

Navigating the Crossroads

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests,

Before we start, I want to take a moment to shed light on our organization. At OVO, we are dedicated to supporting sustainable entrepreneurship on the African continent. Our focus lies on initiatives with a profound societal and environmental impact. We engage in the entire process, from selecting and guiding to financing and monitoring African businesses and organizations, ensuring they achieve their goals. Collaboration is at the core of our approach, and we work closely with an international network of partners and organizations that share our objectives.

For every project, we actively seek Belgian entrepreneurs, companies, and investors willing to contribute their knowledge and resources. We believe fervently in a win-win scenario, where African enterprises and organizations write their success stories, while Belgian businesses and investors broaden their perspectives, creativity, and commitment.

As our mission is to support African entrepreneurship, we are confronted with the multifaceted issues of climate change, the global economy, and their profound impact on African development. Today we will examine the intricate web of challenges and potential solutions that shape our collective future.

Africa's Dilemma

Development vs. Environmental Stewardship

Africa is a continent at the crossroads of development and environmental stewardship. The definition of "growth" and "development" takes on a new meaning in a world where the Western ecological footprint looms large, threatening the well-being of all. African nations find themselves at a critical juncture where they must chart a course that avoids replicating the unsustainable patterns of industrialization witnessed in other parts of the world.

The Allocation of the Global CO2 Budget

Consider for example the urgency of the residual global CO₂ budget. To limit global warming to less than 1.5°C, further global CO₂ emissions must be kept below a total of 400 billion tonnes since 2020. However, the challenge lies in the fair distribution of this budget among nations. Developed countries, with historical emissions during their industrialization, must ensure they take no more than their fair per-capita share, preventing a repeat of historical injustices.

The African Perspective

While Africa bears minimal responsibility for climate change, it is not exempt from its impacts. The Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi, held from September 4 to 6, voiced the continent's plea for increased support from developed nations to navigate the challenges of a hotter continent without stifling their own development.

African leaders called for the rich world to pay more to help them cope with a hotter continent without curbing their countries' development. In a call to action, they stressed the importance of decarbonizing the global economy for equality and shared prosperity. They called for investment to promote the sustainable use of Africa's natural assets for the continent's transition to low carbon development and contribution to global decarbonization.

Akinwumi Adesina, head of the African Development Bank, says, and I quote: the outlook is good for a continent with the workers of the future and the best investment opportunities. But Africa needs to have a lot more resources for financing climate. The biggest challenge lay in the climate crisis. "Africa today is losing \$7bn to \$15bn a year from climate change. And that's going to rise to \$50bn a year by 2030. Yet it receives only 3% of the global climate finance."

Economic Paradigms and the Quest for Sustainability

As we ponder the economic implications of these environmental challenges, divergent schools of thought emerge.

De-Growth

One perspective advocates for a strategic reduction in energy and resource consumption, viewing it as a means to flatten socio-economic disparities and elevate the well-being of populations. It challenges the traditional narrative that associates progress solely with an increase in production and consumption.

This perspective, often called 'De-Growth', advocates for a more deliberate and conscious approach to economic activities, emphasizing quality over quantity. It calls for a paradigm shift where societies prioritize well-being, equality, and environmental health over relentless expansion. The goal is not necessarily to halt all economic activity but to reassess our priorities and redefine success beyond purely economic terms.

Challenges and Criticisms

However, it is important to acknowledge that the concept of 'de-growth' is not without its challenges and criticisms. Detractors argue that it may lead to economic stagnation, job losses, and hinder technological progress. Addressing these concerns requires a nuanced and thoughtful approach to ensure a just and equitable transition.

The Other Perspective: Corporate Responsibility

Contrastingly, another school of thought places the onus on corporations to be agents of positive change. Research assessing the impact of 47 potential corporate actions across five planetary boundaries reveals promising insights. Corporate action has the potential to return the world to safe levels in three crucial planetary boundaries: forest cover loss, freshwater consumption, and nutrient pollution.

This approach challenges the traditional narrative of profit at the expense of the planet. It recognizes the influence that corporations wield and emphasizes the need for responsible business practices. By aligning corporate actions with environmental sustainability, there is a potential to not only address critical planetary boundaries but also to contribute positively to societal and ecological well-being.

As we delve deeper into these perspectives, it becomes evident that our path forward requires a multifaceted approach. The choices we make today, whether on an individual level or within the corporate sphere, will reverberate through our shared future.

Looking Ahead: A Call to Action

As we conclude our journey through these pressing issues, it's clear that the dialogue around climate change, the global economy, and African development is not just theoretical but deeply intertwined with the choices we make today.

The interconnectedness of our world demands a holistic perspective, transcending geographical and socio-economic boundaries. It calls for innovative solutions, responsible corporate practices, and a reevaluation of historical imbalances. The urgency to address these challenges is not just for the sake of our generation but for the well-being of generations to come.

Before we continue our seminar, I invite you to hold a minute of silence for all those who suffer from violence all over the world.

Luc Bonte