

Human wellbeing and security: a whole of planet approach⁹

In a 1961 address to the UN, President John F Kennedy stated “Every inhabitant of this planet must contemplate the day when this planet may no longer be habitable.”¹ Although he was referring to the hydrogen bomb, the future of human wellbeing and security hangs in the balance, now more than ever. There are many threats to the future of human wellbeing and security, and we reflect on four that are of key importance and warrant more considered discourse and debate. We expect these issues to inform discussions at the Raffles Dialogue on the Future of Human Well-Being and Security in Singapore on Feb 2–3, 2015.

First, global institutions are in flux and disarray while globalisation marches on.² With the global financial crisis in 2008, the impasse on climate change mitigation, the leadership failure in responding to the Ebola outbreak, and the ongoing epidemic of non-communicable diseases, global governance is under scrutiny. While multilateral institutions and governments are engaged in defining the post-2015 agenda, with the focus on the laudable aim of the Sustainable Development Goals,³ it is worth reflecting on whether the current architecture of global institutions can deliver. WHO, for example, is the latest institution under fire for leadership failure during the Ebola crisis in west Africa, and The World Bank has been criticised for a perception of ineffective and top-down leadership.⁴ It is therefore not surprising that, in 2014, China announced the formation of a rival Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) have similarly mooted the idea of a New Development Bank to rival the International Monetary Fund.

Second, technology marches on relentlessly and impressively but equity, ethics, and waste are major concerns. Although technology promises gains in knowledge that range from tracking pandemics to understanding patterns and rates of infection brought about by climate change, trade, and global transportation, concerns persist about cybersecurity, confidentiality, and the paucity of data in low-income countries.⁵ Moreover, while advances in medicine and technology are allowing us to live longer than our parents and grandparents, the core philosophy of health care is being questioned: is it about ensuring health and survival or is it to enable wellbeing?⁶ Lack of implementation of knowledge, rather than

knowledge shortfalls, is another concern with only 50% of known medical knowledge routinely implemented⁷ and up to 20–30% of health-care budgets wasted.⁸ Finally, imbalances continue to exist in research and development efforts that are skewed towards the biomedical sciences rather than implementation research to improve health systems in the quest to attain universal health coverage.⁹

Third, international geopolitical tensions continue to affect human wellbeing and security. From the Middle East to east Asia and to the former Soviet Union, tensions, internal conflict, extremism, and instability span military, security, social, and economic dimensions. The hegemony of the west continues to be challenged by the BRICS, particularly China and Russia, with new players such as the MIST countries (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey) emerging as important future actors. A new round of trade wars seems to be brewing with conflicting initiatives being championed by vested interests in different regions of the world—ie, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the Free-Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP), and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).¹⁰

Fourth, the future of human civilisation on this planet is at greater risk than ever.¹¹ Extreme climate events resulting in floods, droughts, and other natural disasters continue while persistent inaction stalls efforts and pledges to deal with the harmful effects of climate change. Despite strong evidence that by 2100 the global average temperature will probably be more than 4°C above preindustrial levels,¹² and the existence of a United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the many climate change conferences on this critical issue have so far failed to conclude a binding global treaty to mitigate the effects of climate change.

What can be done to ensure resilience of human wellbeing and security? The future demands that we consider these four dimensions in an integrated way, and that we develop the appropriate governance and institutional structures to implement a whole of planet approach in which the media, academia, policy makers, industry, and civic society work together at the global and national levels towards a common vision of sustainable human existence. No single discipline or sector will solve these threats. We propose three action steps to tackle the challenges we face.



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First, introspection, reflection, humility, and innovation are needed to design new institutions or adapt current institutional arrangements and develop new financing mechanisms, with international solidarity and clear prioritisation of objectives and goals. Is it time, for example, to revisit the idea of an international development organisation,¹³ or to create an international emergency response organisation to swiftly deal with pandemics and other natural disasters? Could we envision an ambitious 21st-century Marshall Plan to mitigate the effects of climate change?

Second, multilateral institutions and multilateralism must work hand-in-hand with nation states and respect the ideals of sovereignty and national responsibility for the future of human wellbeing and security. This, in turn, demands reciprocity on the part of countries; for nations to prosper they need to have the political will to develop stronger country governance and robust, well resourced, and inclusive institutions to ensure innovation, economic expansion, and more equitably distributed wealth.¹⁴

Third, in all our future efforts we must acknowledge the value and importance of local knowledge, community, and regional solidarity. In the context of the Ebola crisis, as a *Lancet* editorial suggested, we need to “concentrate on community while learning from local successes”.¹⁵ To ensure a resilient future for human wellbeing and security, a whole of planet approach is needed. Individuals, institutions, societies, and all people must take collective responsibility and action for the planet’s finite resources to guarantee the long-term survival of our habitat, and prove J F Kennedy wrong.

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Towards evidence-based hand exercises in rheumatoid arthritis

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Rheumatoid arthritis is the most common inflammatory joint disease, affecting about 0.5% of the global population, and causes disability, including pain and activity limitation. Almost 80% of patients with rheumatoid arthritis have hand dysfunction,¹ which is related to restricted participation in society, including disability at work.² Improved drug treatment has enhanced inflammation control in rheumatoid arthritis during the past decade, but unfortunately does not remove disability.^{3–5} To take full advantage of improved inflammation control, it is important now to explore possible windows of opportunity for cost-effective

rehabilitation measures to maximise the benefits of drug treatment and reduce disability.

We read with interest the results of Sarah Lamb and colleagues’ trial⁶ in *The Lancet*. This is an important study, especially because the feasibility of strength training for rheumatoid hands has been questioned, as has its potential to increase damage and deformity due to potential disturbance of the delicate mechanics of the hand by inflammatory processes.^{7,8} This novel, well designed study, with full statistical power, aimed to investigate whether exercise improves hand function beyond the functional gains obtained by usual care.