



Equity is perhaps the most important element

Sustainable change is a broad church - not always about discarding charcoal and growing trees - it comes in a thousand and one shapes and sizes: people for example. One of the most challenging issues of this 21st Century is just how we relate to each other; how have we relate to have-nots, historied citizens to traumatized migrants, rich to poor. Do we connect as part of the same tribe, or do we seek out divisions for our own benefit?

I reside on the coast of Kenya in a beautiful place called *Shanzu*. For me it *is* beautiful, because I am fortunate enough to live on the coastal side of the highway; but for the 20,000 residents who live on the western side of the road, life at times is not quite so rosy. East is where richer Kenyans, privileged mzungus (white people) and itinerant tourists hang out; west is the province of folk who service those well-heeled people across the bitumen, whether it be food, drinks, changing the sheets or joining them in their bed. And they are the lucky few; most of the Shanzu population is either underemployed or unemployed, living on less than \$4.00 per day. Many turn to drugs, crime, or prostitution to relieve their plight. And with Covid, of course, the story gets worse.



Photos by Duncan Gregory





Image: middleeasteye.net

I paint this picture because in many ways it could be viewed as a microcosm of the global scene, only the bigger image is perhaps even worse, where destitute people in millions flee horrific wars or abject poverty, trying to breach the ramparts of Europe or America, in order to secure for themselves and their families what most of the favored few in those parts regard as normal.

The Covid pandemic has served in more ways than one to highlight this subject of inequity: individuals in richer parts refusing to heed scientific guidelines relating to masks, social distancing and even vaccination, while their prosperous nations hoard vaccines – millions more than they require - rather than enabling equitable distribution to poorer countries. Viewed in this light, Covid can be seen as a startling litmus test relating directly to *Sustainable Change*, because this aggressive pandemic disrupter can only be solved when nations and people are treated equally.

Another, even larger topic looms in the not-too-distant future. This is all about water, where the combination of increasing populations and climate change will see nations (i.e. people from rich and poor parts of the planet) fighting over ever-decreasing supplies of water. And as for Covid, sustainable change will not happen if the rich hoard stocks for their own oases, leaving those less able to die of thirst in their deserts. This scenario could prove much worse than Covid, because even the poor will not accept to die of thirst, while across the fence others are wallowing in water!

So, equality between peoples – both within countries and across borders - is possibly *the* most important element of sustainable change. If we balk at trying to achieve equality for all, then no matter how many trees we plant, sustainable change will not be attainable.

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