

SUMMARY OF THE SPEECH DELIVERED BY DENNIS MOSS

GUEST SPEAKER

“CONSERVATION IN CONTEXT OF THE CAPE WINELANDS BIOSPHERE RESERVE”

In addressing this matter a discourse would, by necessity, oscillate between the distant past and the present. It is akin to providing an overview of history from the earliest times to the state of the current world order.

One can argue that it took humankind 70 000 years, since the advent of the cognitive revolution¹, to agree on a world order based on the principle of sustainable development² and to agree that climate change³ has to be addressed collectively. However, it took the President of the USA a few months from taking office, to break ranks with the nation states that had committed to the Paris Accord! Together with many other examples, this demonstrates how fragile this UN agreed-to agenda is, and demonstrates that civilization is, at best, “a work in progress”.

If the 2016 UN Agenda on Sustainable Development is the father of a new world order, the Man and the Biosphere⁴ (MaB) Programme of UNESCO is the grandfather. In this regard, one must be mindful that the idea to establish the MaB Programme, and its concomitant Action Plan, originated a mere 50 years ago when scientists brought the dangers of climate change to the attention of UNESCO. Furthermore, the formal strategy to establish biosphere reserves preceded the UN endorsed definition⁵ for sustainable development by almost four decades. The MaB programme is therefore a senior global partner in the quest to enable global sustainability.

Where does South-Africa fit into this picture?

South Africans have never been in a better position to help fulfil a sustainable future and to take responsibility for it.

¹ With reference to Yuval Noah Harari 2011 Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind, Vintage Books.

² 2016 UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (core elements economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection)

³ Paris Accord on Climate Change

⁴ Biosphere Reserves are established in accordance with the statutes of the MaB programme of UNESCO dating back to 1971 (promotes innovative approaches to economic development that are socially and culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable). Globally promoted through the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

⁵ “1987 Brudland Commission's definition: “Sustainable development is the kind of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (DM explained that his office has, for operational purposes, adapted this definition to read as follows ... “sustainable development is the kind of development that enhances human well-being and the integrity of the environment by the just and efficient use of resources”).

40 years ago when the definition for sustainable development was adopted, South Africa was in a state of emergency (when the first UN World Summit on sustainable development was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the South African government was denied a seat at the event and South Africa was in the throes of pursuing a common future for its people at the time).

In 1996, when the Seville Strategy on Biosphere Reserves was approved by UNESCO, the South African Constitution, that has sustainable development and sustainability at its heart, was promulgated as the supreme law of the land. From a South African perspective, these principles and values are therefore shared.

Biosphere reserves and sustainable development are integrated concepts – conservation and development are two sides of the same coin.

A biosphere reserve is a physical area comprising **Core Conservation Areas** (our surrounding mountains – some of which are UNESCO'S world heritage sites), **Buffer Zones** (where humans must tread lightly) and **Transition Areas** – (our agricultural land and human settlements). These areas must be managed in a manner that would optimally fulfil conservation, development and logistical functions in society (in the 1996 UNESCO Seville strategy on Biosphere Reserves, it is stated that biospheres can become theatres for reconciling people and nature, and they can bring knowledge of the past to the needs of the future).

Biosphere reserves were designated to be working examples to give effect to sustainable development. This concept is based on ethical values⁶ – a, “must-do”. The denial of this is not a matter of arbitrary choice as the consequences of one's choices should be weighed.

The initiative to establish a cluster system of biosphere reserves was taken by the Cape Provincial Government in 1989 as a strategy to align conservation with development in the Cape Floristic Region. It took almost 30 years to put theory into practice (Stellenbosch Municipality was a supporter of this programme since the mid 1990's).

The Cape Winelands Biosphere Reserve came into being in September 2007 in terms of an agreement between South Africa and UNESCO. This was endorsed by Stellenbosch Municipality as the entire municipal area is located within the boundary of the biosphere reserve.

A roadmap for the future

In a short period of 50 years a common global agenda had emerged. This agenda stands on the shoulders of accumulated knowledge that took millennia for humanity to acquire. From a humanist perspective Harari⁷ describes knowledge as experience x sensitivity. Whilst a large body of knowledge is available, experience to give optimal effect to

⁶ A UNESCO's 2010, The Ethical Implications of Global Climate Change

⁷ Yuval Noah Harari 2016: A brief History of Tomorrow Hervill Secker (In the medieval Europe the formula for knowledge was Scripture x Logic. The Scientific Revolution proposed that knowledge = Empirical Data x Mathematics).

sustainable development, as is contemplated in the MaB programme, and the culture to apply this with the required sensitivity, is at an early stage of development.

The role that e'Bosch is playing is clearly of great value in building a culture of sustainability in the Greater Stellenbosch area. This can, to a significant degree, be attributed to the fact that the e'Bosch initiatives are primarily project based. It is when people undertake projects together that they get to know one another and when trust is built (it is hugely beneficial if this takes place within a biosphere reserve that creates opportunities for international networking).

Partnership and governance

The progress that had been made during the past 50 years is a product of partnership and governance.

The South African Constitution is the ultimate governing instrument. It provides for local government to be endowed with the functions to implement and oversee a sustainable development process in a domain closest to the people. In this regard national, provincial and local government legislation requires that decision-making should be informed by values and principles that should govern spatial planning and resource use in the municipal area (it follows that this applies to the biosphere reserve). The legislative principles that should inform decision-making are:

- Spatial justice
- Spatial efficiency
- Sustainability
- Resilience and;
- Good administration

For governance to be optimal at a local scale, a spirit of partnership and shared responsibility is required. The Cape Winelands Biosphere Reserve can play a decisive role in promoting these, considering that its core function is not limited to conservation but is, in fact, the promotion of sustainable development with the objective to attain sustainability.

The message from the mayor and the rector, the awards and certificates awarded to community members and the inclusive nature of this e'Bosch event, bears testimony to the potential for the Greater Stellenbosch to help lead the way to a sustainable future for the country.

The NDP requires South Africa to showcase its excellence – an internationally endorsed road map exists for the Greater Stellenbosch to evolve into an area of excellence and good practice that would be appreciated and recognised nationally and globally.

A fair question would be that, if the people of the Greater Stellenbosch cannot rise to fulfil the full potential of this area, who would do so?

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