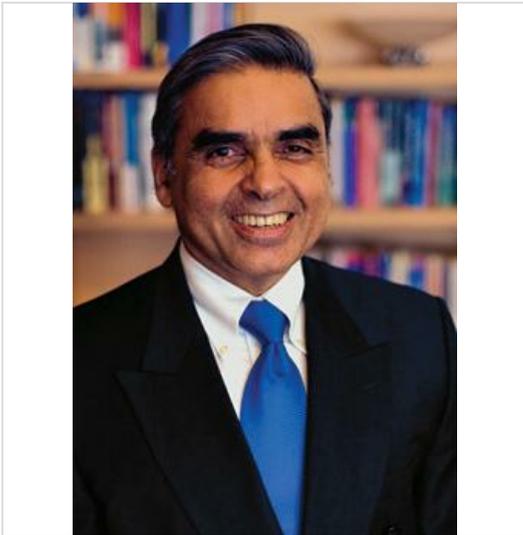


RIO+20 The Future We Want

Kishore Mahbubani: The future we want



There is one indivisible common interest that seven billion humans share: Planet Earth. It is the only planet in the universe that can sustain human life. If we destroy our planet, especially the precious and fragile atmosphere which protects us from cold outer space, we do not have a Plan B. There is nowhere else we can evacuate to.

Hence, twenty years from now each citizen of Planet Earth should walk around with a dual identity. Yes, he or she should say "I am American" or "I am Chinese." But he or she should say with equal conviction, "I am a citizen of Planet Earth. I am committed to protecting my country. I am equally committed to protecting the only planet we have."

Each citizen should therefore develop a good understanding of the many environmental threats facing our planet. In the past, ignorance was an excuse. The internet has destroyed ignorance. Today, 2.3 billion have access to the Internet. In twenty years, four to five billion, if not every citizen, will have internet access. For the first time in human history, we will be able to educate every citizen on Planet Earth and keep one another fully informed.

Even today, a cursory glance of, say, the Wikipedia page on environmental issues will demonstrate the whole slew of environmental challenges we face: from global warming to destruction of forests; from over-fishing to disappearance of animal species; from water pollution to new health problems. There is no shortage of environmental challenges. There is a shortage of citizen consciousness and commitment to meet these challenges.

The good news is that all these challenges can be overcome. The rapid emergence of green technology helps. The main obstacles are political, not technical. Most politicians refuse to tell inconvenient truths and they continue to pander to short-term sectoral interests. There is little political courage, even among the politicians of developed countries. This is why the world desperately needs an educated global citizenry committed to saving Planet Earth.

This can be done. In the past three decades, we have created the largest number of educated human beings ever in human history. And we have created new tools of social media to link educated minds from every corner. By August 2012, one billion people will have a Facebook account. Hence, it is not a wild dream to say that twenty years from now we would have finally created an overwhelming global commitment to save and protect Planet Earth among eight billion people. This dream can and will become true.

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