**DR. DENNY TAYLOR, 16 OCTOBER 2018**
U.N. 2018 HLPF (DOC 1. v.1 2018)
ENGLISH

# U.N. 2018 HLPF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

## PEER REVIEW REPORT

**DR. DENNY TAYLOR, 16 OCTOBER 2018**
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(Submitted by Dr. Denny Taylor)

*The web version of this document will be updated with links to new documents as they become available at www.dennytaylor.com.*

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# Authors Note

This comparative analysis of the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals is based on: 1) ethnographic observation and documentation of the U.N. 2018 HLPF; 2) participation in events during the U.N. General Assembly; 3) attendance at planning meetings for the HLPF and UNGA; and 4) a sociolinguistic analysis of the extensive documentation pertaining to the SDGs and the HLPF, including email communications, website presentations, official reports and papers, scientific research studies, and media coverage and commentary. My qualifications to conduct such an analysis can be found on my website, which includes papers that pertain specifically to the U.N. SDGs and Peacebuilding, as well as a 40 year retrospective of my research and my c.v. Briefly, my transdisciplinary research addresses the great acceleration of human activity negatively impacting human societies and the planet; while my field experience in regions of armed conflict and catastrophic events, plus fieldwork with families living in extreme poverty, impacted by opioid addiction, and racism, discrimination and gender inequality, parallel the work of many in HLPF.

- U.N. SDGs are derived from entrenched, competing and often incompatible discourse communities in which the goals are framed by different ways of thinking and acting in the world.

- U.N. SDGs have different values with regard to sustaining human life on the planet. They are however, interrelated and interdependent.

- No U.N. SDG stands alone.

- *All* U.N. SDGs are contingent and conditional on achieving Goal 6, the availability & sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

- Goal 10 on inequality provides essential opportunities for cross-goal participation and is a transformative category fostering greater collaborative involvement working with both countries and NGOs to make the world safe, resilient and sustainable.

- Goal 16 climate change, which is caused by human activity, is a imminent existential threat to all human societies and

- In and between human societies, people's ways of knowing are available for analysis through their social interactions and associated actions revealing their cultural, social, historical, biological (health, wellness, illness), philosophical, and religious engagement with the world.

- The overarching question (QoQ) is: How can timely actions be undertaken at unprecedented and multiple geopolitical scales, when the issues involve people of widely differing and disconnected values, ethics, emotions, spiritual beliefs, levels of trust, interests and power?

# Section 1: Sustaining Human Life on the Planet

In the extreme, if unaddressed by U.N. member states, Goals 1 – 6 are potentially existential. Life on the planet cannot be sustained without these fundamental human rights being rapidly addressed.

---

## Goal 1: End Poverty in All its Forms Everywhere

Poverty is orchestrated through structural inequalities and systems of oppression that are unquestioned in many U.N. member states.

Extreme poverty impacts women and children the most. 1.6 billion people have no homes, 2 billion people are experiencing water stress, and 68.5 million people have been forced to leave their homes. Both rural and urban poor are at risk.

Poverty is interpreted differently both within and between countries and cultures, e.g. in the U.S. the reasons families live in poverty is both highly politically contested and deeply embedded in economic inequalities, and also in historic and present-day structural racism and gender discrimination.

Poverty is amenable to the use of numerical data for quantification analysis, and also to data collection and analysis through disciplined and systematic observations of lived experience.

Numerical data is available. There are also 100 years of ethnographic accounts of extreme poverty and the concomitant violence the poor endure, but still human societies lack the will – the ethical fortitude – to re-Imagine human life on the planet without modern slavery or lives that don't count.

Ending poverty is contingent on all 17 Sustainable Goals and is addressed further in Goal 10, which focuses on inequality. What is critical here is that ending poverty is an achievable goal but requires that human societies also address the perils of extreme wealth.

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## Goal 2: End Hunger Achieve Food Security and Improved Nutrition and Promote Sustainable Agriculture

Hunger is a physical condition that is strategically orchestrated politically, economically, nationally, culturally and through conflicts between national and religious groups.

In the short-term hunger can be immediately ameliorated if there is the political will.

In the long-term hunger is contingent and conditional on ending poverty and progress on the other SDGs.

Some elements are amenable to the use of numerical data, and also to data collection and analysis through disciplined and systematic observations of lived experience.

Conversely, ending poverty is conditional on ending hunger. Equally significant, all other SDGs impact whether people have food to eat. Most importantly, Goal 3 is conditional and contingent on Goal 12, which is the assurance of sustainable consumption and production patterns.

---

## Goal 3: Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Well-Being for All at All Ages

Complex goal that has many elements negatively orchestrated through structural inequalities.

Most elements are contingent and conditional on all 17 Sustainable Goals.

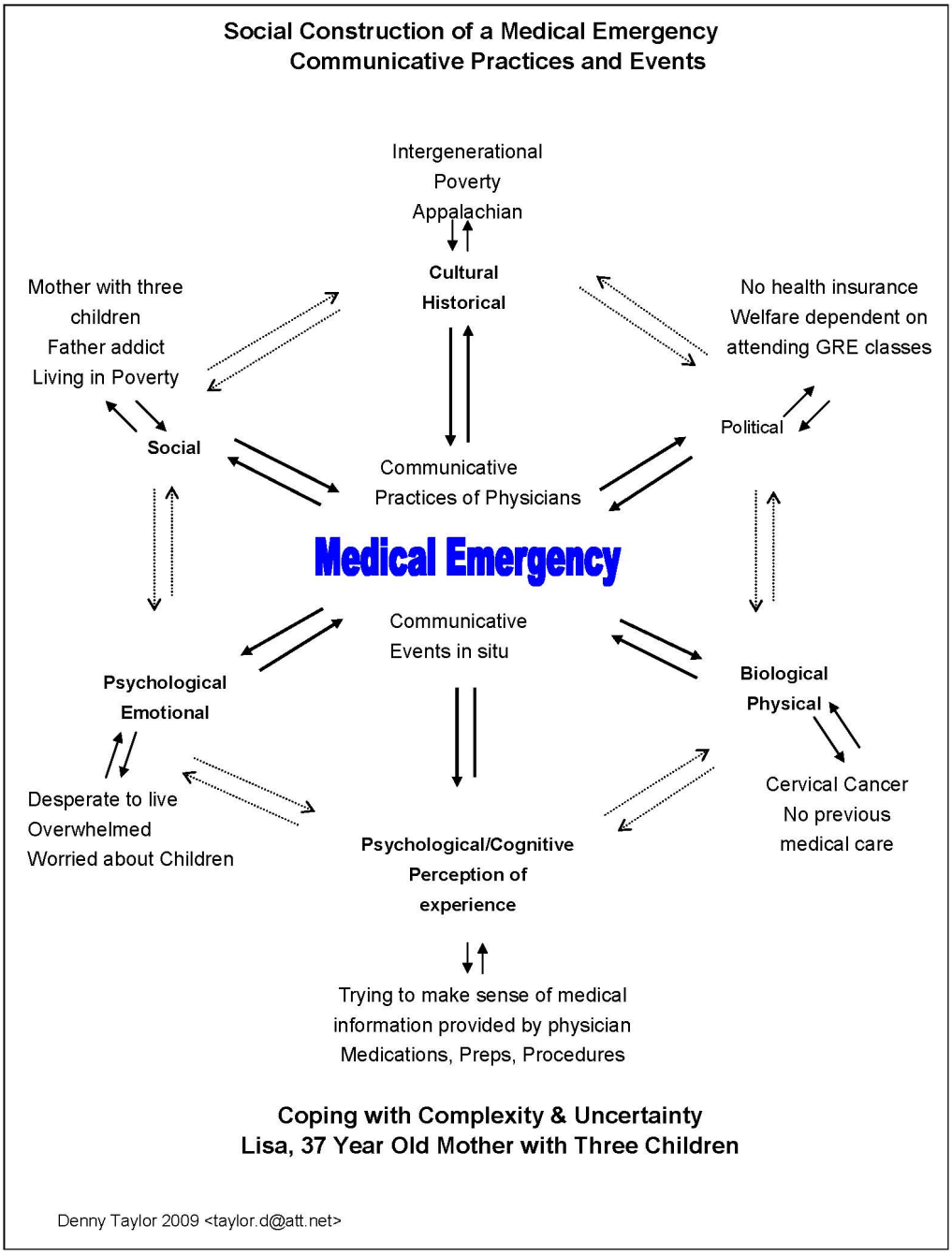
If we include consideration the health and well-being of all people – mothers, fathers and children – in our response to global crises how would that affect our present and future actions?

Some elements of health and well-being are amenable to the use of numerical data, and also to data collection and analysis through disciplined and systematic observations of lived experience.

The suffering of mothers and children in Syria is unspeakable and requires immediate action by the global community. But it would be a mistake to imagine that the suffering of mothers and children in countries like the U.S. are not suffering and dying because of the inadequate or lack of health care.

The following graphic focuses on the underlying social, cultural and economic structures in the U.S. that shape the suffering of one mother, living in poverty without medical insurance, who was denied medical treatment for cervical cancer.

*[Social Construction of a Medical Emergency Communicative Practices and Events graph next page.]*




The unspeakable suffering of the mother with cervical cancer ended when she died. The denial of health care layers moral injury on top of physical injuries and poisons the possibility of achieving the SDGs.

Goal 3 provides an opportunity to develop a structure of accountability for medical and public health emergencies, documenting what works and what doesn't, uncovering crimes against humanity and holding countries responsible.

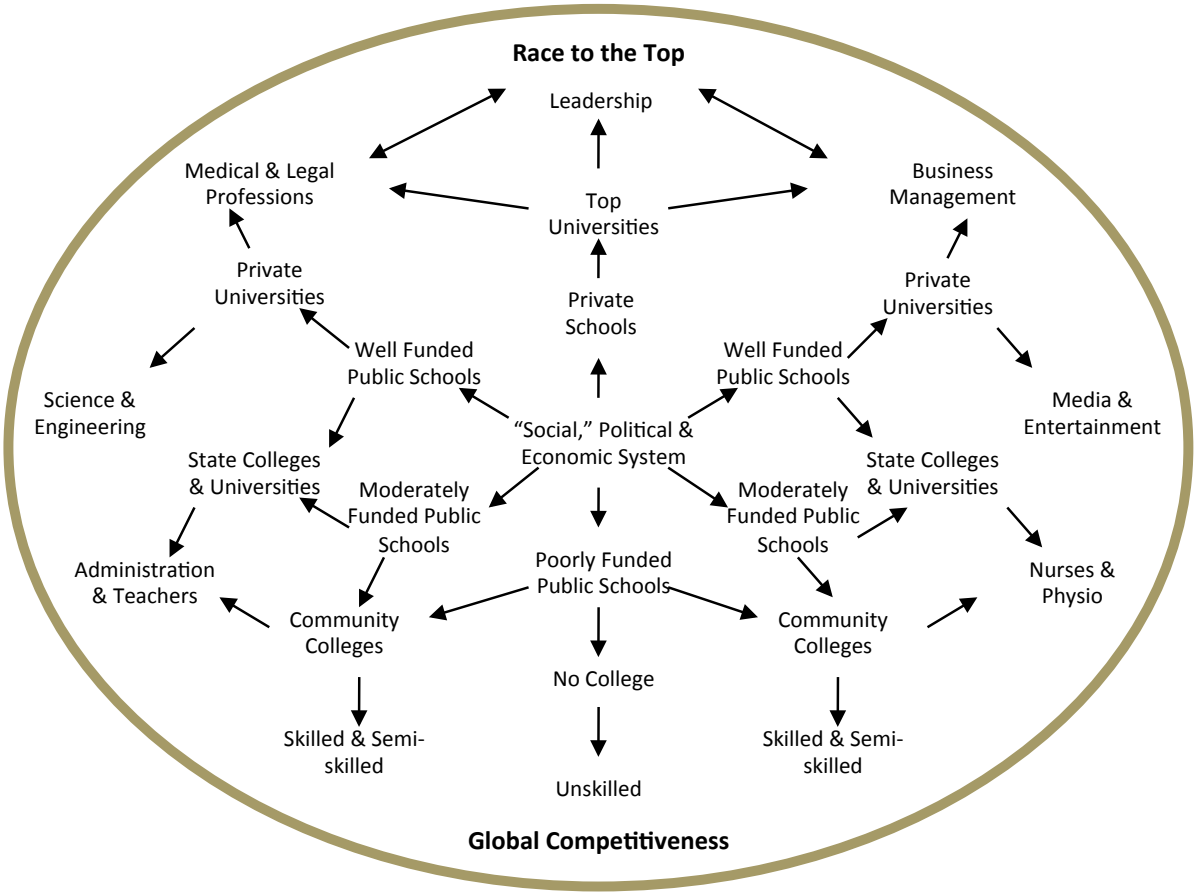
## Goal 4: Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All

Multi-dimensional complex goal that has many elements highly dependent on, for example, ending hunger by providing good nutrition and by ensuring healthy learning environments in which both teachers and students can thrive.

Some elements are amenable to the use of numerical data, and also to data collection and analysis through disciplined and systematic observations of lived experience.

Rich countries have poor students living in poverty, sleeping in shelters, going to school hungry, and facing structural racism and discrimination in local, state and national education mandates that predetermines the path that they will take, and the opportunities they have to participate fully in the societies in which they live.

The following graphic exposes the educational pathways and structural inequalities that restrict children and youth in the opportunities that they have to participate in U.S. society.




The challenges for less affluent countries are immense. Often commercial education programs developed in the U.S. and U.K. that maintain the structural inequalities in these countries are

foisted upon other countries, and these programs do not take into consideration the local culture and societal mores of the people.

Three successful approaches that re-imagine the possibilities of local educational opportunities follow.

1. IIE Platform for Education in Emergency Response: (https://www.iie.org/Programs/IIE-PEER)

   The website states: Education is the orphan of every war. Education in emergencies is one of the most underfunded sectors in humanitarian aid with higher education often considered as a luxury. Today, only 1% of the world's more than 60 million refugees attend university, compared to the global average of 34%. However, the need for higher education is especially acute in places of conflict, where it is crucial in rebuilding societies and maintaining stability. Higher education is strongly linked to increased opportunity, strengthened economic development, improved public health and safer communities. It offers young people hope and a path towards a sustainable and independent future.

2. UNESCO Learning Cities: http://learningcities2017.org/learning-cities/what-is-a-learning-city/

   This YouTube video provides an overview:
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkieRWAKNKk

   The website states: Lifelong learning is key in creating sustainable cities and societies. In the quest for sustainable societies, we must learn to live sustainably. People require certain skills, values and attitudes if they are to contribute to the creation of sustainable societies and address the challenges they face in helping achieve this goal. In today's fast-changing world, where social, economic and political contexts are constantly being reshaped and reevaluated, learning must be continuous and lifelong. Lifelong learning and education must, therefore, become a main driver in developing the resources necessary for people to achieve sustainable environmental, social and economic advancement.

3. Family Literacy: This idea for a *Family Literacy Sustainable Development and Peace Building Initiative* will require a significant reframing of the current responses to the human activity that is damaging the planet, and also a reduction in the extreme geopolitical tensions that are endangering human survival. It is important that established approaches to mitigating life threatening risks should not be abandoned, but reconfigured in response to the systemic complexity of risks – the myriad of ways in which various kinds of risks are tied together by many links and commonalities.

   In many U.N. Member States, programs focus on family literacy initiatives that encourage peacebuilding, finding employment, and empowering women and girls.

Some programs address the psychosocial needs of women and their concerns about health and family planning. Still others, in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, where the human suffering is extreme, family literacy programs focus on war trauma and PTSD. The following reports provide a more in depth analysis:

https://www.dennytaylor.com/latest-news/2018/family-literacy-and-the-future-of-humanity

https://www.dennytaylor.com/latest-news/2018/how-family-literacy-in-un-member-states-has-become-a-conduit-for-sustaining-peace

https://www.dennytaylor.com/latest-news/2018/un-hlpf-2019the-family-literacy-declaration-of-principles

The possibilities for re-Imagining education are limitless and should be elevate to a global priority with educational guidelines for sustainable life on the planet.

---

## Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls

Gender equality is a human right challenged by a clash of values explicit or implicitly constitutive of cultures, religions, and the political, economic and social structures of all human societies.

A multi-dimensional complex goal that rejects paternalism has many elements highly dependent on, for example, ending poverty and hunger by providing good nutrition, health care and education for women and girls.

Gender equality is contingent and conditional on all 17 Sustainable Goals.

Some elements are amenable to the use of numerical data, and also to data collection and analysis through disciplined and systematic observations of lived experience.

Immediate actions should be taken to: 1. Ensure education is universally free; 2. Make the education of girls and young women a global priority; 3. Ensure young women have equitable leadership and career opportunities.

---

### Goal 6: Ensure Availability and Sustainable Management of Water and Sanitation for All

All SDGs are contingent and conditional on achieving Goal 6.

The lack of water is an existential risk.

There is no life without water. Through the millennia human settlements have existed in the most dire circumstances, but no human group has ever existed without water.

Human societies are threatened by existential risks because of extreme weather conditions and the destruction of ecological habitats that are the result of human activity.

Water is more than a human right. It is a human right that is challenged by a clash of values explicit or implicitly constitutive of cultures, religions, and the political, economic and social structures of all human societies.

Wars are fought over water, and loss of water results in massive migrations of people.

Some elements are amenable to the use of numerical data, and also to data collection and analysis through disciplined and systematic observations of lived experience.

Access to water and adequate sanitation is essential to ending poverty and hunger and reducing armed conflict.

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# Section 2: The Private Sector Gain Influence at the U.N.

The dominance of the power – profit paradigm makes it is entirely possible to address Goals 7 – 9 without addressing human rights and the existential risks that threaten human life on the planet. Goals 7 – 9 & 13 have created opportunities for the private sector to gain influence at the U.N. A shift has already taken place from a 50-50 split of countries and the private sector funding the U.N. to a 20-80 split with the private sector now controlling the flow of money at the U.N. There is concern about dark money and also the role of debt in determining the initiatives and projects undertaken by the U.N., and one U.N. official expressed the concern that with regard to the SDGs, “it’s the donors that decide what gets done.”

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## Goal 7: Ensure Access to Affordable, Reliable, Sustainable and Modern Energy for All

Abstract concept lacking consensus on meaning and forming a cluster of goals that are of particular interest to business groups and powerful influencers.

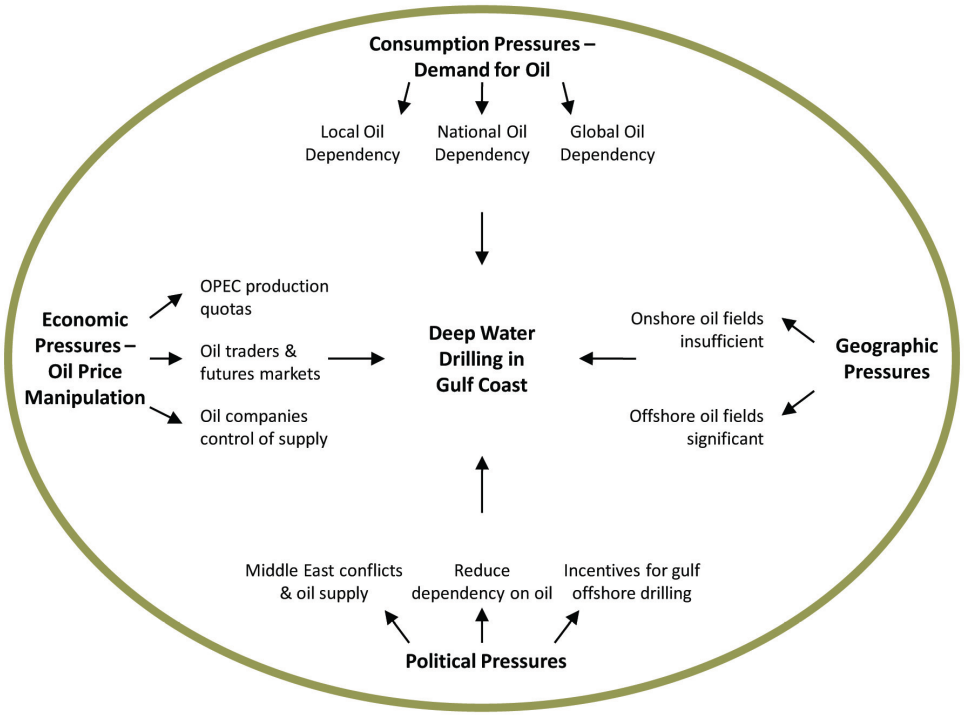
Requires actions be undertaken at unprecedented and multiple geopolitical scales, when the issues involve people of widely differing and disconnected values**,** ethics, emotions, spiritual beliefs, levels of trust, interests and power.

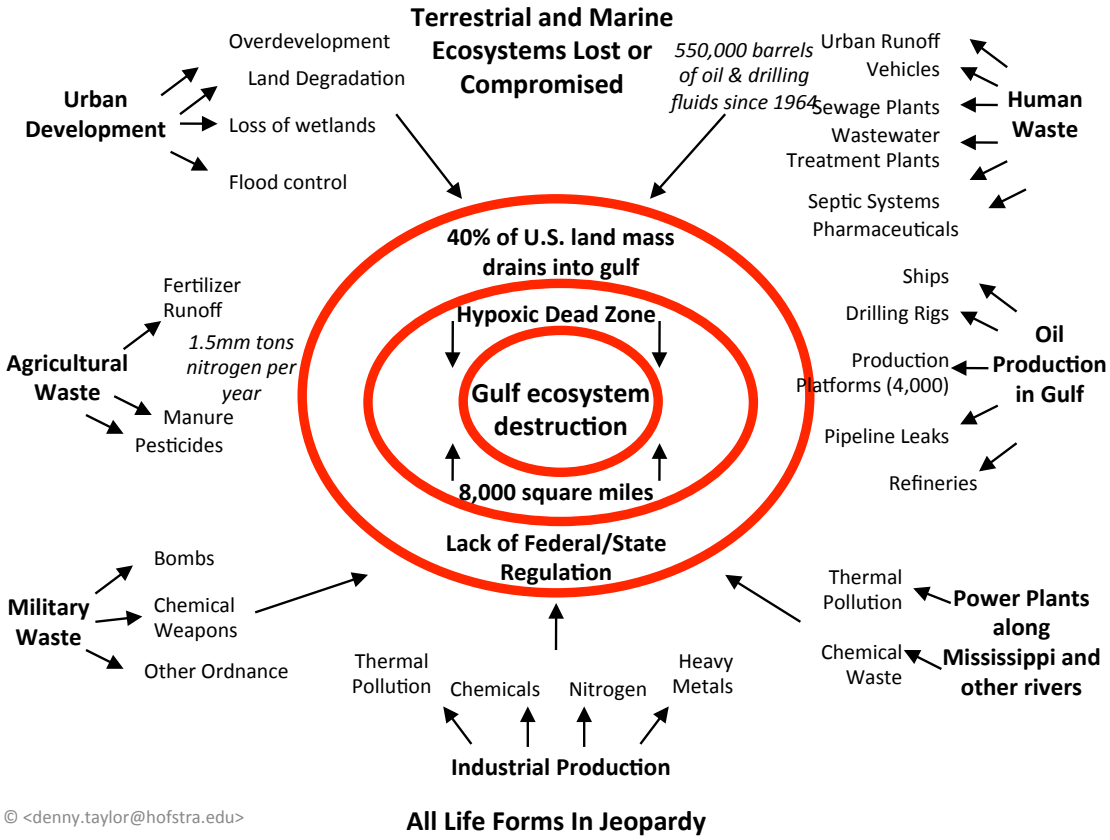
The financial value for monarchs, governments and corporations to own and control fossil fuel energy sources overrides the values and ideals of all other SDGs.

Wars are fought for the control of energy sources, and new sustainable carbon free energy sources are highly contentious threatening the economic power of many rich nations and corporations.

Poor countries are plundered by the oil extraction of energy corporations and the environmental damage is irreparable.

Many elements of “old energy” are amenable to the use of numerical data, and also to data collection and analysis through disciplined and systematic observations of lived experience. The systemic complexities of environmental disasters are illustrated in the following graphics:






These graphics, which are part of a set produced in an analysis of the BP oil disaster in the U.S. Gulf Region, leaves no doubt that Goal 7, in a similar way to all other SDGs, is systemically and dynamically complex. Catastrophic events in energy production operations exacerbate the damage already taking place to pollution threatened ecosystems and they have cascading toxic effects on all terrestrial and freshwater and all marine plant and animal life forms.

Many elements of “new energy” are amenable to the use of numerical data and also to data collection and analysis through disciplined and systematic observations of lived experience.

Goal 7 is the most vulnerable to corporate competition. This was evident at the 2018 U.N. HLPF. This is a critical factor in evaluating new energy initiatives.

---

## Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

The juxtaposition of Goal 7 and Goal 12 highlights the interconnectedness of terrestrial and marine ecosystem degradation through human “enterprise”. The idea that sustainable

consumption and production can be bifurcated from energy production is a fallacy. Goals 7 and 12 are inseparable, and both are extremely vulnerable to private sector influence and interference. The complications this causes will be discussed further in the analysis of Goals 13 – 15.

---

## Goal 8: Promote Sustained, Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth, Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for All

Goal 8 is contingent and conditional on the achievement of Goals 7 and 9, and is particularly susceptible to the dominance of the power – profit paradigm.

These SDG Goals are of particular interest to governments, business groups and powerful economic influencers, but not necessarily for the purposes for which they were established.

For example, economic warfare is currently taking place as nations around the world are scrambling to control the reserves of rare-earth minerals that are used for components of high-tech items including mobile phones, computers, cameras, wind turbines, solar panels and precision missiles.

The melting of the Greenland Ice Sheet has revealed rare earth reserves causing political and economic conflicts between Greenland, Denmark, the U.S. and NATO. In the Democratic Republic of Congo columbite-tantalite used in semi-conductor chips has become a hot commodity for rival local groups, some acting on behalf of other countries including Rwanda, Uganda, Israel, Japan, China and the U.S.

Requires actions be undertaken at unprecedented and multiple geopolitical scales, when the issues involve people of widely differing—and—disconnected values**,** ethics, emotions, spiritual beliefs, levels of trust, interests and power.

The competition between nations for rare earth minerals is one of the backdrops that distorts the intent and possible achievement of Goal 8, and reveals how this goal is of importance to the business sector, historically located in the discourse communities of corporate and special interests with a mind-set focused on profit, which is incompatible with discourse communities of NGOs and care-based communities.

Thus, observations of side events at the U.N. HLPF 2018 provide empirical evidence of the HLPF providing an opportunity for business groups and economic influencers to promote, for example, the high tech development that is framed by Goals 7, 8, and 9.

To continue with the intense competition for rare earth minerals for use in hi-tech items, it is important to emphasize that there are significant differences between SDG initiatives that start

with people and SDG initiatives that start with hi-tech AI, big data and sustainable infrastructure.

For example, learning cities begin with the local needs of families and draw on their problem solving capabilities. These cities are at the intersection of SDG 4 (inclusive quality education and lifelong learning), SDG 11 (inclusive and sustainable cities and human settlements), and SDG 12 (sustainable production and consumption), as well as, to varying degrees, the other SDGs.

However, smart cities begin with technology to meet the SDGs. The presentations at the 2018 HLPF focused on cities as "powerful engines of economic growth, fueled by intensive interpersonal communication and high concentrations of specialized skills."

The stark contrast between the family centered "learning cities" and the business centered "smart cities" was evident by those who attended these vastly different 2018 HLPF presentations. The former, which had a well-established human rights perspective, was held in a nearby church, while the latter, with a high-finance business perspective, was actually accommodated with a meeting room at the U.N.

At the learning cities meeting there was a diverse audience of many nationalities and racial identities with almost equal numbers of women and men. At the smart cities meeting there were mostly men in attendance who projected the power and privilege of senior executives representing the business community.

The noticeable differences between the attendees at the two sessions were matched by the noticeable differences in the presentations. In the learning cities presentations there were families, little children, and elderly grandparents whose memories were failing them. The emphasis was on caring for one another and on working together, and the engagement in many intergenerational learning projects, including innovative projects on computers. In the smart cities presentations there were no families, no children, no old people, just bandwidth, connectivity and lucrative commercial opportunities.

The trajectory of learning cities and smart cities creates a cautionary tale, and it will come as no surprise that the IIASA TWI2050 Report: Transformations to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals includes "smart cities" as one of the six "exemplary transformations" to push down the existential risks confronting humanity. But at the end of the day the power and profit paradigm turns the responsibility for the SDGs over to the private sector and it is families who will pay. The life sustaining reasons against being so coopted are many.

Ignoring the exploitation of children as well as adults in the extraction of rare earth minerals, the lack of work-safe rules, and the potential for armed conflict makes a mockery of the goal of "decent work for all."

## Goal 9: Build Resilient Infrastructure, Promote Inclusive and Sustainable Industrialization and Foster Innovation

Goal 9 is also business centric, is contingent and conditional on the achievement of Goals 7 and 8, and is particularly susceptible to the dominance of the power – profit paradigm.

These SDG Goals are of particular interest to governments, business groups and powerful economic influencers, but not necessarily for the purposes for which they were established.

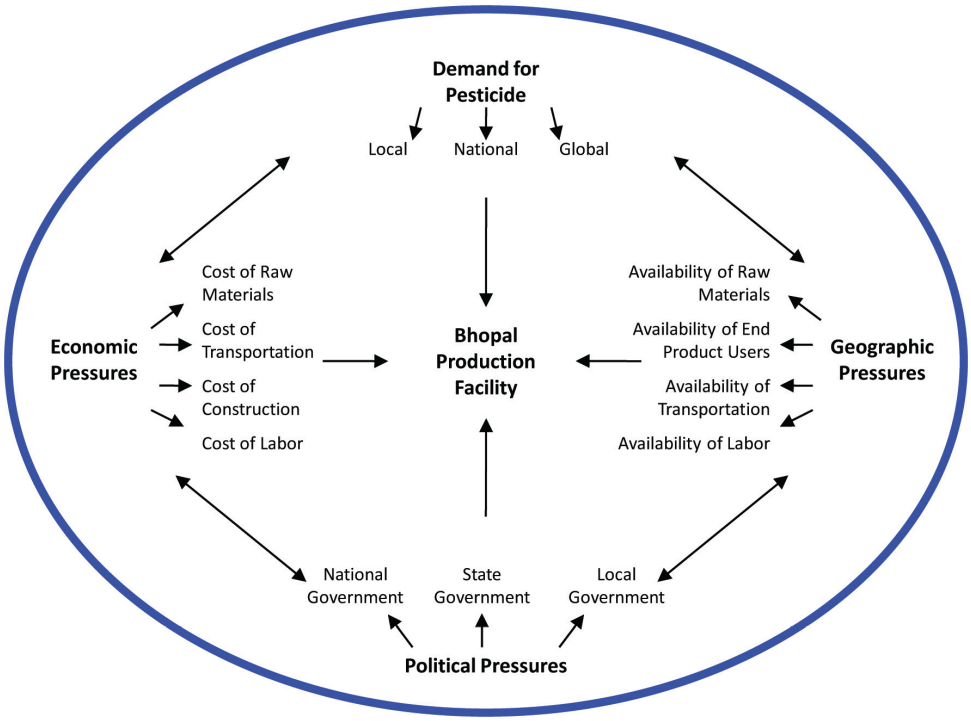
During the 2018 HLPF, concerns were expressed that business groups and powerful economic influencers have controlling influence on the UN, and that it is only through the deceptive rhetoric of double speak that business centric corporate interests create the false impression that humanitarian concerns or sustainable development are being addressed.

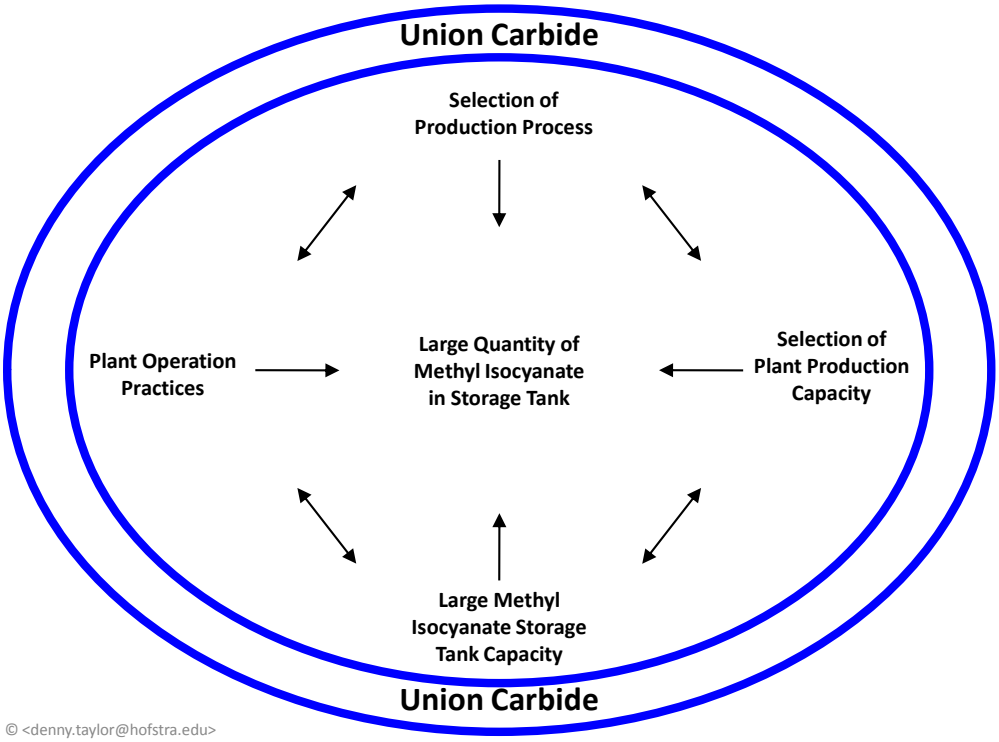
Again, this is an easily distorted Goal that is of importance to the business sector, historically located in the discourse communities of corporate and special interests with a mind-set focused on profit, and is incompatible with discourse communities of NGOs and care-based communities.

Requires actions be undertaken at unprecedented and multiple geopolitical scales, when the issues involve people of widely differing and disconnected values**,** ethics, emotions, spiritual beliefs, levels of trust, interests and power.

A re-Imagining of Goals 7,8 and 9 is a moral imperative. The present emphasis will protect the rights of corporations without any recognition that these goals have real implications for the poor, the hungry, and for all those forced to leave their homes due to both military and industrial environmental destruction. Mass migrations have many causes. Statements written about such disasters do not provide an opportunity for deep analysis of the impact they have on people or the environment.

As an example, in the set of 6 graphics that follow of the Bhopal disaster it is possible to gain a deeper understanding not only of the impact of the disaster but also of the moral and ethical responsibilities of global corporations – in this case a U.S. company – that destroyed the homes of hundreds of thousands of people and caused a mass migration.

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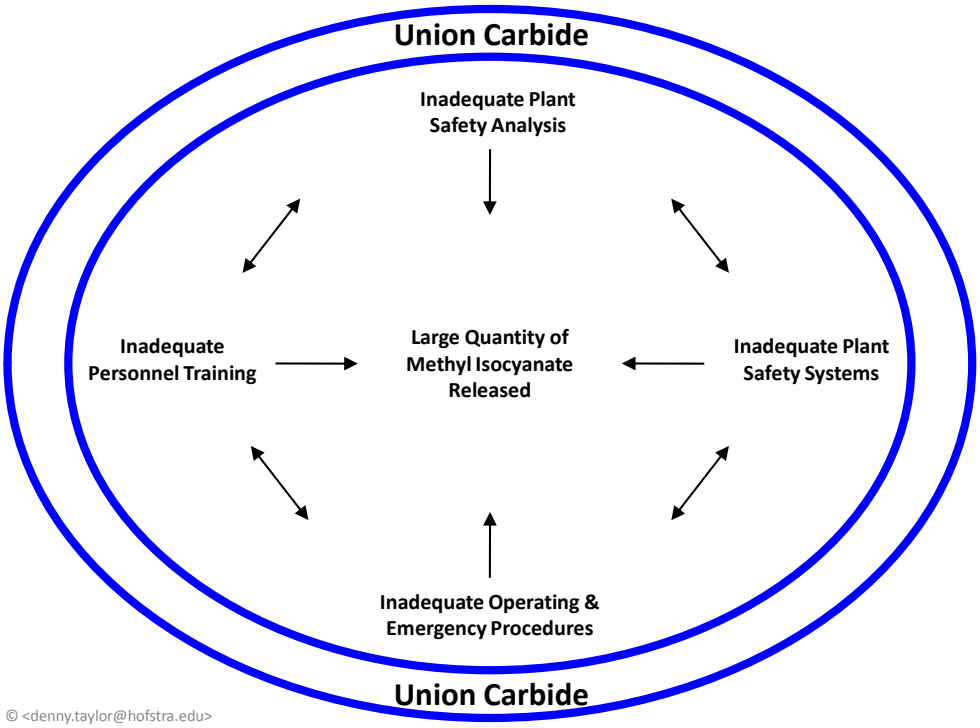


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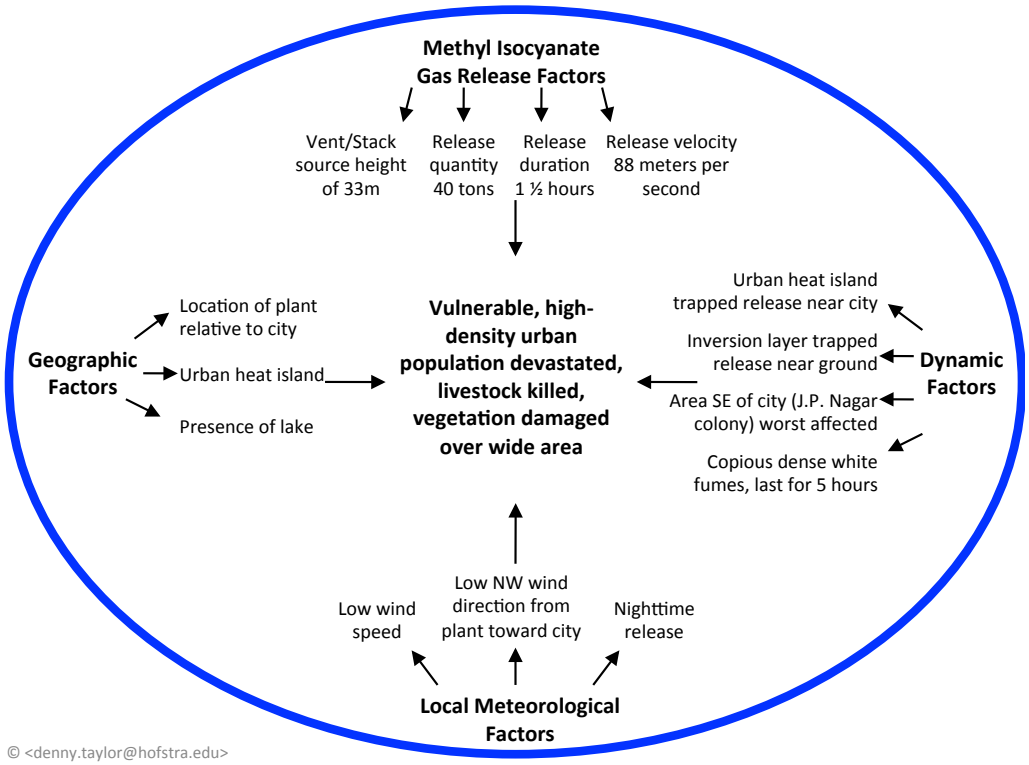


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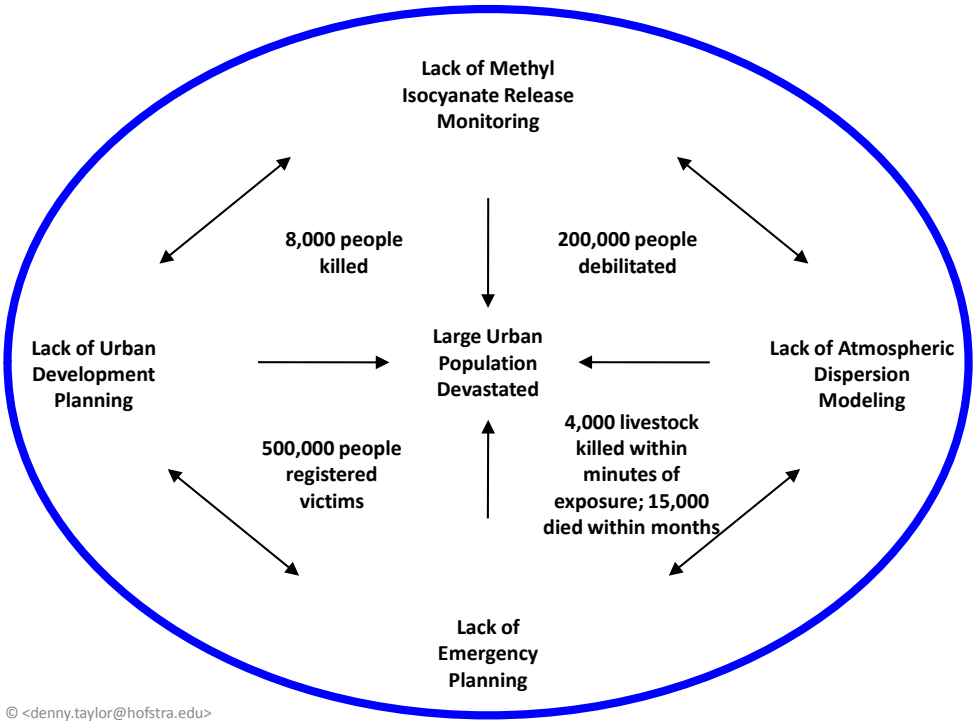


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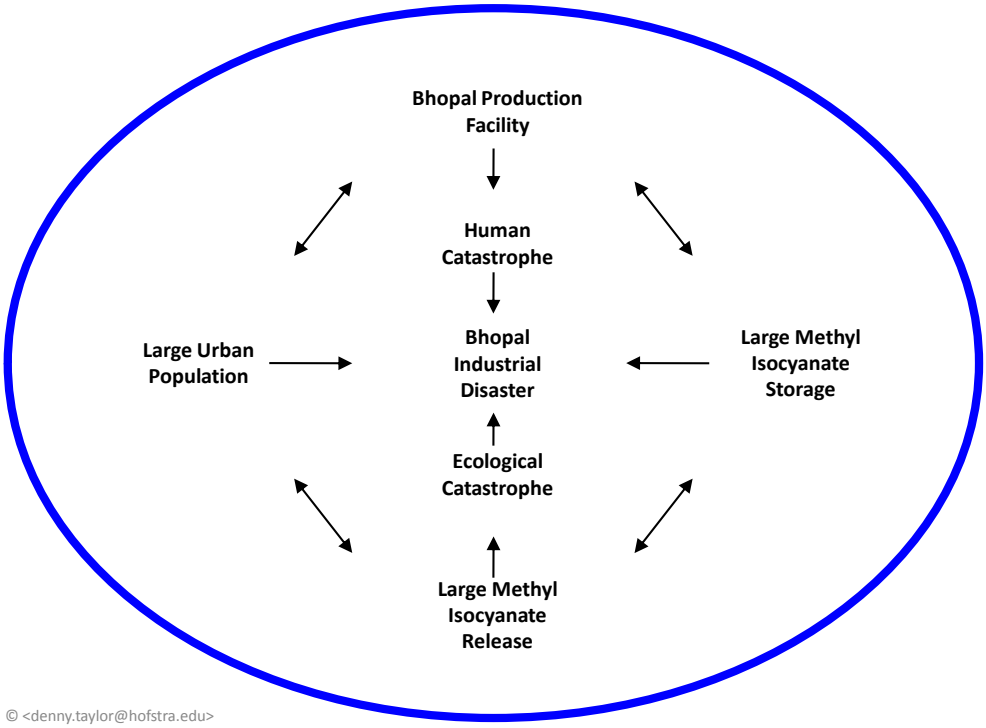


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When the analysis of the Union Carbide Bhopal disaster is combined with the analysis of the BP Gulf Region disaster there is no argument that can be made to negate the cataclysmic impact of the power – profit industrial activity on people and the planet.

---

# Section 3: To Be Unequal Is to Be Unsafe

## Goal 10: Reduce Inequality Within and Among Countries

There is no U.N. agency currently established to address inequality. Based upon observations at the 2018 HLPF it would appear this is a conscious decision, and that a "blind eye" exists to the extreme forms of inequality discussed at the 2018 HLPF.

Inequality is a relational concept requiring empathetic ways of knowing embedded in the "more or less" understandings of human experience**.** To be unequal is to be unsafe.

Those working to reduce inequalities are charged with confronting the heavy legacy of inequality endemic in human societies that negatively impacts all SDGs.

Inequality is amenable to the use of numerical data and quantitative analysis, and also to data collection and analysis through disciplined and systematic observations of lived experience.

There is a significant body of both quantitative and qualitative research that documents socio-political structural inequalities, in addition to ethnographic accounts based on extensive field research that can be accessed and used to support actions.

To focus on inequality is also an opportunity to provide both quantitative and qualitative data on the inequalities that exist within and between the U.N. member states and NGOs, major groups and stakeholders that are addressing all 17 SDGs. This effort would provide the HLPF with the actionable knowledge that is needed resist polarization, minimize protectionism, and reduce silos.

Goal 10 is of critical importance for providing oversight mechanisms by recognizing issues, lifting ambition, and providing guidance on the development of sound strategies for the transformation for fair and just action.

Goal 10 provides unique opportunities for clear articulation of the challenges, opportunities and risks across all SDG Goals, in the explicit recognition that the SDGs are interlinked and need to be continually rethought.

Goal 10 is unique as a "stand alone" SDG as the arbiter, reconciliator and restorer of equality, working closely with both countries and NGOs, major groups and stakeholders focused on all 17 SDGs.

Daniel Perell, the Global Organizing Partner of the NGO Major Group, provides the overarching mission of Goal 10:

> Goal 10, "Reduce Inequality Within and Among Countries", is considered to be one of the great advancements of the Sustainable Development Goals over the Millennium Development Goals.
>
> Achievement of Goal 10 would not only serve to narrow the widening gaps between rich and poor, but it would allow for greater realization of human rights and the fulfillment of potential of all human beings across the life course.
>
> Reducing inequalities within and between countries will also be crucial to progress across the whole 2030 Agenda.
>
> Goal 10 is about promoting economic justice, but it also sets important targets around social, economic, cultural and political inclusion; discrimination and participation; gender equality; global governance and decision-making; and financial regulation. Moreover, it is the only goal that refers to migration - one of the preeminent global justice issues and political concerns of our time.

Perell's framing of Goal 10 in collaboration with his colleagues provides the "pivoting possibilities" of using Goal 10 to evaluate Goals 1 - 6 that are focused on human rights, and also to evaluate Goals 7 – 9, which at the present time appear to be more business centric and susceptible to the power – profit paradigm. One more quote is included:

> Securing a stand-alone goal in the 2030 Agenda on inequalities within and between countries was a great achievement. Yet, beyond the rhetoric, the limited degree to which SDG 10 is being implemented and monitored is of great concern. We believe coordinated civil society action will be crucial to generate momentum to change this.

A framework for addressing the issues of inequality embedded in the SDGs has already been drafted by Perell and his colleagues in the form of a series of questions that could be addressed.

Here are three variations of these questions that have been constructed for this review that should be a top priority:

1. Who are the thought leaders and on-the-ground activists who are focused on the 17 SDGs who have identified <u>inequality</u> as a major impediment to the achievement of the

goals; and how can we provide assistance by strengthening their voices and advancing the conversation around the relevance of Goal 10 to the achievement of all SDGs?

2. Based on these Cross-Goal Collaborations: What are the structural barriers – political, social, cultural, economic and bureaucratic -- to progress being made on Goal 10 that have been identified?

3. How can policies, programs and campaigns to reduce inequalities meaningfully incorporate different, intersecting types of inequalities that have been identified in the Cross-Goal Collaborations? For example: How can the linkages between SDG 1 and SDG 10 be addressed? Similarly, How can the linkages between SDG 5 and SDG 10 be addressed?

But a formidable caveat exists that should not be ignored. SDG 10 challenges the acceptance of extreme wealth in human societies. By focusing on all forms of inequality in cross-goal collaborations, the human suffering and often-deadly outcomes of extreme wealth will be exposed. There are links between the richest man in the world and the poorest people in the world. Without exaggeration a case can be made that we have reached a time in human history in which the systemic complexity of these linkages are the sum of all inequities that exist in human societies. The poor immigrants on bicycles in sub-zero or $+100^0$ F. temperatures in NYC who literally deliver Amazon boxes on their backs are intimately connected to the richest man in the world who they serve. Every aspect of their lives depends on this connection. Similarly, the titans of Silicon Valley are directly connected to the young children in the Democratic Republic of Congo who sift the soil through their fingers in search of the rare earth minerals that are used in all electronic products.

A prerequisite for the great wealth of individuals and countries is great poverty and human suffering of entire populations of poor countries, and any humanitarian forces focused on reducing inequalities are therefore facing formidable challenges. Nevertheless, the moral imperative can no longer be ignored. Reducing inequalities is essential if human societies are committed to pushing down the risks of an existential future for both the rich and the poor.

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## Goal 11: Make Cities and Human Settlements Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable

Goal 11, in a similar way to Goals 7, 8, and 9, is of particular interest to governments, business groups and powerful economic influencers, but not necessarily for the purposes for which they were established. Global corporations have seized on this idea of Smart Cities and the concept is now used in advertising by major financial investment groups including Bank of America/Merrill Lynch, and by telecommunications companies, including AT&T.

However there is a notable bifurcation of Goal 11 between the power-profit business centered "Smart Cities" paradigm, and the people-centered humanitarian paradigm of "Learning Cities." What is of critical importance here is that Goal 10 provides an opportunity to clearly articulate the bifurcation of Goal 11, and to precisely articulate the inequalities that exist in "smart cities" that are being addressed by "learning cities."

The Smart Cities initiative, which was presented at the 2018 HLPF, begins with technology and focuses on cities as "powerful engines of economic growth, fueled by intensive interpersonal communication and high concentrations of specialized skills." At the HLPF there was no talk whatsoever of the people who live in the cities. By contrast the "Learning Cities" paradigm presented at the 2018 HLPF begins with the local needs of families and draws on their problem-solving capabilities both with and without technology.

The Learning Cities paradigm is conditional and contingent on the aspirations of Goal 4, and is inclusive of quality education and lifelong learning. Leaning Cities also addresses issues of poverty and inequality by helping local people to stay in school, learn a trade, and take care of children. Learning Cities fulfill the mission of Goal SDG 11, which is to create and enhance inclusive and sustainable cities and human settlements, and SDG 12 (sustainable production and consumption), as well as, to varying degrees, the other SDGs.

Once again, a caveat is warranted. At the 2018 HLPF, the Mayor of New York City presented what he referred to as the "First-ever Voluntary Local Review". The objective was to highlight the critical role of city governments and communities in advancing a global agenda to uplift people, prosperity and planet. However, the presentation of VLR for NYC did not focus on the 65,000 people living on the streets of New York City, while at the same time there are 55,000 empty apartments in the city.

Disaggregate the word "homeless" and the city's homeless includes 80-year-old female teachers, people who cannot pay their medical bills, and soldiers who have had their legs amputated because of injuries they received serving their country in one of the many U.S. wars.

There are also young college graduates living on the streets of New York because they are so burdened with educational debt that they have buckled under the load. And all the while stores are closing because of high rents and the loss of income because of ecommerce – Amazon, of course. Add to this unacceptable reality, the massive 100,000 Uber cars congesting the streets, pumping particulates into the air that New Yorkers breath, and halving the worth of the medallions taxi drivers have bought leaving these long term drivers of the yellow taxis that are a part of the identity of the city broken and bitter.

There is so much more but the challenges are clear. The VLR is as compromised as many of the voluntary reviews of U.N. members, which are more focused on promoting countries than on making a concerted effort to address the Sustainable Development Goals.

“The VRNs are like travel logs,” one member of an NGO says. She names one country and says, “They spoke of it as a ‘destination’” she said. “Countries are not ‘destinations’ that people visit. They are places that people live.”

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# Section 4: Climate Change, Terrestrial and Marine Ecosystem Destruction, & Armed Conflict

The primary goal in this subset of SDGs is Goal 13 -- take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. The graphics presented in Goal 7 provides a visual representation of the cost to humanity of carbon fuels and chemical production. The graphics presented in Goal 9 provide additional visuals of the connections between terrestrial and ecosystem destruction, the changes to production and consumption that are moral and ethical imperatives, and the actions that must be taken to push down the risks of climate change. Similarly if we want to push down the risks of climate change, then actions must be taken to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, which is Goal 14; and we must protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss, which is Goal 15.

There is a huge potential for human societies to respond to climate change, to restore terrestrial and marine ecosystems, and to slow the great acceleration of risks to people and the planet. But it will take great transformations for the re-Visioning of human societies so the Goals 1 – 6 are taken seriously and are no longer side-lined by the proponents of the power – profit paradigm. One step that could immediately be considered is the re-conceptualizing of the SDGs. The present framing of the SDGs which encourages thinking of them as separate and discrete impedes any progress that can be made to address the systemic complexity of the very real and imminent dangers of the rapid acceleration of the existential risks.

Thus, rather than reify the artificial divisions between Goals 13 -16, a functional systemic approach is taken in the presentation of a series of graphics.

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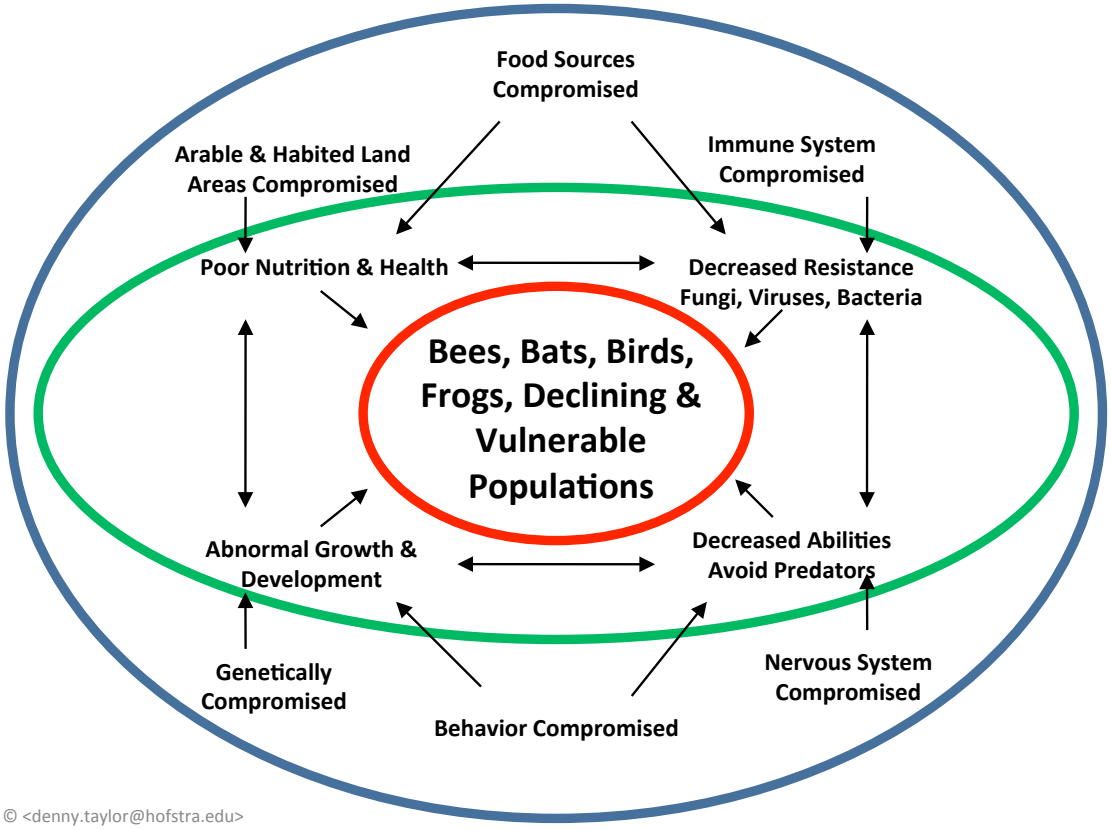
## Goal 13: Climate Change is an Imminent Existential Risk

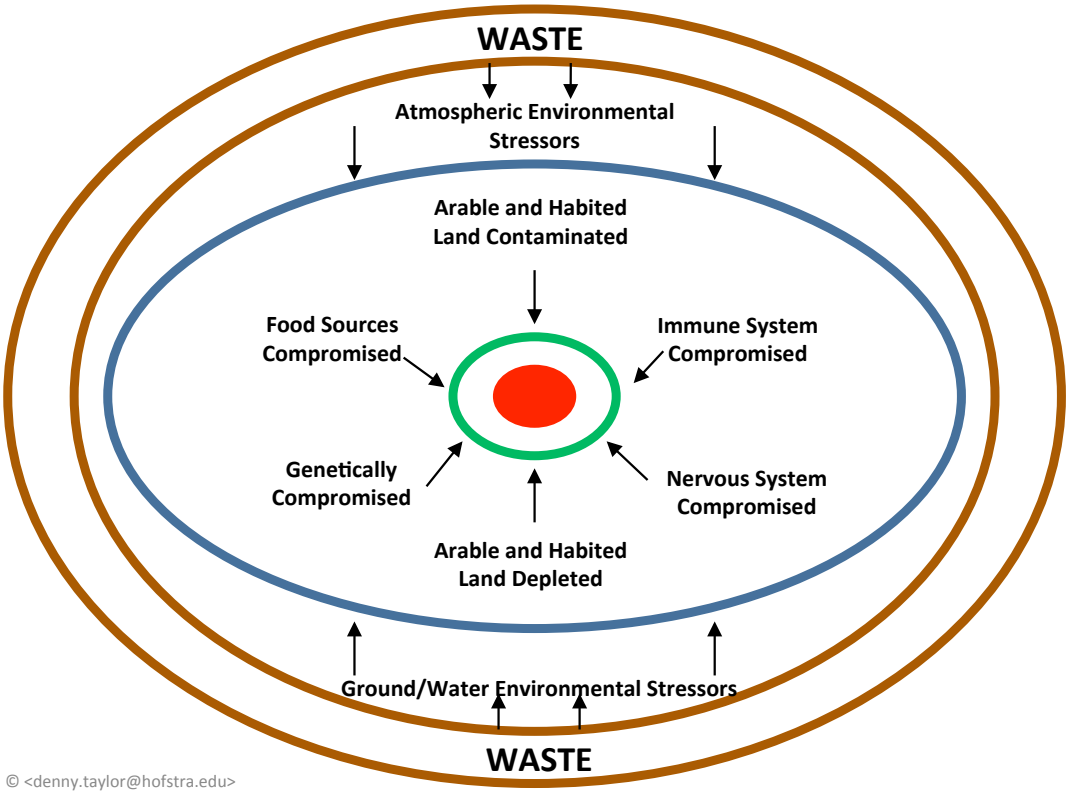
It is now a well-accepted scientific fact that we have left the 10,000 years of stable climate patterns that were the signature of our beloved Holocene, and we have entered the Anthropocene which is hotter, wetter, drier, and more turbulent, unpredictable and polluted because of human activity. Given this worldwide, life threatening deterioration of the

circumstances in which children are expected to live their lives, it could be argued that the greatest advancement human beings could make in the 21st century is to ensure the survival of their children.

The following graphics represent a step-change in thinking, and the argument is made that only by involving all stakeholders in the SDGs can we pushdown the risks of transgressing the planetary boundaries of human life on the planet. The environmental resiliency of human societies is of critical importance, and we must adjust our social, economic, and political models accordingly. This requires that we acknowledge the links, for example, between energy and biodiversity, de-forestation and desertification, and plastics and marine degradation. The economic models of privileged societies have colonized more vulnerable countries, and have established predatory practices in their own countries in which people are considered “human capital” kept “in-place” by institutional racism and discrimination – the educational graphic presented in Goal 4 is illustrative of this structural mechanism.

The graphics are based on over 5 years of transdisciplinary research, and they are designed to signify the systemic complexity of climate change without the necessity of an accompanying textual explanation:



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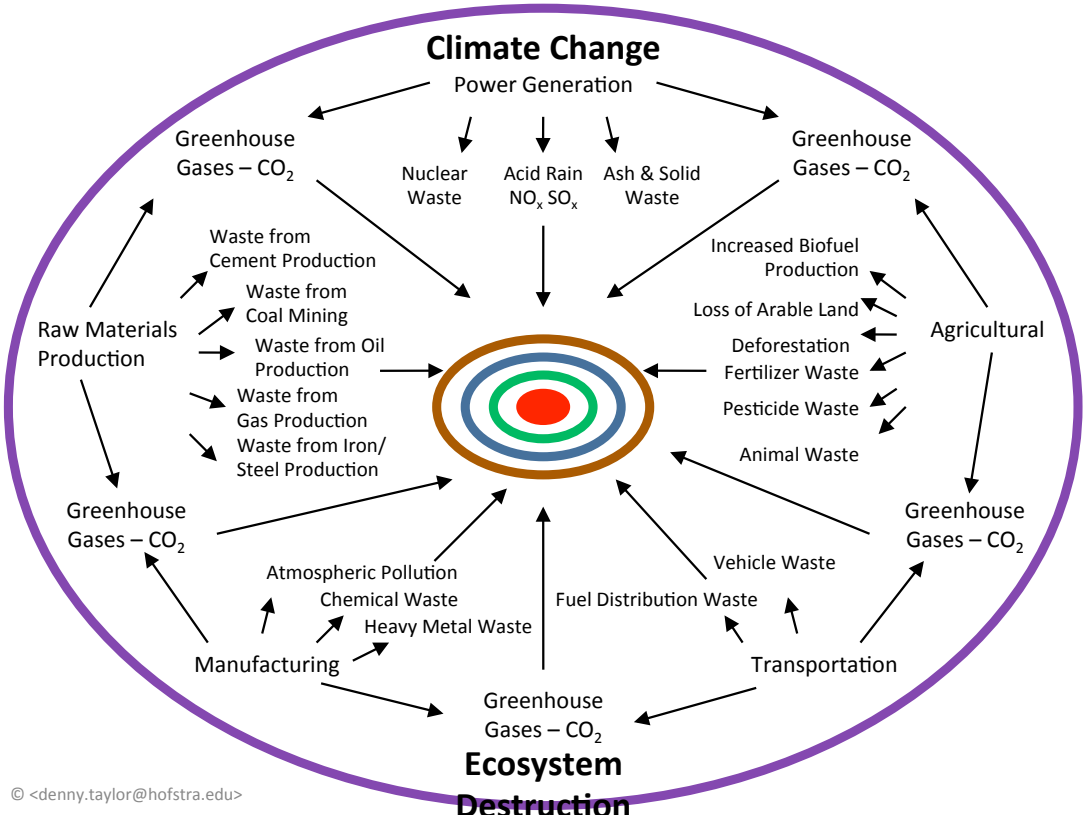


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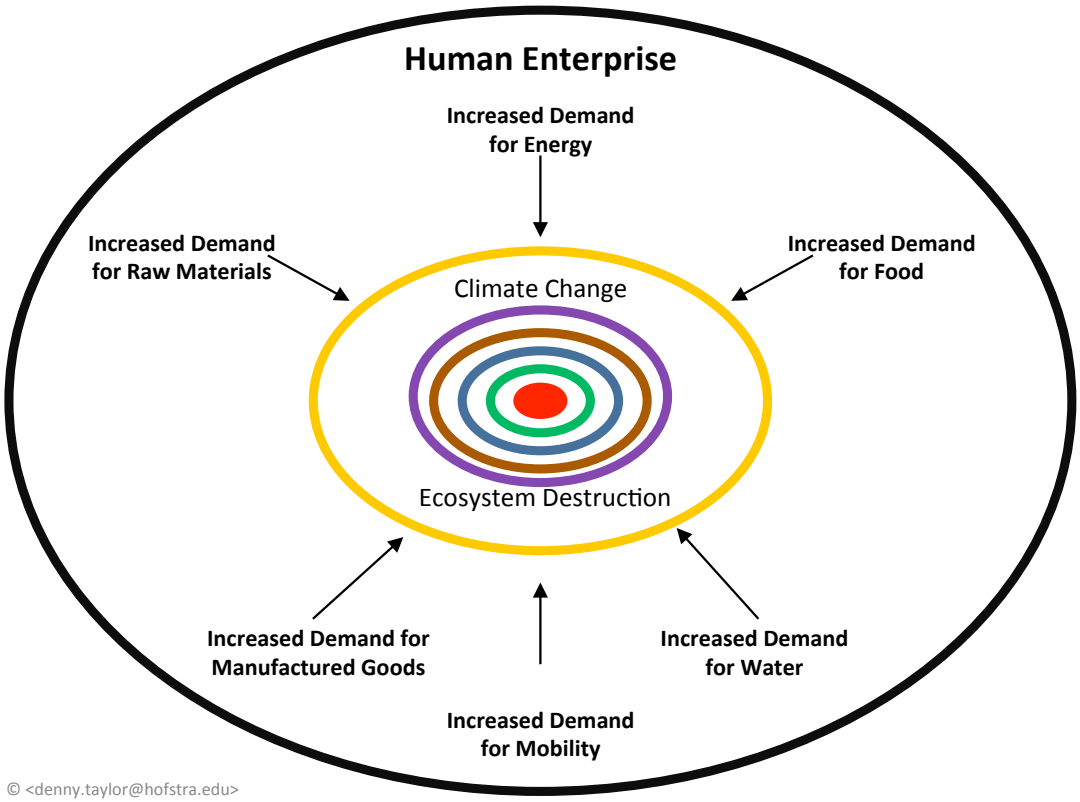


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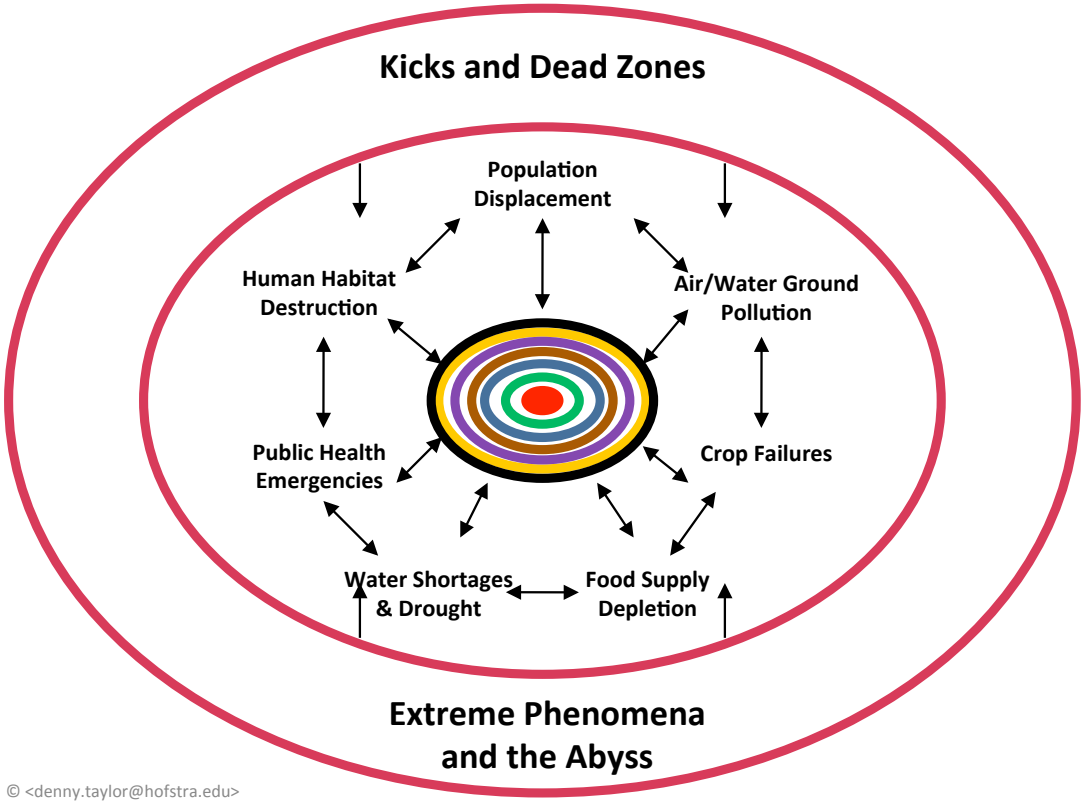


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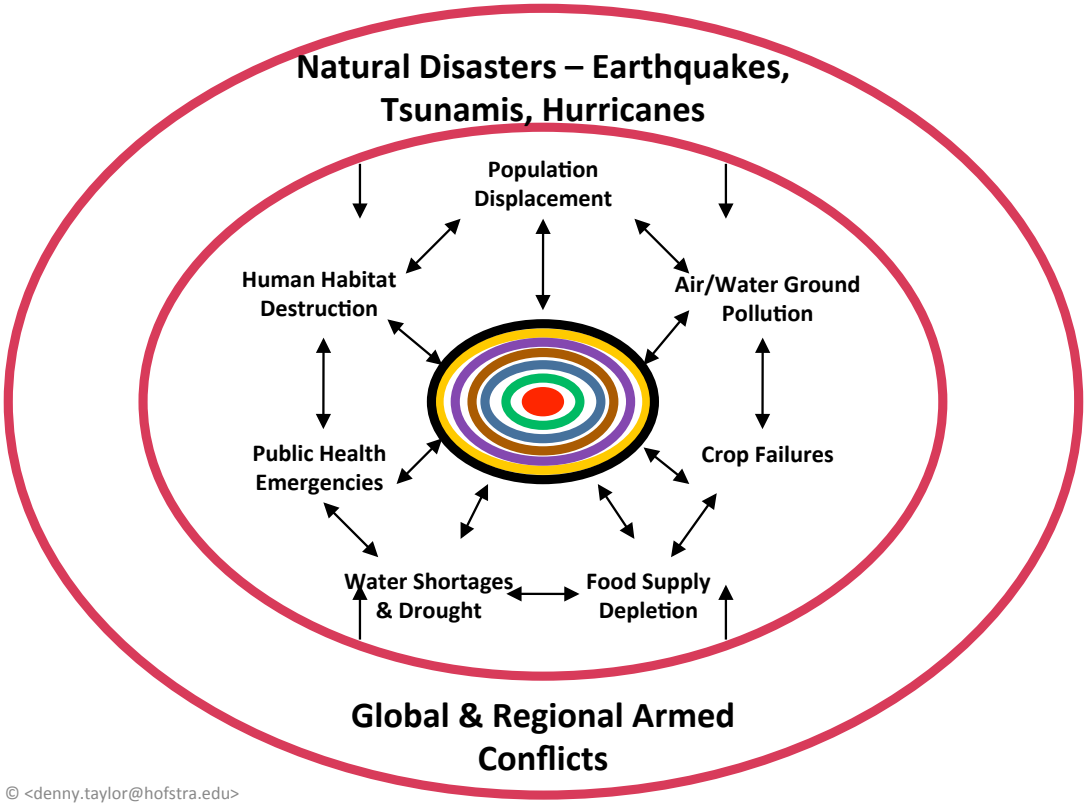


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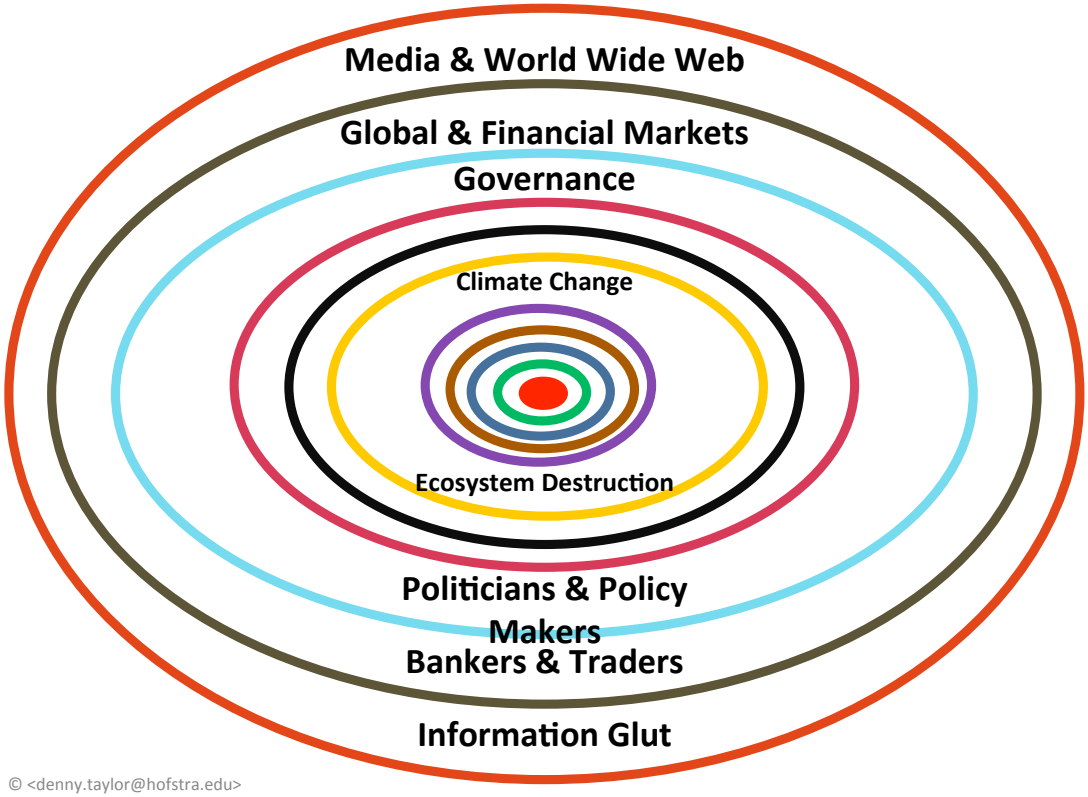


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The final graphic in this series spotlights the interconnections between every sector of the power-profit paradigm are represented. The graphics leave no doubt that it is governments, business groups and powerful economic influencers – including the media and the developers and users of the World Wide Web – who must take responsibility for climate change and re-Imagine a future in which the planet becomes a child-safe zone in which our children are not saddled with corporate climate change debt.

More in-depth discussion of climate change and these graphics is provided in the peer-reviewed papers that can be accessed here:

https://www.dennytaylor.com/climate-change

These research documents focus on: 1) The State of the Planet; 2) Meeting Global Needs; 3) Transforming our Ways of Living; and 4) Governing Across Scales.

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## Goal 16: Promote Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development

Armed conflict and wars are major contributors to climate change and a major cause of societal, ecological, marine, and atmospheric degradation.

“It is important that we respond to the big and important questions,” the President of the UN General Assembly, H.E. Miroslav Lajčák said in his opening address at the conference “Sustaining Peace: Partnerships for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding” convened by the UN and Columbia University (December 8, 2017).

“There is no room for complacency,” President Lajčák said. He spoke of “too many local and regional conflicts” and of the need to “sustain peace – a peace that lasts for generations.” He talked about “conflicts within and between countries,” and he said, “We do not have a good mechanism for dealing with them.”

President Lajčák also talked about the need to stay ahead of potential conflicts, and of the UN’s resolution to do so. He emphasized the need for: conflict prevention; predictable and sustainable financing of prevention; more coherence in the UN support for peace; and partnerships with civil society with the intent of sustaining peace. He repeated several times that local knowledge and participation of the local people in peace initiatives is of vital importance.

“What tools do we have at our disposal?” President Lajčák asked at the end of his address. “And, how can we give greater visibility to sustaining peace?”

A response to President Lajčák questions are presented here:

https://www.dennytaylor.com/latest-news/2018/family-literacy-and-the-united-nations-peacebuilding-architecture

https://www.dennytaylor.com/latest-news/2018/how-family-literacy-in-un-member-states-has-become-a-conduit-for-sustaining-peace

https://www.dennytaylor.com/latest-news/2018/family-literacy-and-the-future-of-humanity

Local knowledge and participation in peace initiatives is of paramount importance. In this context the three examples of educational initiatives that fulfill the promise of all 17 SDGs are of importance here. In Goal 4, which is designed to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, three examples were given of initiatives that re-Imagine the role of education, but also add another dimension to pushing down the risks of local and regional conflicts and enhancing peacebuilding, and are of critical importance to the concept of "sustainable peace." Briefly:

1. The IIE-PEER is facilitating scholarships and support for college students from Syria, Yemen and many war-torn counties

   The IIE-Scholar Rescue Fund is working around the world with professors, researchers and public intellectuals, many of whom need life-saving support, to provide fellowships ad visiting professor positions at partnering host institutions around the world.

2. UNESCO Learning Cities creates sustainable cities and societies by establishing the conditions for entire communities to participate in life-long learning projects and initiatives through which people learn to live sustainably and address the challenges they face in helping achieve this goal. In today's fast-changing world, where social, economic and political contexts are constantly being reshaped and reevaluated, learning must be continuous and lifelong. Lifelong learning and education must, therefore, become a main driver in developing the resources necessary for people to achieve sustainable environmental, social and economic advancement.

3. Family Literacy, Peacebuilding and SDGs. At first there are some that might question what has life long learning got to do with building a sustainable peace. This third example of such projects and initiatives, which focuses on family literacy, provides an answer. An analysis of the family literacy initiatives in U.N. member states and 40 years of family literacy research in high poverty urban and rural locations, and in regions of armed conflict and catastrophic events has been used to identify the connections between the 70/262 Review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture and the impact of family literacy on peacebuilding and sustainable development.

## Family literacy Initiatives

- “Encourage coherence, synergies, and complementarities”
- “Recognize that development, peace and security, and human rights, are interlinked and mutually reinforcing”
- Respond to “the high human cost and suffering caused by armed conflicts”
- Recognize the importance “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”
- “Recognize and participate in the struggle to establish a just and lasting peace all over the world”
- “Ensure that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account”
- “Encompass activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, … moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development”
- “Stress that civil society can play an important role in efforts to sustain peace”
- “Promote sustained and sustainable economic growth, poverty eradication, social development, sustainable development”
- Support “gender equity and respect for, and protection of, human tights and fundamental freedoms”
- “Recognize also that the scale and nature of the challenge of sustaining peace calls for close strategic and operational partnerships … (including) civil society organizations, women’s groups, youth organizations”
- “Reaffirm the important role of women in peacebuilding and noting the substantial link between women’s full and meaningful involvement in efforts to prevent, resolve and rebuild from conflict and those efforts’ effectiveness and long-term sustainability, and stressing, in this regard, the importance of women’s equal participation in all efforts for maintenance and promotion of peace and security and the need to increase women’s role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution and peacebuilding”
- “Reaffirm also the important role youth can play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and as a key aspect of the sustainability, inclusiveness and success of peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts”

Family literacy is used by most UN Member States to frame peace enhancing initiatives, and meets the agreed upon Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly 27 April 2016 that is outlined in the 70/262 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture

Countries, including Afghanistan, Nepal, and Sub Saharan Africa, offer village based family literacy programs, which seek to develop literacy in the context of community needs such as health, employment and family planning. In some countries family literacy initiatives are designed to reduce gender inequality and family violence, while in other countries family literacy programs focus on the amelioration of psychological and emotional traumas resulting from armed conflict and the support of family members physically disabled by war. For example, family literacy peace enhancing programs have been established to:

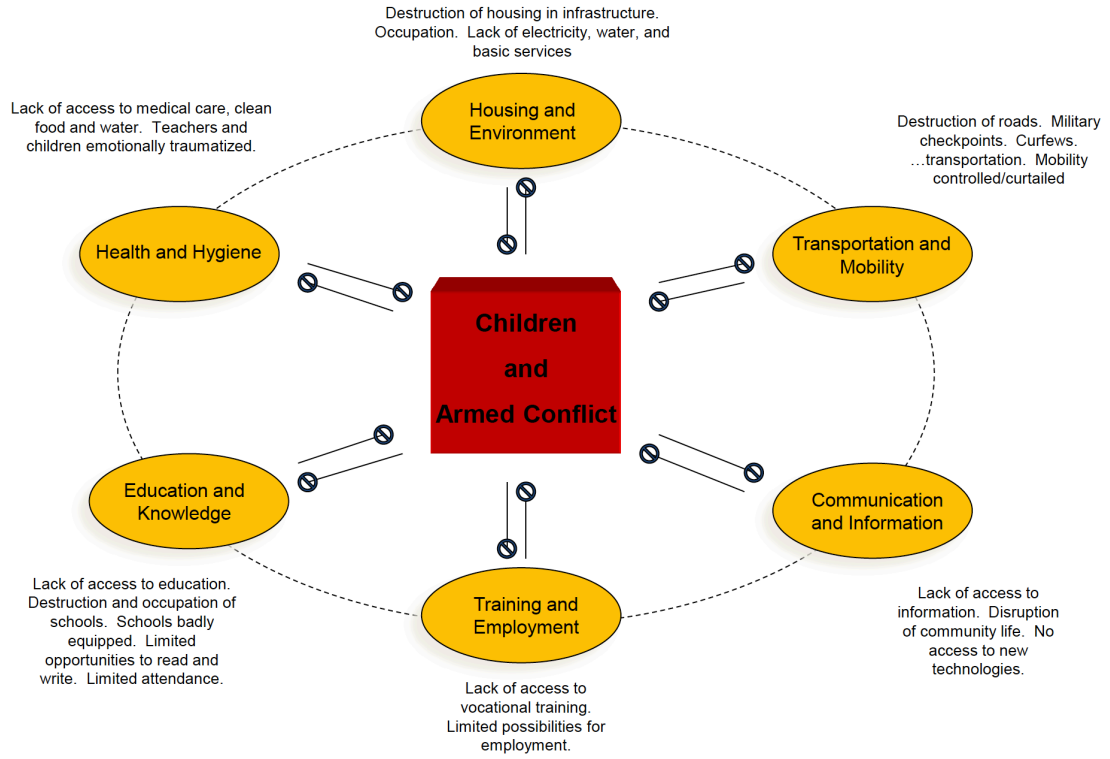
- Respond to the needs and concerns about health, employment and family planning (Afghanistan; Albania; Sub Saharan Africa)
- Respond to the psychosocial needs of women (Afghanistan; Egypt)
- Respond to war trauma and PTSD (Afghanistan; Iraq)
- Respond to issues of child labor, family violence, and other life adversities (Afghanistan)
- Establish literacy programs for socially excluded families (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- Establish literacy and peace education classes for families (Iraq)
- Establish literacy programs, especially for women and girls who want to attend schools and literacy classes in order to lead a peaceful and better life (Iraq; Bangladesh)
- Establish programs empowering rural women to develop literacy skills through the writing and documenting of their own poetry as a cultural resource that is valued both locally and nationally (Yemen)
- Establish programs in low-literacy regions, e.g. with families in the deeply-rural, under-resourced mountain valleys of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa)
- Create home-based programs to engage with families in literacy activities (South Africa)
- Create literacy centers of care for vulnerable children and mothers (South Africa)
- Combat HIV and AIDS through informational literacy activities (South Africa)
- Establish family and community literacy programs for children isolated and needlessly separated from their families (Armenia)
- Encourage family literacy for boys and girls living in poverty by developing basic literacy and using “communication technology” (Azerbaijan)
- Develop family literacy programs for young children working to contribute to family incomes (Bangladesh)

Highlighted here are the family literacy initiatives in UN Member States. Family literacy has also become a conduit for the peaceful relocation of refugees and economic migrants in Canada, the U.S., and many countries in Europe, especially Germany and Sweden. In many economically advantaged countries family literacy programs are available, especially for mothers and children learning new languages and life skills so that they can survive and thrive in the new places that have become their home.

Family literacy is also integral to/and in keeping with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. A systematic analysis of the family literacy initiatives undertaken by UN Member States indicates that family literacy is used in most countries in ways that are in keeping with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Most importantly, family literacy initiatives are used to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies. The focus of worldwide family literacy initiatives on many of the other 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is remarkable but nevertheless unrecognized.

Summing up, IIE-PEER and IIE-Scholar Rescue Fund, combined with UNESCO’s Learning Cities and Family Literacy Programs and Initiatives are of critical importance both locally and globally to providing access to justice, and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. This statement is reinforced by the following graphics.

## Exclusion of Children

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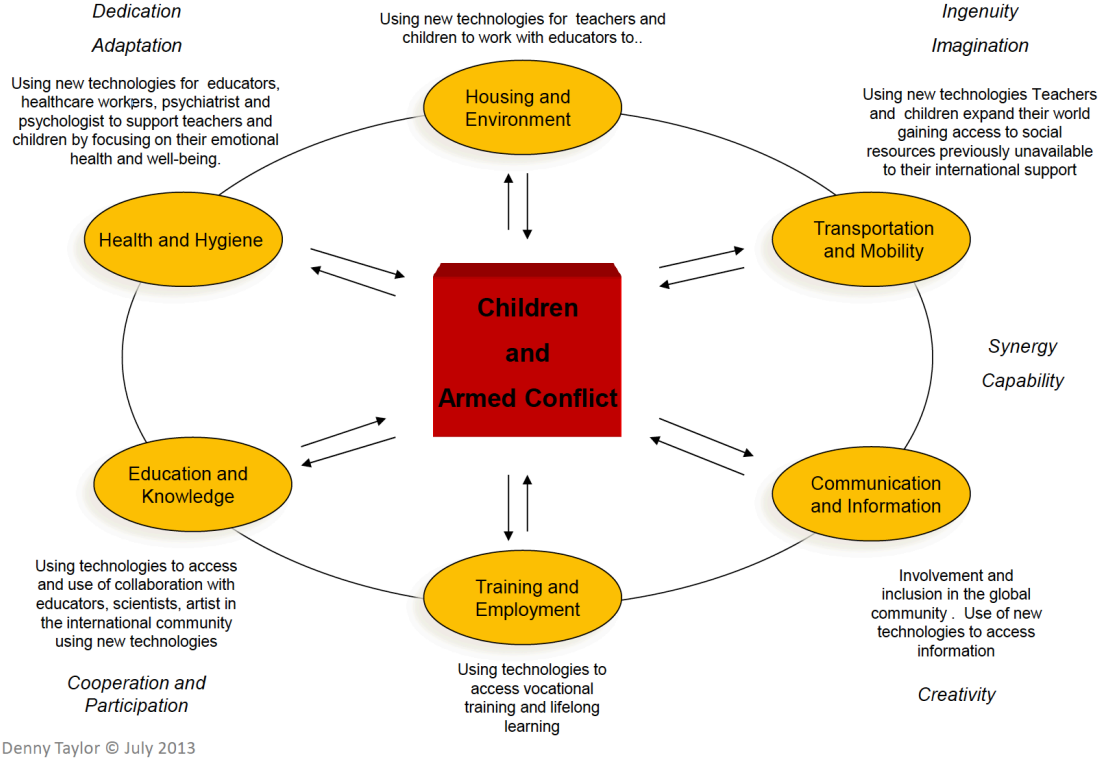
## Teachers Helping Teachers: Overcoming Social Exclusion Using Scientific and Technological Innovation

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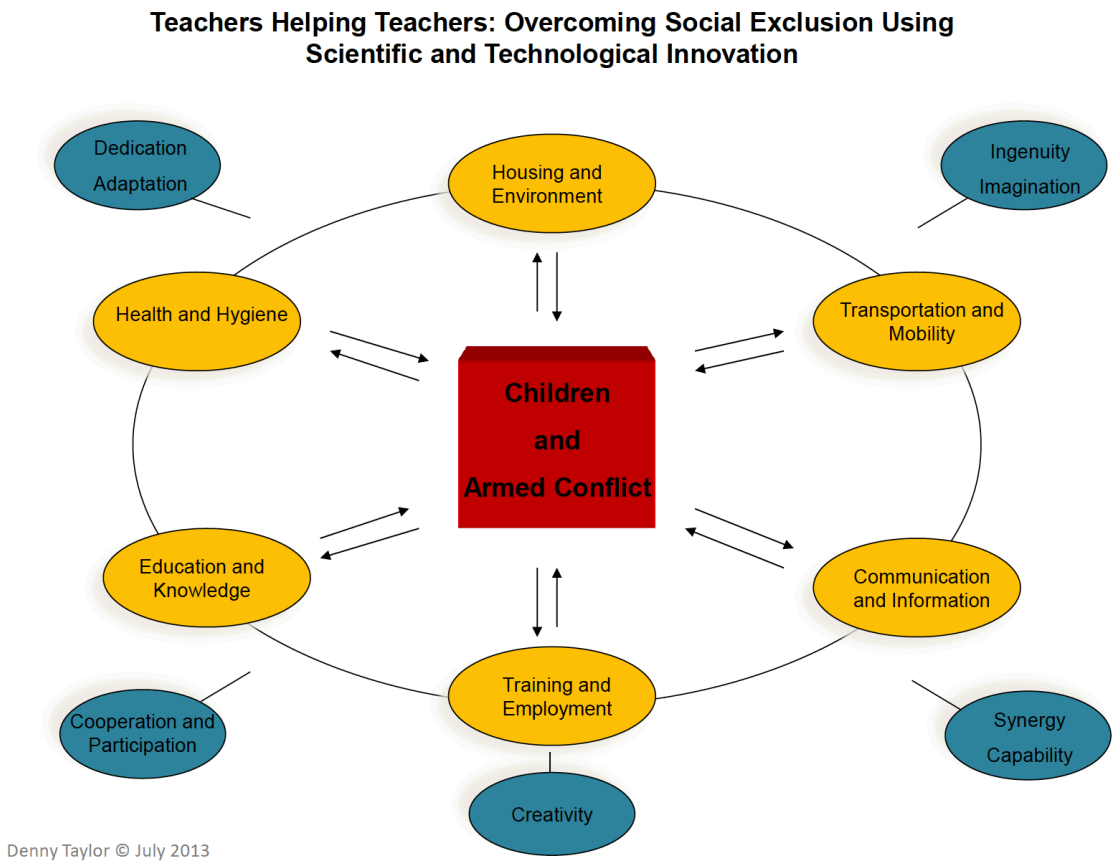


## Goal 17: Strengthen the Means of Implementation and Revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

At a time when we are well beyond normalcy there is no coherent strategy for risk reduction within or across governments and agencies. Old discourse structures reinforce paternalism and inequalities that inhibit thinking out of the box. Some of the reasons that U.N. Member States ignore this endgame situation were evident at the 2018 HLPF and also at the 2018 UNGA. Sustainable development ambitions can be transformed into shared priorities and actions on the ground, but it will take a re-Visioning of the critical role the United Nations must take in order to address the Sustainable Development Goals.

The QoQ we must all address:

**How can timely actions be undertaken at unprecedented and multiple geopolitical scales, when the issues involve people of widely differing and disconnected values, ethics, emotions, spiritual beliefs, levels of trust, interests and power?**

The QoQ requires the representatives of monarchs, governments and corporations to acquiesce to changing boundaries and shifting lenses, and participating in thoughtful, contemplative conversations and sharing sophisticated understandings with representatives of NGOs and civil

society openly participating. The purpose: to understand and build on the interrelationships between globalization and localization. The bottom line is that a cohesive global effort is urgently needed to push down the risks of climate change. At the present time the discourse on all 17 SDGs is fragmented and incoherent, and there is an urgent need for all groups to invest in dialogue in response to the potentially cataclysmic events that will confront humanity in the very near future.

Time is our scarcest commodity, and yet at the 2018 HLPF old patterns of behavior dominated the event. There were 80 ministers and vice ministers attending the HLPF and 2,500 nonstate actors registered. The ethos was of polarization and protectionism, with fragmented national frameworks lacking any external review. Climate change is life threatening, but in the context of the SDGs is mentioned by only a few. Biodiversity is essential for human well being, even existence, but biodiversity is diminishing in every region of the world and is not addressed in any cohesive way in the Voluntary National Assessments presented by U.N. member states.

Multiple silos were evident. Representatives of countries presented their VNRs, rushing their presentations due to time constraints, and representatives of NGOs were given just two minutes to respond to each presentation. These artificial ritualized performances provided no opportunity for authentic inclusive dialogue or debate to scaffold the problems faced by individual countries, or to reach out and offer advice or make recommendations for specific issues. There was no "what's next?" intentionality, and no forward thinking on how to tackle the global threats to human existence.

Many of the presentations by U.N. representatives were narrative loops of past speeches, while the VNR presentations resembled travel logs with video infomercials and, in one case, a country was referred to as "a destination" rather than as a place where people actually live. Multiple observations on multiple days of the participants attending the VNR presentations found them on their computers answering email, scrolling through Twitter, editing documents, and falling asleep.

In many of the side-venues the private sector held business oriented sessions, some with language of social responsibility and human rights as a thin veneer laminated to hard-sell propositions for an artificially green product such as "sustainable drinking" by a producer of beer, and more worrying "smart cities" in which there were no people mentioned and no acknowledgement that most global cities resemble NYC with its 65,000 homeless citizens.

The energy at the 2018 HLPF came from the NGOs – officially referred to by one U.N. representative as "non-state actors". It was the NGO participants who brought local knowledge and global responsibility to the HLPF. They were organized, and they met at 8:00 a.m. to dialogue, share information, and plan the sessions that they would attend. Professionals of conscience, their shared and unwavering commitment was to hold the member states accountable for all those left behind, and also to present innovative and effective programs and initiatives. But the opportunity for authentic dialogue with representatives of U.N. member states was extremely limited by the outdated and ineffective hierarchical structure of the HLPF.

The low-status of the NGOs is evident by the locations of the events that they held. While the corporation promoting sustainable beer was held at the U.N., events addressing the SDGs and human rights were located in surrounding churches and other locations with large meeting spaces. Several times at meetings at embassies the role of the NGOs was denigrated, For example, in a discussion of VNR at a nearby embassy a speaker expressed the view that NGOs should “stop acting like watchdogs” and come up with some innovative ways to address the SDGs instead.

The irony is that many of the NGO’s have done exactly that. Many of the NGOs are united by their experiences of working with local communities around the globe. They are working with families living in extreme poverty, experiencing public health emergencies, surviving in regions of armed conflict, and coping with the lack of water. The list is long.

If human societies are to survive and thrive there is a need for informed public conversation to resolve contradictions and conflicts on the reasons why sustainable development is important. From this perspective the U.N. has the capacity to:

- **Provide information that could improve the clarity, transparency and understanding of proposed actions.**

- **Establish ad hoc groups that include members of the Major NGOs representing diverse constituencies as well representatives from U.N. Member States;**

- **Ensure that all procedures are clearly defined.** Ignoring the knowledge and understandings of the complexities of diverse constituencies is serious and reflects negatively on the leadership.

- **Keep in mind that the NGOs represent many nationalities and cultures.** They bring with them knowledge and understandings that provide a myriad of ways to advance the SDGs. By excluding them from the decision-making process, we all experience the loss.

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# Key Recommendations

Emerging from this peer review of the 2018 HLPF is the overarching recommendation that all initiatives to push down the risks recognize the first principle of human existence, which is that the family is the primary unit of all human societies.

An ecological approach rather than an economic business approach is an urgent priority.

The graphics presented in Goal 7, which focus on ecosystem destruction in the Gulf region and the graphics that depict the ecological impact of Bhopal presented in Goal 9 reflect the immense negative impact of the economic industrial model on both people and the planet.

We can change the future now, but it will take: 1) a reVisioning and reconceptualization of people and the planet, and 2) a rejection of the frameworks that inhibit actions, that together will provide life support for human societies in this and future centuries. The climate graphics presented in Goal 13 are illustrative of one possible re-framing. At the center of these graphics is the red dot, which represents the human family as well as other vulnerable populations.

The light at the end of the tunnel is that the NGO initiatives to establish learning cities, to use family literacy to provide opportunities for families to focus on local problems that impact sustainable development and peacebuilding, and IIE-PEER initiatives to provide higher education support for refugees, especially acute in places of conflict, are all crucial to the rebuilding of societies and to maintaining stability, pushing down the existential risks of climate change, and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.