



# REGENT BUSINESS SCHOOL



**THE GLOBAL GOALS**  
For Sustainable Development



## CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS IN SUSTAINABILITY



# Background Information

The pursuit of *sustainability* is one of the most widely embraced solutions to the gravest concerns of our era. Globally, there is a growing consensus amongst citizens, scientists, scholars, activists, practitioners, and governments, as well as powerful players in business and finance, that the potential crisis we face is real, and that we must come together as a planet in support of a *Sustainable Future*. Consequently, we have seen the call for sustainability grow louder and more ubiquitous—as policy platform and research agenda, as utopian vision and rallying cry, and as business plan and marketing pitch. A plethora of sustainability projects, policies, plans, and campaigns have been advanced in the public and private sector, on a local, regional, and planetary scale.

All these actions are playing increasingly significant roles in raising awareness of climate change and encouraging sustainable social, economic, and environmental practices worldwide. Talents and resources are being used to draw attention to issues, build will and agency for change, and devise innovative solutions to move the world towards greater sustainability. These innovators are breaking down false boundaries and through positive action are becoming effective catalysts for, and site of, sustainability.

On a global level, the Climate Change Agreement adopted in Paris at the end of 2015 will have to give way to the more sober, and challenging, process of implementation on national and local levels. The Sustainable Development Goals agreed upon by global political leaders are a necessary first step, but a real and equitable transition to a more sustainable world will require continued and accelerated action in multiple domains. This will require shifting behaviours and thinking, building new infrastructure and systems, and keeping the pressure on policymakers and transnational entities to reach the targets set in Paris. As the People's Climate March saying goes: "To change everything, we need everyone." the level of emotions and beliefs, provide new ways of seeing problems, and develop creative solutions.

Furthermore, there is a critical need to accelerate efforts to train the next generation of sustainable development civic-minded leaders and entrepreneurs. In particular, there has been a lack of progress on the leadership and entrepreneurship front for sustainability and there is a strong need to scale up our efforts. This is tied to the fact that we live in a world on the cusp of dramatic global change. Innovative thinking is required to manage emerging issues such as the need for technical solutions to reduce CO2 emissions; mechanisms to ensure a reliable and sustainable food and water supply; management plans for protecting and enhancing biodiversity; the enforcement of pollution prevention and clean-up measures; and new incentives for harnessing the power of the market for sustainable development.

A whole generation will need to be engaged to think and act in a way that matches the scale of the challenge. Society is challenged to re-design and re-think many of its assumptions about progress, development and the finite capacity of Earth to provide the resources necessary to sustain the human enterprise. This will require a multi-disciplinary approach with critical questions that span links across social, environmental, economic and political issues.

## Central Theme

In the context of the above, the critical conversations seminar series *Beyond Development: Critical Conversations as a Catalyst for Sustainability* to be hosted by REGENT Business School, the Mercury, Nedbank, eThekweni Municipality and Company X will creatively explore the unexplored, and re-engage in critical discussions, provocative dialogue and idea-sharing around critical sustainable questions of our day. These 'critical conversations' aim to push past the conventional ideas of sustainability by delving into novel and innovative ideas for mobilising for changes necessary for our planet to become a better place for all who live in it.

## Aim & Objectives

The *aim* of the *critical conversations seminar series*, therefore, is to bring together academics, environmentalists, researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, community leaders, captains of industry, government officials and youth to build on path-breaking initiatives that are advancing cross-sectoral links between divergent stakeholders and sustainability around the world, encourage critical dialogue and debate, promote bolder efforts, and recommend strategic approaches for taking innovative grassroots initiatives to scale for greater, longer-term impact in sustainability.

In the greater interest of the Sustainable Development Goals, the *critical conversations seminar series* will be live streamed via Facebook and LinkedIn and videoed. Copies will be made available for global public consumption through the auspices of *YouTube*. An edited copy of the outcomes of each session's critical conversation will be published in the Mercury.

Within the perspective of the prime aim, the *major objectives* of the *critical conversations seminar series* are:

- The need to clearly articulate theories of change—the “why” and “how” critical conversations can advance sustainability goals;
- The imperative to shift from an economic system based on extractive logic to one that values stewardship and regeneration;
- The importance of intermediaries who can communicate and build connections across different disciplines, worldviews, cultures, and geographies;
- The necessity to pursue immediate action to make improvements in our current unsustainable systems;
- The need for more “human” definitions of what “development” means and more nuanced metrics of well-being that are not based on economic growth;
- The urgency to train and educate youth civic-minded leaders and entrepreneurs who can readily accept the proverbial baton for sustainable development;

- The need to acknowledge and work through the existential and emotional dimensions of this crisis in addition to the political and technological ones; and
- The importance for an ongoing, multi-sector dialogue about sustainable transitions that can produce new more impactful policies and practices in sustainability.

## Key Questions

Indeed, in terms of global sustainability there are myriad questions. For purposes of the *critical conversations seminar series*, the key questions are:

How can cutting-edge sustainable innovations and solutions become more accessible, affordable, and widely produced?

Can the new development paradigm based on inclusivity communicate the deep importance of natural systems promote climate awareness and sustainable values, particularly among young people?

How can the business sector influence consumer attitudes and behaviours, accelerate equitable labour practices, and promote sourcing methods that build responsible global citizenship?

How can political leaders, business enterprises, and citizens, alike, be convinced to embrace new community development models and frameworks in building sustainable communities?

What incentives can propel more public, private and diverse cultural organizations to embed sustainability into their policies, practices, and investments, thus reducing carbon usage and exerting necessary moral leadership?

## Finally

The cross-disciplinary character offered by the *critical conversations seminar series* to is a rare opportunity to learn how to talk to others in the spirit of the intrinsic values captured in a quotation by Bertrand Piccard, when he said “In the 21st century, I think the heroes will be the people who will improve the quality of life, fight poverty and introduce more sustainability”. Everyone who is concerned about the status of mother earth and the future of humankind has a role to play in these critical conversations.

Thus participants are encouraged to use an expansive definition of sustainability that encompasses economic, political and social, as well as ecological, dimensions and towards this end, participants need to be brave and generous in the debates and discussions and to “seriously engage both obstacles and opportunities with open hearts and minds. In essence, participants need to be boundary-crossers, each working in their own way to build connections between people that transcend borders and sectoral comforts, in the interest of sustainability.