

Speech Transcript

Waheed Saleem at the West Midlands Regeneration Convention at the NIA in Birmingham 26th Nov 2007

Within my speech I would like to highlight the big issues of the 21st Century through the lens of sustainable development. It is worth pausing briefly to highlight the principles of sustainable development:

Living within environmental limits. Respecting the limits of the planet's environment, resources and biodiversity – to improve our environment and ensure that the natural resources needed for life are unimpaired and remain so for future generations; and

Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society. Meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal well-being, social cohesion and inclusion, and creating equal opportunity for all.

An obvious implication of this definition is that the two goals are not – or, at least, should not be assumed to be – mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing; that is, an environmentally sustainable community is also thought to be one that promotes personal well-being and strong social ties.

Achieving a Sustainable Economy: Strong and sustainable economic growth, providing prosperity and opportunity for all, where environmental and social costs fall on those who impose them. Therefore moving away from the traditional method of measuring economic growth through GDP, to one that includes environmental and social indicators.

Promoting Good Governance

Actively promoting effective participative systems of governance in all levels of society - engaging people's creativity, energy, and diversity. The democratic accountability and legitimacy.

Using Sound Science Responsibly

Ensuring policy is developed and implemented on the basis of strong scientific evidence, whilst taking into account scientific uncertainty (through the precautionary principle) as well as public attitudes and values.

The Big Challenges

The big challenges for the UK can be put into four categories: climate change, terrorism, immigration and social inequality.

Climate Change

The political, economic and scientific arguments have been won; the majority of people accept that climate change is the biggest problem facing the world:

“Climate change is the greatest market failure the world has ever seen”. Mitigation – taking strong action to reduce emissions – must be viewed as an investment, a cost incurred now and in the coming few decades to avoid the risks of very severe consequences in the future” - Stern Report.

The above quote is stark in its warning; the danger of not doing something will be huge, as will be the cost. The evidence of the effects of climate change can be seen in:

- Deforestation, desertification...
- Over fishing...
- Build up of toxic substances...
- Water stress and waters shortages...
- Loss of biodiversity...
- Air pollution...
- Water pollution...
- Shrinkage of glaciers
- Thawing of permafrost
- Later freezing and earlier break-up of ice on rivers and lakes
- Lengthening of mid-to-high latitude growing seasons
- Increased intensity of severe storms, hurricanes, floods, droughts etc, UK, Bangladesh
- Declines of some plant and animal populations
- Earlier flowering of trees, emergence of insects, and egg-laying in birds
- 87% of international flights for pleasure and leisure (UK based leisure)
- World temperature increasing by 2°C
- Increasing concentrations of CO₂ in the atmosphere.

If we, the human race, are contributing to the direct effects of climate change, what can we do to reduce the human effects, both as individuals and institutions? It is important to note that individuals cannot on their own make the difference required, but public and private institutions need to provide the leadership in reducing their emissions.

In local areas the multi-partner agreement, through LSPs, should be leading the way to reducing carbon emissions in the area e.g. Birmingham's City Council's leadership. The Sustainable Communities Strategy and the Local Area Agreements are the mechanism for developing the multi partner leadership. The question that needs to be asked is: "is there a sustainable development thread running through the LSP Board, the thematic partnerships and delivery vehicles?"

The Sustainable Development Commission's experience in auditing local performance on sustainable development is that this kind of thread is essential to successful delivery. So, for example, could you have a champion for sustainable development on the LSP Board and on other key partnerships? Could you employ a 'sustainability co-ordinator' (as per Birmingham Head of Climate Change and Sustainability)?

If LAAs really are to be the delivery plan for Sustainable Community Strategies, how will you ensure that the Sustainable Community Strategy is up to the task of providing a sustainable vision effective enough to inform the LAA? In particular, how can you ensure that SCS's focus on longer-term priorities and more global impacts [visioning exercise / link to regional, national and global activity / ecological footprint] e.g. Oldham LSP uses the ecological footprint of the borough to track the long-term perspective.

How will the LAA outcomes be aligned with sustainable development? Leicester LAA, for example, developed an outcome to reduce pollution and waste, support biodiversity, and achieve more efficient and sustainable use of resources. This links to the Natural Resources priority area from the UK SD Strategy. Cornwall LAA, meanwhile, included an

outcome to “grow Cornwall’s sustainable energy economy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions”. This supported economic and environmental objectives, as well as social objectives through links to reducing fuel poverty.

There are a plethora of indicators, what is perhaps just as important as selecting good targets, however, is avoiding perverse indicators or targets. For example, targets for promoting healthier diets could work against the local economy and the environment, unless they are linked to indicators of fresh local food supplies

The focus on housing regeneration is not being matched by efforts to achieve economic regeneration in some areas. For example, in Stoke-on-Trent the housing programme is not being matched by economic regeneration support from the RDA, therefore employment opportunities and skill development in the area are not being adequately strengthened. This point is also underlined by the strong focus on growth in the South East of England, and less attention on economically strengthening communities in the Midlands (only 1.5hrs out of London by train, after all).

Furthermore, it is extremely disappointing that the Sub National Review by the Government has moved backwards on the powers and responsibilities for RDAs. Removing the statutory responsibility of the RDAs for sustainable development to only one for economic growth GVA is an example of serious lack of judgement by the Government and a classic example of un-joined up government.

However, despite the lack of direction from the Government, the West Midlands can become the centre of excellence for low carbon technologies, with substantial investment in R&D, which should be led by the Regional Development Agency, in partnership with the private and public sectors.

The regeneration sector must take into account the density of housing, ensure eco-towns and new housing developments in fill in existing communities (brown fill sites) and should consider refurbishment as an option to demolition and new build. The issue of VAT, however, needs attention, as refurbishment still does not get VAT free status (as new buildings do), which I believe is un-sustainable and undesirable.

A good sustainable regeneration scheme would include integrated, cheap, low carbon transport, local healthy services, socially (with social housing) and ethnically diverse local communities and schools and the whole development would be zero carbon, with good green space to create a sense of belonging and community for the residents. It is imperative that people are given the opportunity and encouragement to participate in the civic community to generate social capital. An example of where this could become a reality in Birmingham is the Central Park development in the City Centre. I hope that the ascetic is matched by the social and economic development that is required?

At the local level, taking action to achieve sustainable development actually provides a number of very tangible benefits and opportunities.

- **Maximises benefits:** integrating social, economic and environmental objectives maximises the benefits that can be gained from local initiatives e.g. procuring sustainable, fresh, local food supports the local economy, reduces food miles and associated congestion costs, cuts greenhouse gas emissions and contributes to people’s health

- **Strengthens partnerships:** by offering the opportunity to work across social, environmental and economic partnerships and interests.
- **Community leadership:** enhances public trust and reputation, motivates LSP partners and the public to take action, improves levels of local engagement and participation, and helps to build a common sense of responsibility around sustainability
- **It can also lead to financial benefits:** more efficient use of energy and other resources can lead to direct financial savings, especially over the long-term. Environmental efficiency measures, such as insulation, recycling bins and low flush toilets, can all reduce running costs. Bigger projects can yield greater savings - Kirklees Metropolitan Council's energy and water conservation loan scheme has led to nearly £500,000 of savings over 6 years.
- **Risk management:** the management of all risks, including long-term environmental, social and economic risks contributes to good organisational management. Sustainable development helps to 'future-proof' local areas by ensuring that they are better equipped to deal with declining resources and stricter environmental limits
- **Value for money:** basing spending decisions on sustainability criteria ensures value for money over the long term. This means taking a 'whole-life cost' approach that takes account of environmental, social *and* economic considerations. Last year, the Government's Sustainable Procurement Task Force found that decisions based on up-front costs alone are often a false economy

In my opinion, these opportunities set out a clear mandate for developing an economic, social and environmental regeneration agenda, led by strong local partnerships. Further information and good examples can be found on the Sustainable Development Commission website: www.sd-commission.org.uk

Terrorism

What is very interesting in the debate on terrorism is that when asked the general public, did not put terrorism as a major issue for them. In a recent YouGov poll (2007) people stated the following issues that require government intervention:

- Crime 63%
- Immigration 58%
- Hospital cleanliness 48%
- Care of Elderly 48%
- Reform constitution 46%
- People's interest in Britishness 43%
- EU treaty 32%
- Obesity in YP 32%

However, we know the devastating effects that terrorism can leave behind, we just have to look at effects on individuals and communities after the 7/7 attack or the failed Glasgow Airport attack. This is an issue for all of us not just the Muslim community; terrorism undertaken by fanatical criminals is a political issue not a theological issue or an Islamic

issue. Islam, which literally translated means peace, does not in any way justify or condone attacks on innocent civilians, even in the time of war.

Therefore, this issue needs to be tackled through political and social interventions. For instance how can we continue to justify the apartheid regimes in schools; in some schools in Birmingham and Bradford 98% of pupils are from the Pakistani communities and in one school in Moseley (an ethnically diverse area) there is Catholic school which is all white, as a result of a change in entrance criteria!

I do not need to relay the statistics on deprivation of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, especially the young people, which in effect provides a fertile ground for people to recruit disaffected and disenfranchised young people to a political cause that provides them with a sense of belonging. It is therefore imperative that we engage our young people in British society, providing educational and employment opportunities to enable them to belong to Britain and become British Muslim and be proud of being as such. Despite all the rhetoric, we still see discrimination and social exclusion faced by many Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. We still lack the representative voices in politics and the wider public sector; therefore we need more role models from these communities in public positions to provide young people with a sense of achievement. This is especially the case in cities with a large growing Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, for instance Birmingham, Bradford and Leicester.

There is of course the other side of the coin, the Muslim community themselves need to ensure they encourage young people to be active citizens of society. They must ensure their leaders and imams can speak English and communicate with young people. They must ensure citizenship lessons are be taught alongside Islamic and Urdu lessons.

Immigration

Immigration is an issue that stirs up emotional and political debate. The Office of National Statistics estimates the UK population will grow to 80m. More people translates into more consumption of energy, food etc. There is, therefore, a real issue in regard to the UK's commitment to reducing carbon emissions. The question that needs to be seriously debated is the effect of immigration and migration on the environment; can we seriously sustain the mass migration of people across the globe, through cheap flights, which is causing not only increases in carbon emissions, but also other environmental and social destruction; the destruction of green spaces and forests to make way for more houses and facilities. The migration of educated people from developing countries creates a 'brain drain' from those countries that need them most.

One of the reasons for migration is economic; people want to make a better life for themselves. Therefore, I believe we should be looking to distribute the world's wealth more equally, creating a better place for people in their own countries, therefore reducing the need for travel to 'better' places. "One fifth of humanity lives in countries where many people think nothing of spending \$2 a day on a cappuccino. Another fifth of humanity survive on less than a dollar a day, and live in countries where children die for want of a simple anti-mosquito bed net."

I am not a member of Migration Watch, nor do I agree with any of their viewpoints and sentiments, but if we are seriously considering the effects of climate change, we must

include the issue of migration and immigration in that debate and consider the environmental effects of such in our debates.

Social Inequality

Poverty remains a major issue, even in the developed world. The Lisbon Summit of the European Union in 2000 noted that the Union contained 60 million people poor or at high risk of poverty. In the UK, the Labour Government have ambitiously pledged to halve and then eliminate child poverty. In the US, there remain over 35m people in poverty, despite the most prolonged economic upturn for many years.

There are 273 “poverty wards”, which represent 3 percent of the wards in England. They are concentrated in the Northern regions and London, and contain roughly 5 percent of the nation's population. Compared to national averages, residents of these wards are more likely to live in social housing, be members of minority ethnic groups, and be “work-poor” (of working age, but not in work, study or a training scheme)¹.

Overall, about 60 per cent of households in poverty wards in 1991 lived in social rented accommodation. This compared with a rate of 23 per cent nationwide. In fact, nearly every one of the 273 poverty wards had an above-average proportion of its households in social housing. Though at least half of poverty ward households in each region lived in social housing, that housing tenure was more closely associated with poor neighbourhoods in the South. In London's 44 poverty wards, about 70 percent of households were in council or housing-association-owned housing. In the West Midlands, by contrast, poor neighbourhoods in and around Birmingham featured large numbers of households who owned their homes, or rented from private landlords¹.

Overall, minority ethnic groups accounted for 16 per cent of poverty ward residents in 1991, about two-and-a-half times the national average (6 per cent). Across the North East's poverty wards, however, less than one in 50 individuals are from a minority ethnic group in 1991. At the other end of the spectrum, poor neighbourhoods in the West Midlands and London featured very large minority ethnic group populations. In the West Midlands, these neighbourhoods were marked by large Indian and Pakistani populations, while in London they contained a mix of mainly Bangladeshis and Black Africans/ Black Caribbeans. As with industry, analysis of changing poverty-ward conditions along minority ethnic group lines in 1991 would reflect underlying differences between these regions of the country.

In the West Midlands 39% of the population in poverty wards is work poor, only 13% of people living in poverty wards have degrees, compared to 20.6% nationally, 45% achieve 5 or more GCSE compared to 56% England, 40.3% of children live in lone parent households in poverty wards and 21.1% of people living in poverty wards have limiting long term condition¹.

Inequality in the UK is widening, the rich are getting richer, but the poor are not improving as faster.

Therefore, to achieve a strong, health and just society, we must tackle the underlying causes of social exclusion and inequalities that are clearly still persistent in our society.

¹ Narrowing the Gap. The Trajectory of England's Poor Neighbourhoods, 1991-2001; A. Berube (2005)

Conclusion

These are big issues that can not be tackled by one person or institution. They are local, regional, national and international issues that need to be addressed at different levels in a co-ordinated manner.

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The viewpoints in this article are that of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policy of the Sustainable Development Commission.