



# Facing the Crisis in SD

After Rio+20: Future needs and remaining challenges –  
Perspectives on SD for the next generations

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Keynote address to the  
European Sustainable Development Network  
Friday, 29 June, 2012



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# Key Messages

## **3 Themes ...**

- **Science:** SD is where science meets decision-making
- **Systems:** SD brings systems thinking into policy
- **Growth:** SD facilitates the dialogue on reinvention

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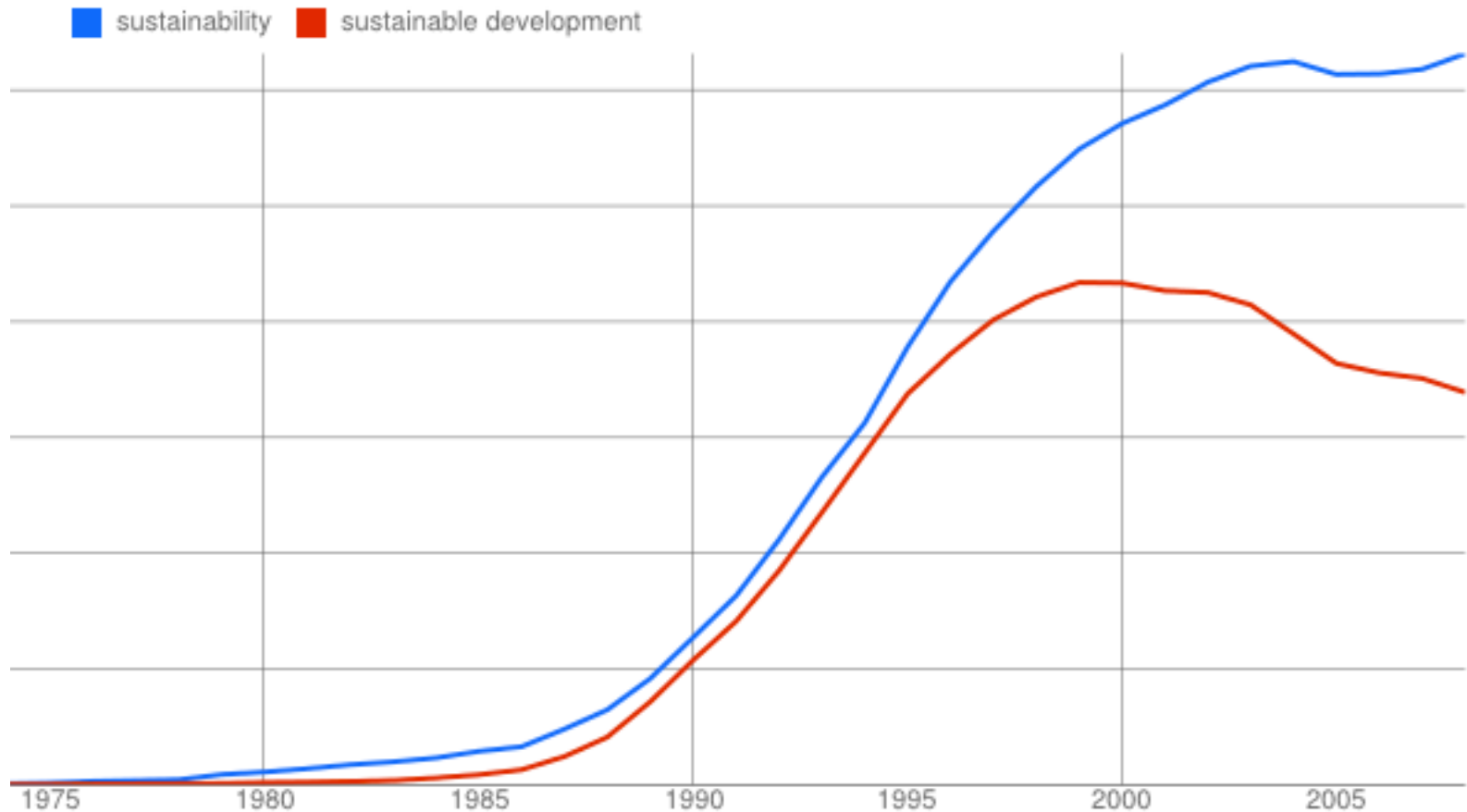
- **Science:** SD is where science meets decision-making
- **Systems:** SD brings systems thinking into policy
- **Growth:** SD facilitates the dialogue on reinvention

## **3 Actions ...**

- **Look up:** Promote and sustain the SD vision
- **Look down:** Enable greater sub-national action on SD
- **Look around:** Broaden and strengthen SD networking

# Is “sustainable development” dying?

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# Defining “crisis”

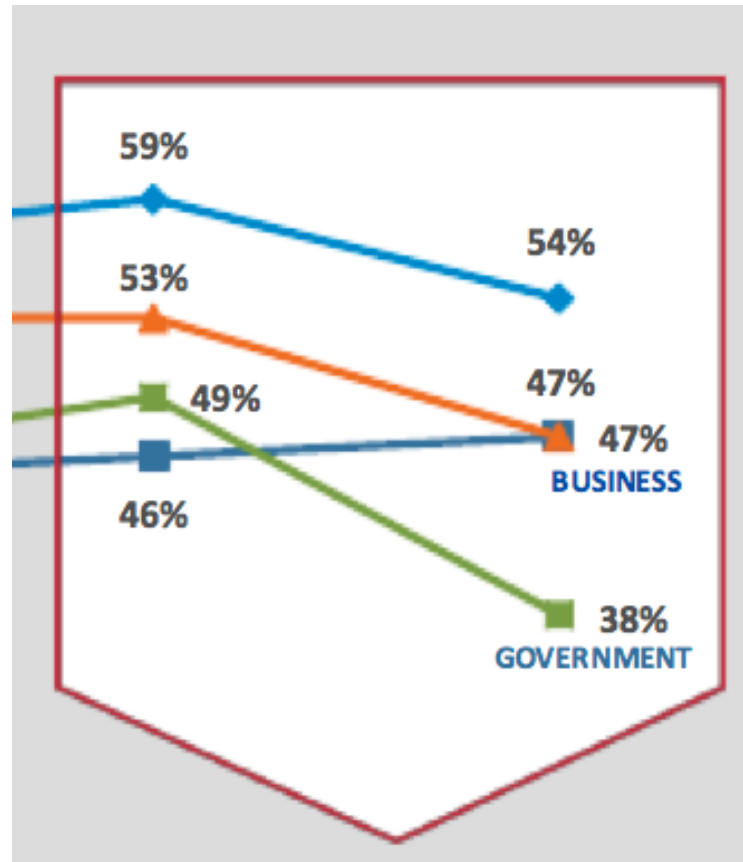
**crisis** |ˈkrɪsɪs| *noun* ( *pl. crises* |-ɪsēz| ) (from Greek, “*krisis*” meaning “*decision*”)

- (1) a time of **intense difficulty, trouble, or danger**: *as in “the current economic crisis”*
- (2) a **time when a difficult or important decision must be made**: *a turning point*
- (3) the **critical moment in the progress of a disease**, *indicating either recovery or death*

# Is SD really in “crisis”?

- Rio+20 being branded as a “disappointment” or “failure” ... even before it began
- Loss of trust in national government as lead actors to realize SD
- Ministerial-level battles for control of key concepts, terminology, policy initiatives, budgets
- Increased polarization between sectors, especially severe disillusionment among civil society leaders
- Science marginalized, economics trumps everything

# National governments lose public trust



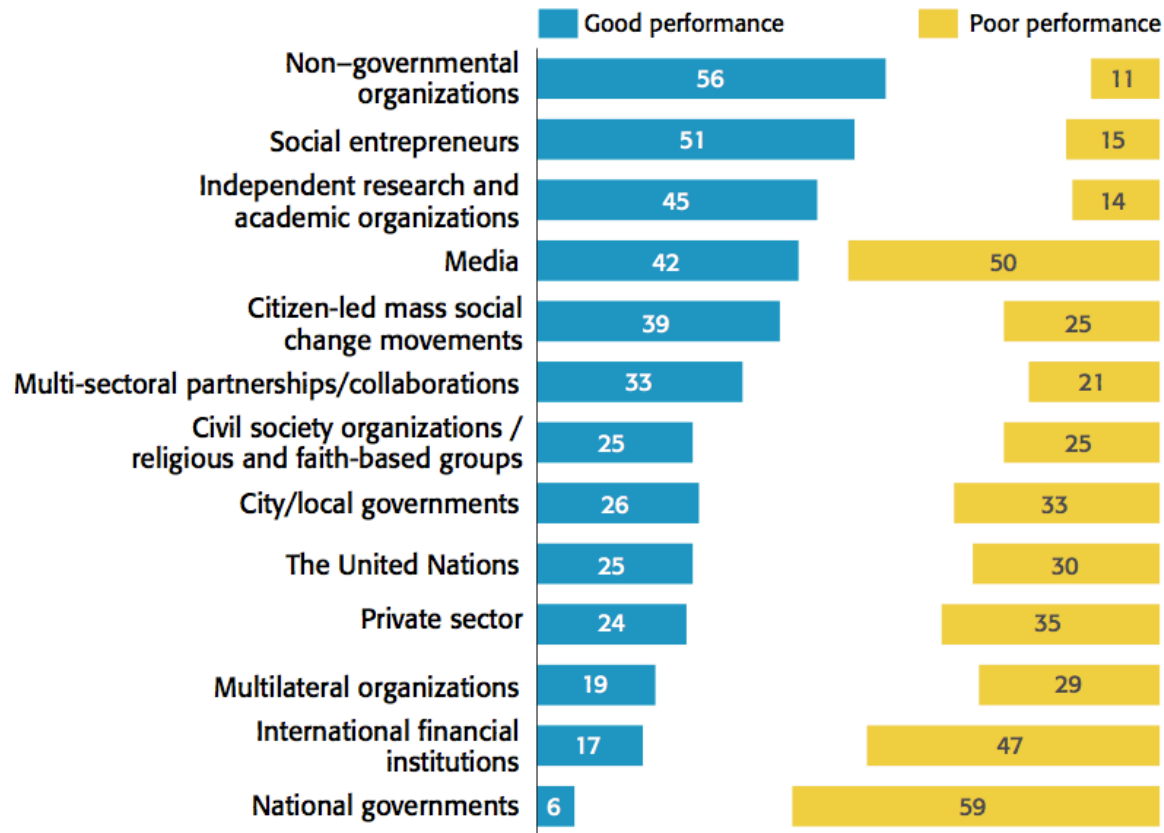
*Edelman Trust Barometer 2012  
(Global data)*



# National governments not trusted on SD

*Figure 3: Contribution to Sustainable Development Progress Since 1992 Earth Summit*

Sustainability Experts, 2012



# National governments not trusted on SD

*Figure 4: Contribution to Sustainable Development Progress  
Since 1992: Comparing Expert and Public Views  
Ranking of Institutions,\* Sustainability Experts vs General Public, 2012*

	Sustainability Experts	Global Public
<div>Good performance</div> <div>↑</div> <div>↓</div> <div>Poor performance</div>	NGOs	Research/academics/scientists
	Research/academics / scientists	NGOs
	Religious groups / churches	United Nations
	United Nations	Media
	Media	Religious groups / churches**
	Private sector	Private sector
	National government	National government

\*Ranking is based on net performance, i.e. percentage of "good" minus percentage of "poor"

\*\*Not asked in Brazil, Greece, and Spain

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Let's take stock of Rio+20 ...  
again

# Rio+20 outcome: a positive view (I)

- Full **reaffirmation of sustainable development**, and of the broad array of relevant international commitments
- Commitment to **increase the speed of action** on sustainable development
- First global consensus acknowledgement that **food, energy, climate are in crisis**

# Rio+20 outcome: a positive view (2)

- Call for **new, broader measures of progress** to complement GDP and to be used in policy making
- Endorsement of **corporate responsibility / CSR programs and sustainability reporting**, including support for relevant policy and regulatory frameworks

# Rio+20 outcome: a positive view (3)

- General adoption of the concept of “**green economy**” and establishment of a set of detailed policy guidelines for working with the concept in a policy context
- Endorsement of **life-cycle assessment, sustainable design, and other core methodologies** for greening economies

# Rio+20 outcome: a positive view (4)

- Adoption of the **new 10-Year Framework Program** on sustainable consumption and production
- **Dismantlement of the CSD** and commitment to create a higher-level body
- A mandate and process for developing a set of global **Sustainable Development Goals**

# Rio+20 outcome:

## A few things that are missing ...

- Acknowledgement of “planetary boundaries” and ecosystem limits
- Convincing, government-led mechanisms for financing and implementation of a broad-based sustainability transformation
- Strategy for dealing with the issue of growth



# About Growth: What is the “issue”?

- We are confused about what “it” means
- But if we don’t have “it”, things get rapidly worse
- So, we don’t like to question “it”
- But: there are many different kinds of growth
- We need more of some kinds, less of others
- But: we’ve linked them *all* to the money system
- ... and that system is very difficult to change

# Growth is the key issue for SD

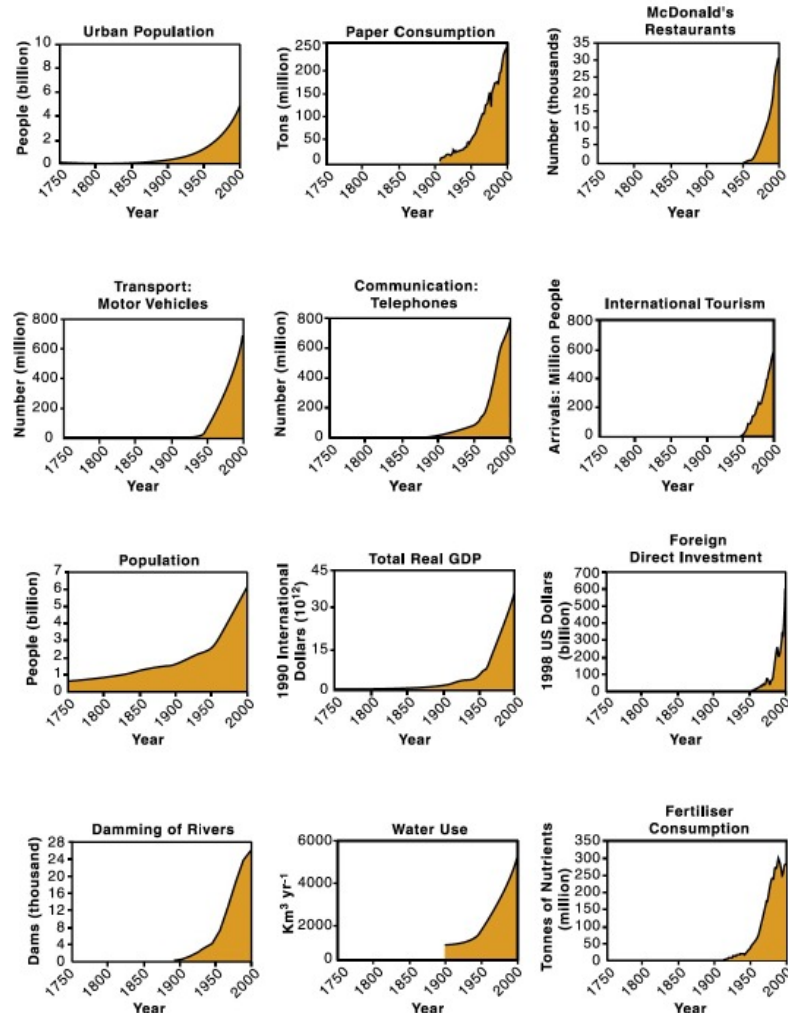
It links three themes at the heart of SD today:

- It is the stumbling block creating trouble at the so-called “*science-policy interface*”
- Understanding growth requires developing a *systemic perspective* — which remains a challenge in highly differentiated and specialized governance systems
- It is the focus of a *clash of worldviews* that plays out in institutional and political decision-making

# “Growth as Usual”: The Paradox

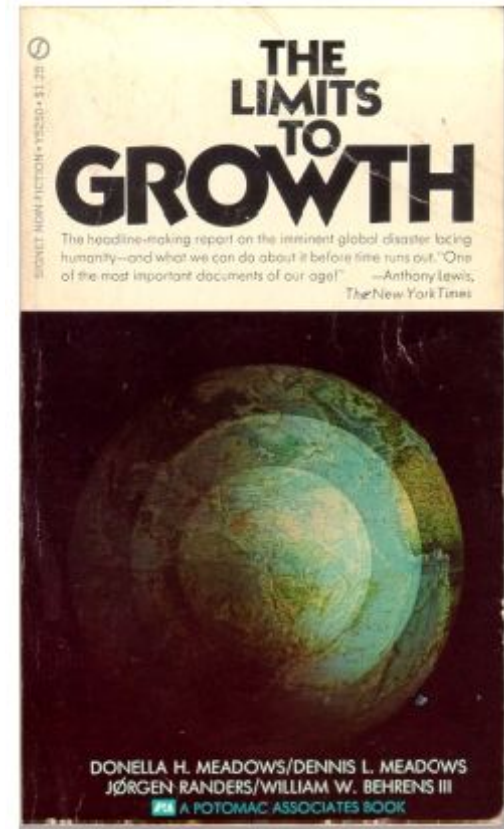
- 1. We need more of it:** It reduces absolute poverty ... but mature, post-industrial economies with aging demographic profiles have a difficult time maintaining high rates of GDP-measured economic growth
- 2. We need less of it:** Traditional economic growth puts extreme pressures on resources and ecosystems, while often widening the gaps between the wealthy and the poor

# The scientific backdrop: Living during a “Great Acceleration”



# 1972: *The Limits to Growth*

- Controversial when launched, generated global headlines
- Routinely attacked – on false grounds – for nearly 40 years
- Now widely acknowledged as an accurate and prescient analysis (even by former critics)



# Why have societies been in denial about the limits to growth for so long?

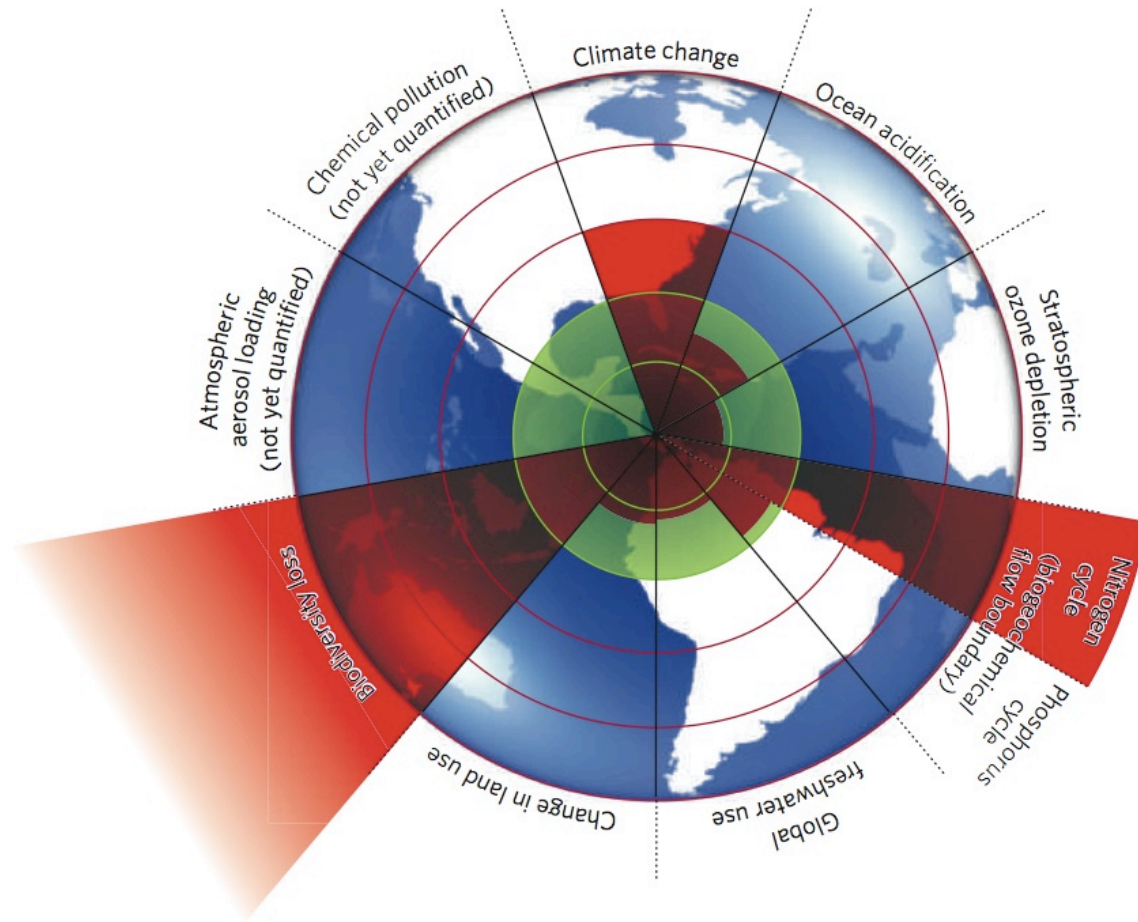
**Answer: Resource substitution**



At the Mad Hatter's tea party, when the cups got dirty, they just moved down to the clean ones. That's "resource substitution." However, eventually they will have come all the way around the table ... and back to the dirty cups.

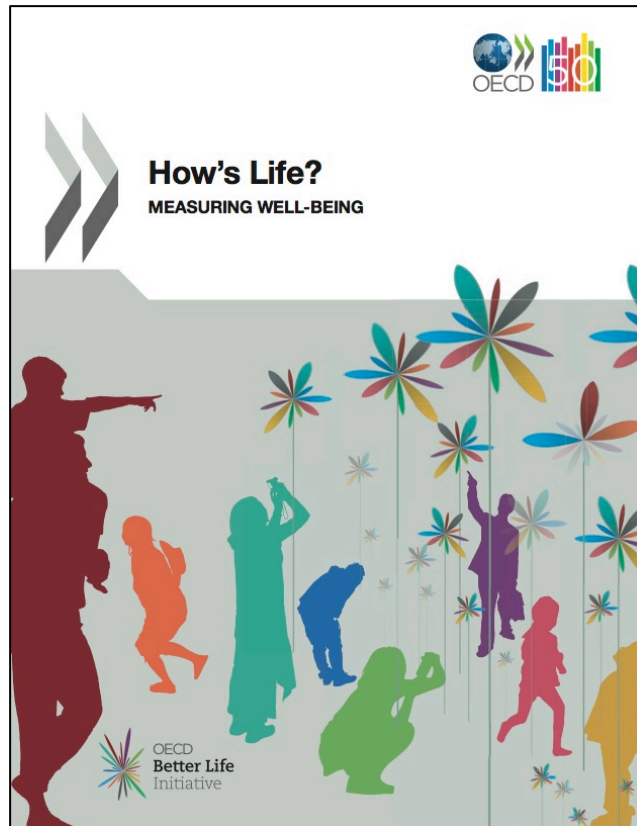


# 2009: The “Planetary Boundaries”



“Planetary Boundaries,” or “A Safe Operating Space for Humanity” *Nature*, Sept 2009

# 2011: The growth of questioning growth



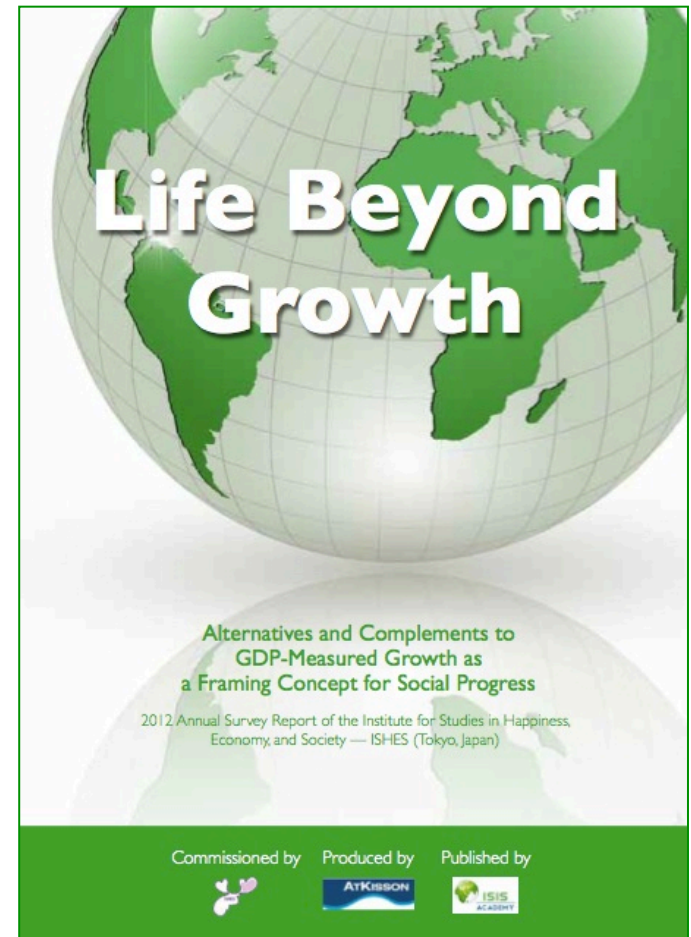
- *“Growth ‘as usual’ is not an option.”*
- *“We need to respond to [people’s] aspirations and to link economic growth with broader societal progress.”*

— Angel Gurría,  
Secretary-General, OECD  
Release of “How’s Life?”, 12 Oct 2011



# Report: “Life Beyond Growth 2012”

- First annual survey of the current “state of the alternatives” to Growth-as-Usual
- Considers only concepts, indicators etc. *in active use by some government, somewhere in the world*



# What is “Green Growth”?



*Green Growth was explicitly embraced by the OECD and by the World Business Council on Sustainable Development. A major global institute based in Korea, Denmark, and Australia helps to facilitate the spread of ideas, research, planning, etc.*

See: [greengrowth.org](http://greengrowth.org)

- Concept first championed by the UN Economic and Social Council for Asian and Pacific (ESCAP)
- “Green” means primarily “low-carbon,” and implies achieving normal (or accelerated) economic growth through investments in clean and green technology
- Includes a focus on “sustainable livelihoods” and “Green Jobs”

# What is “Green Economy”?



*UNEP also provides consulting support services to nations who wish to adopt the Green Economy framework. The UNEP “Green Economy Report” included a global modeling study showing that by redirecting 2% of global investment, the global economy could be “greened”.*

See: [unep.org/greeneconomy](http://unep.org/greeneconomy)

- Concept first championed by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), NGOs & think-tanks
- Much broader than Green Growth in its conception; includes environmental and social goals more centrally and explicitly
- Was a primary focus (and source of controversy) at Rio+20

# What is “De-Growth”?



- Defined as “a voluntary transition towards a just, participatory, and ecologically sustainable society”
- Proponents believe that the transition to a smaller-scale material economy is “inevitable” and that it will bring social and environmental benefits
- Champions include Tim Jackson, author of *Prosperity without Growth*, French Green Party, etc.

See: [degrowth.net](http://degrowth.net)

# Growth: A Spectrum of Alternatives

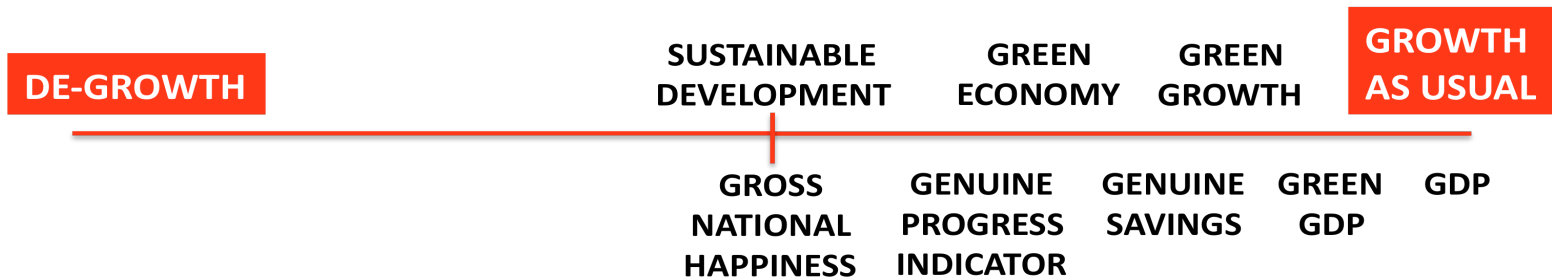
## Frameworks



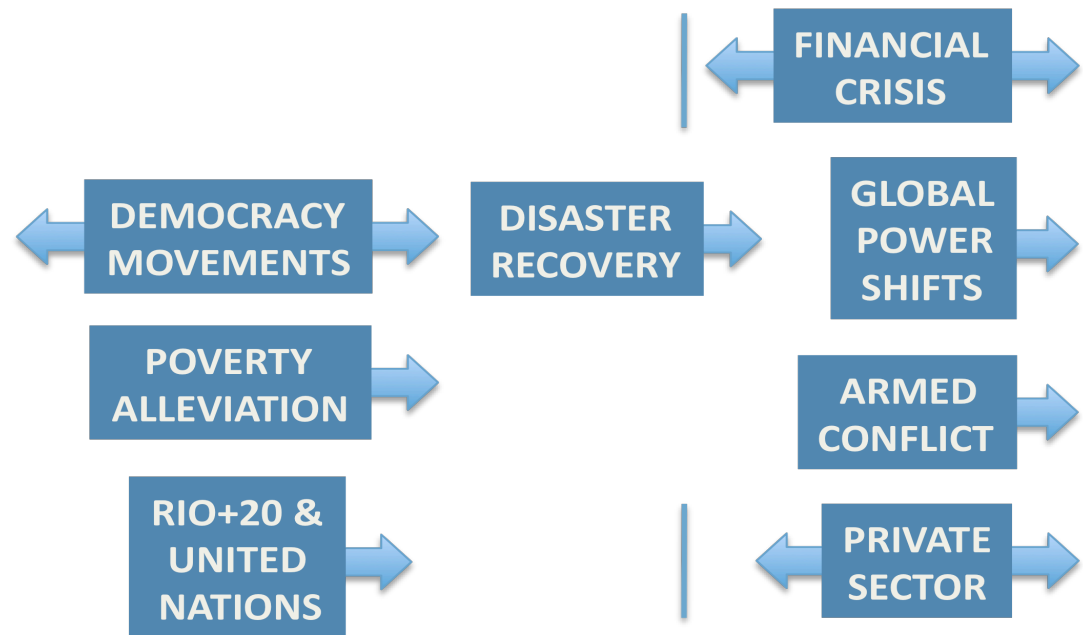
## Indicators

# Factors affecting the growth debate

## Frameworks



## Indicators



# Defining the New Role of States: **SD Facilitators**

13. We recognize that people's opportunities to influence their lives and future, participate in decision making and voice their concerns are fundamental for sustainable development. ... [SD] can only be achieved with **a broad alliance of people, governments, civil society and private sector, all working together** to secure the future we want for present and future generations

*“The Future We Want,” June 2012*

# The Three Themes

- **Science:** SD champions and functionaries have become *de facto spokespeople for science* in the policy arena (note the link to indicator work)
- **Systems:** It is our job to bring a systems perspective, but also to *increase the capacity of others to think in systems terms*
- **Growth:** We must increasingly moderate and *facilitate multi-sector engagement on reinventing growth ...* for a civilization in crisis



# The Three Actions

- **Look up:** Keep the SD vision alive, use the positives from Rio+20, draw on stories of progress in all sectors
- **Look down:** Increase efforts to create enabling environments for sub-national action
- **Look around:** Strengthen and broaden networks of sustainable development champions ... and support each other

# For a bit of inspiration, see ...



**www.Pyramid2012.net**

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## The Workshops

Here we present a photo collage that shows the extraordinary diversity of the Pyramid 2012 campaign workshops. In the appendix to this report, we also present short summaries of those workshops that were formally reported to us in detail. For more information about all the workshops we know about, more photographs, and even some short videos, please visit the official Pyramid 2012 campaign website: <http://Pyramid2012.net>



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# Thank you

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