Mason, San Francisco
October 4 - 6, 2010

Panel Topic: Exploring the Future: Innovation in 21st Century International Development

Purpose: To explore, in a rapidly changing world, the future of international development, looking at how the innovation lessons we have learned in the realm of business can be fruitfully applied to the world's deepest challenges.

Design/methodology/approach: Reports and expert opinions from panelists

Co-Designer of Track: Erika Gregory, Collective Invention, Inc.

Panelists:

Sanjay Khanna, Resilient People
Adeeb Mahmud, FSG
Susan Burns, Global Footprint Network
Kit Cody, Rwanda Ventures

Summary: This year's theme is different than in the past. The goal is to understand how the practice of international development must change to become more resilient, and ensure that the needs of people born in 2010 in developing countries will be met in 2025. What must we do in the next fifteen years, to ensure that specific, not abstract, needs will be addressed?

Each panelist opened with an introduction about his or her organization and its work in international development.

Practical implications: The increasing number and severity of natural disasters, including floods and fires, affects us all. At the same time, the world's population is growing, and hunger and lack of sanitation will be increasing problems.

Global Footprint Network measures resource usage in 160 countries, including imports and exports. Now, there are constraints on resources as never before, with 80% of countries requiring imports of resources, including food, just to survive. In 1963, on the other hand, 80% of countries had excess capacity. Countries such as Ecuador and Iran are now at an ecological deficit, as is Switzerland, although Switzerland is wealthy enough to import to meet its peoples' needs. Virtually all African countries are losing capacity, and only four are wealthy enough to import to meet their needs.

Our goal should be overall sustainability, with all countries producing enough to support their citizens' needs. More information may be obtained at: www.footprintnetwork.org. Investment decisions must be made with bio-capacity in mind, to produce wealth for the long term.

The convergence of many stresses, including climate, poverty, and growth, will impact the population's mental health. The word "sustainable" is no longer applicable: we must be "resilient" to prepare for the future and build cognitive capacity and social services. Future economic impacts, and the rates of change are unknown and will converge with other issues. Outcomes affecting public health and standard of living are unknown, but we know that mental health will be affected by future changes. A courageous and calm approach will be necessary, and cultural aspects must be accommodated in fashioning responses.

Investments must be made with creativity and continuity to meet peoples' needs. Grants and investments in areas such as construction and alternative energy will be in demand. The panelists discussed the use of grants versus investments to scale up projects, and leverage benefits, such as in the case of microfinance. Grants can promote policy and awareness, and investments can influence behavior and harness market forces. The use of both is important and may be applied on the same projects, at different stages or in different locations.

Social issues, nutrition and security will be critical in coming years. It will be important to use capital effectively, measuring impacts with clarity and promoting transparency. It will be important to build a sense of community when developing projects.

Keywords: innovation, international development, resilience, developing countries, sustainability

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