

OPEN MIND  
December 2022

COP 27, one of the biggest global meetings on climate change, ended recently in Egypt, making headlines in every media channel. MIND has been at the forefront of global climate change and sustainable development discussions since 1992. We have proposed multiple breakthrough concepts to various global UN meetings on how to integrate climate change (and other environmental and social issues) into sustainable development strategies. They include, among many others, the sustainable development triangle, BIGG path, Millennium consumption Goals, and Sustainomics framework. These concepts have made foundations in global sustainability theory, SDG framework, and are in use by many national governments.

**Here, Professor, Mohan Munasinghe, the founding Chair of MIND is breaking down some of the complicated concepts and much-needed actions for you.**



### **Humanity is running out of time**

Metaphorically speaking, we have built our house close to a steep cliff. One doorway to the future will take billions over the cliff edge, by continuing with unsustainable activities. The second doorway will enable us to walk parallel to the edge by making small behavioural changes, but some people will continue to fall off. The third doorway will reverse our previous direction and set everyone safely on a balanced inclusive green growth (BIGG) path, away from the cliff. Whichever door we choose will bring about change. By adopting rational, science-based approaches and working together, humans can make the third (and right) choice, to avoid enormous suffering and millions of unnecessary deaths.

### **We need to take urgent action, but there are barriers**

Perhaps the deepest fault line is the one that divides the rich countries and the Global South. In 2009, the developed countries promised to provide \$100 billion a year to help the Global South address climate change impacts. Progress toward this goal has, however, been hopelessly inadequate, and shortage of funds is a poor excuse – for example, global spending on armaments alone is about \$2 trillion per year!

It is taking far too long for nations to agree on climate change while the problem steadily worsens. Because in contrast, it is not hard to convince a group of open-minded individuals gathered in a room, that climate change is a today problem, and certainly not a tomorrow problem.

### **What we require now is consensus rather than unity, to implement solutions**

A strong consensus is a key prerequisite to building stakeholder ownership and converting intentions into actions. Seeking unity may not be helpful, if it implies an ideological monoculture with people marching in lockstep under one banner, following orders from the top. A more democratic approach is attractive, within a polycentric framework that allows a diversity of ideas and values to flourish, while aiming for constructive cooperation to achieve high-priority objectives that benefit all stakeholders. Consensus might be built around simple ethical criteria like “mini-max”: minimizing the harm to the maximum number of people, especially the poor and vulnerable.

Implementing consensual goals should feature empowerment, inclusion, and subsidiarity – especially encouraging individuals and communities to act without waiting to be told what to do. Often, middle-level leadership, including city mayors, community leaders, and company CEOs can be more effective than national and international leaders.

In this context, at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, I proposed the practical ‘Sustainomics’ framework and sustainable development triangle (economy, society, environment), which leads us to the BIGG path, now applied in many sectors and countries. This approach could help to implement the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) and reach consensus at many levels of society to achieve local, national, regional, and global objectives.

### **Lessons from history: avoid repeating the cataclysms and collapses that befell humanity in the past**

In the 18th century, Brazil, China, and India had a quality of life comparable with Europe. But in the 19th century, colonial rulers forced developing-country small farmers to export cash crops at unfavorable terms of trade, and neglect domestic grain production, thereby increasing vulnerability in the colonies. The resulting food insecurity killed tens of millions due to famine during two El Nino droughts: 1876-78 and 1898-1901. The developing world never caught up after this setback. Looking even earlier in time, unsustainable resource exploitation and unequal wealth distribution caused advanced and creative civilizations to fade after many millennia – in China (Han), India (Maurya, Gupta), Europe (Greek, Roman), Middle East (Mesopotamian, Egyptian), South America (Mayan). These same risks haunt our future:

1. Overconsumption of resources such as energy, water, and food places excessive strain on the ecological carrying capacity.
2. The divide between rich elites and poor masses leads to socioeconomic stratification, instability, and strife.

### **Climate justice will energize the Global South**

The Global South is receptive to reducing vulnerability and adapting to climate impacts. But climate justice is a key issue here since the poor who will be the most severely affected by climate impacts had no hand in creating the problem. The environmental debt owed by the rich is greater than any financial debt owed by the poor. In this context, at the COP27 conference taking place in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, the Global South pursued the issue of climate justice, including compensation from the industrial countries to the poor countries. These demands are based on two key principles applicable in environmental law: “polluter pays” and “victim is compensated”. Furthermore, it is incongruous to ask the Global South to reduce carbon emissions when per-capita emissions in those poorer countries are a fragment of per-capita emissions in the wealthier northern countries. If your child is starving, it’s unethical and obscene for a wealthier person to tell you to cut down on your carbon. Besides, the bulk of current carbon accumulations in the atmosphere was put there by the northern countries. If the north shows leadership by taking a greater share of the mitigation burden, it will be easier to reach a consensus that can open the doorway to a safer future.

### **The way forward**

In the end, I do have faith in future generations. Multiple, complex global problems pose a serious challenge to us all – pandemics, economic crises, poverty/inequity, resource scarcities, conflicts, ecosystem harm, and climate change – are interlinked. These issues can be addressed together with integrative solutions, provided we begin with significant progress, especially within the COP process. Sustainomics and BIGG show us how to take the first steps toward making development more sustainable and reaching a more secure future, together.

Please get in touch with MIND if you like to learn more about sustainability.

## **MIND'S RECENT GLOBAL PRESENCE**

**In Japan - Prof. Mohan Munasinghe felicitated by Royalty in Japan**



Professor Mohan Munasinghe, 2021 Blue Planet Prize Laureate and co-winner of the 2007 Nobel Prize for Peace, recently attended the ceremonies for the Blue Planet Prize, which is the top global award for environmental sustainability, and which is equivalent to a Nobel Prize for the environment.

He was felicitated by Royalty and other dignitaries at the event hosted by the Asahi Glass Foundation in Tokyo, which had been postponed to October 2022 due to Covid restrictions in 2021.

<https://island.lk/prof-mohan-munasinghe-felicitated-by-royalty-in-japan/>

**At Global Climate Summit in Sharjah**



2007 Nobel Peace Prize Co-Laureate and 2021 Blue Planet Laureate Prof. Mohan Munasinghe (right) with 2006 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Prof. Muhammad Yunus. They were both keynote speakers at the high-level IGCF 2022

Professor Mohan Munasinghe delivered a plenary keynote speech at this year's International Government Communications Forum (IGCF) 2022 in September.

Prof. Munasinghe described effective mechanisms to educate the public and gain their support for collectively driving fundamental changes in society to achieve the goal of creating net zero emissions in communities and businesses while enhancing adaptation strategies to protect the poor and vulnerable from climate impacts. He presented ideas to engage members of the public and persuade them to change their consumption attitudes, thereby making their activities more climate -Andenvironment-friendly.

<https://island.lk/prof-mohan-munasinghe-delivers-keynote-at-global-climate-change-event/>

### **In Vietnam**



Distinguished participant at the high-level scientific conference on “Science, ethics, and sustainability” in September 2022, which was the Flagship Event for Asia celebrating the United Nations International Year of Basic Science for Sustainable Development 2022.

His Excellency Nguyen Xuan Phuc, President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam invited Professor Munasinghe to deliver a keynote speech at the conference.

During his well-received keynote speech, Prof Munasinghe referred to the well-known sustainable development triangle and the balanced inclusive green growth (BIGG) path he had originally proposed at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. He congratulated Vietnam on its spectacular post-conflict recovery, achieving a 7% average economic growth rate for the past 35 years. He was confident that Vietnam would achieve sustainability soon using the BIGG approach, despite the poor global situation.

<https://island.lk/prof-mohan-munasinghe-meets-vietnams-president/>

## New Publications Alert

**Sustaiomics Made Easy (new edition)**- The MIND team is working on simplifying the complex Sustaiomics framework for greater readability. We will let you know as soon as this is completed.

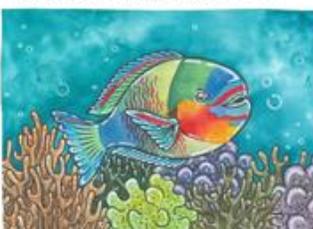
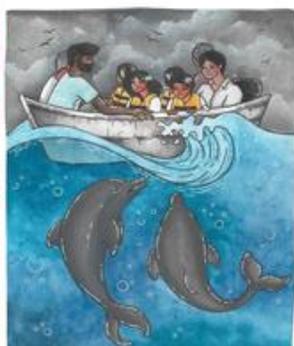
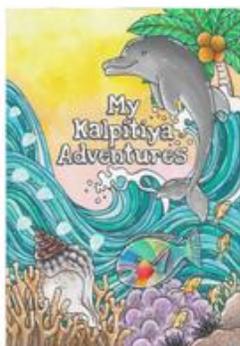
**My Kalpitiya Adventures- A game book for children** Follow the link to read <http://www.mindlanka.com/book22.cfm>

### A gamebook for children!

A gamebook means, you cannot read this straight through from one end to the other. Instead, you get to choose which way the story will go. When you come to a choice point, simply click on the option you wish to select. You can always go back and select a different option at any time. **We hope you enjoy this book and remember to choose wisely!**

Follow the link! -- <http://www.mindlanka.com/book22.cfm>

This book brings to you by Munasinghe Institute for Development as a result of our efforts to introduce young readers to the concept of sustainable development with the fond hope that it will encourage them to explore sustainable development.



“Wait, wait! You call after her but a sudden flash of light blinds you.

When you open your eyes again, you discover you are still in your bed in the cabin. The dawn is just breaking, and slivers of watery light are coming through the rattan blinds. You can hear the noise of birds over the waves crashing on the beach. The rest of the students are still asleep. That was some crazy dream! You sit up in bed and stretch. You might as well get dressed now that you are awake. As you stand up to go to the bathroom you notice the large shell lying next to your pillow”.

## Featuring a MIND Scholar



**Shagana Kukendran** is a MIND scholar in the 2018 batch. She is currently a chemistry master's student at Western University Ontario, one of the top 10 universities in Canada. She started the program in January 2021 and will be completing it in December 2022. Her future career plan involves becoming a formulation chemist for a pharmaceutical, cosmetic, or production industry.

We are honoured to learn that the MIND scholarship has influenced her to apply the concepts of sustainable development in her post-graduate work.

“The research project I am working on for my master's thesis involves synthesizing a nickel catalyst that enables aerobic oxidation for synthesizing carbonyl compounds which are commonly utilized as starting materials in many chemical processes. Since nickel is an Earth-abundant metal that is also inexpensive, the work mainly focuses on a sustainable process which is an important term I learned as a MIND scholar. I was privileged to receive the MIND scholarship during my final undergraduate year at the University of Colombo and was introduced to the term sustainability early on and its importance in the economical, societal, and environmental aspects. This helped me to choose the project that I enjoyed working on. I am thankful for being a part of the MIND family and I wish all the best for the other scholars!”