

Wellbeing and sustainability
- can the Sustainable Development Goals
be used in Impact Assessment
to help New Zealand navigate to a sustainable future?



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NZAIA Nov 2022



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



17 Goals
169 targets
231 indicators

A universal agenda,
created to 'leave no one behind'
'a new balance between people & planet'

Goals are interconnected &
fundamentally interdependent



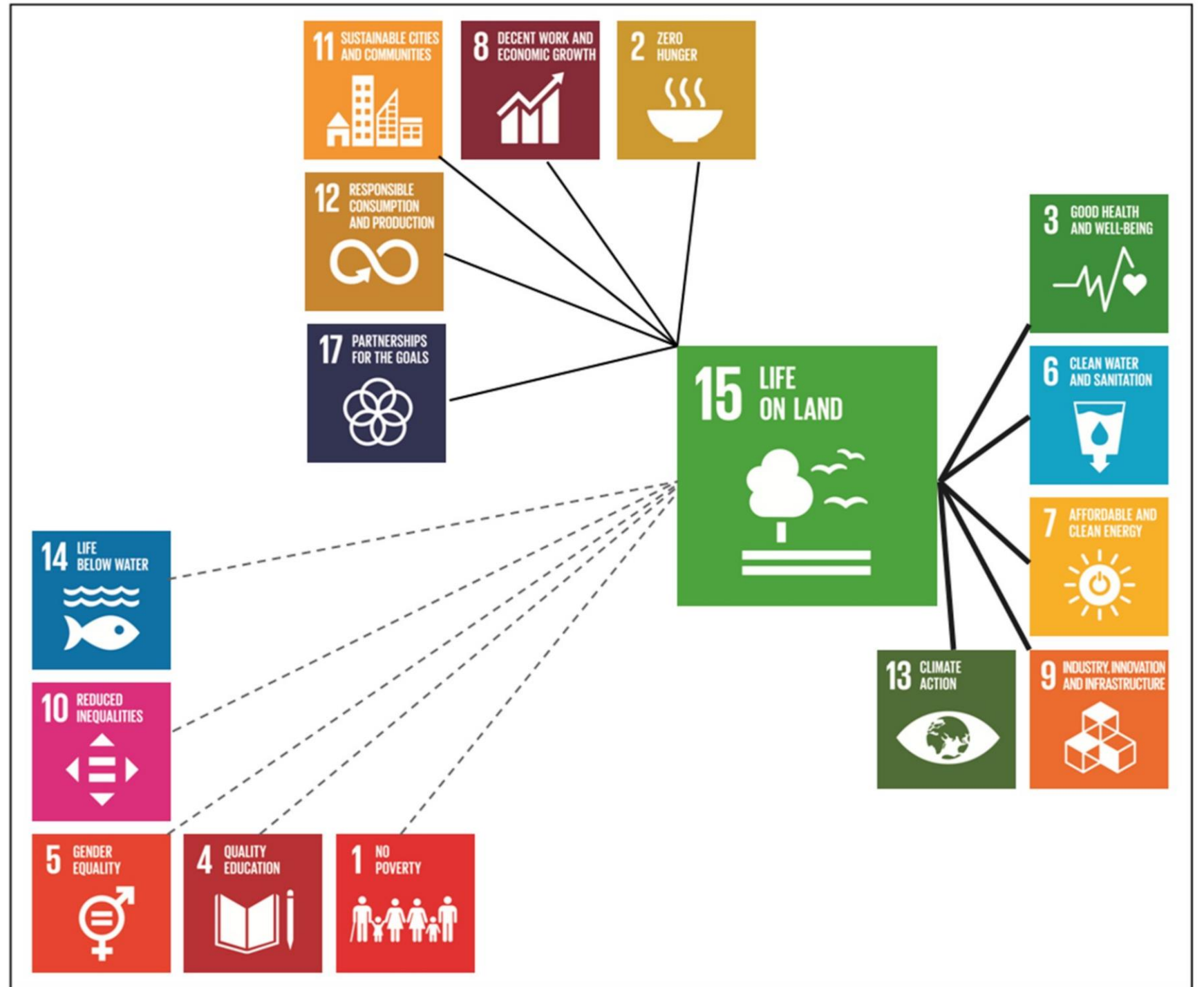
- Recognition that sustainability is multi-dimensional
- baby steps to systems thinking by organisations & individuals



Great graphics!

Interaction of SDG15 with other SDGs

(Hazarika & Jandl, 2019, modified
from Nisson et al., 2016)



Health and sustainability

- WHO puts health in centre of SDGs
 - Outcomes determined by other goals incl. climate change
 - Working with UNFCCC to incorporate health into CC goal
- WHO definition of health:
 - a state of complete physical, mental & social well-being





WORLD
GREEN
BUILDING
COUNCIL

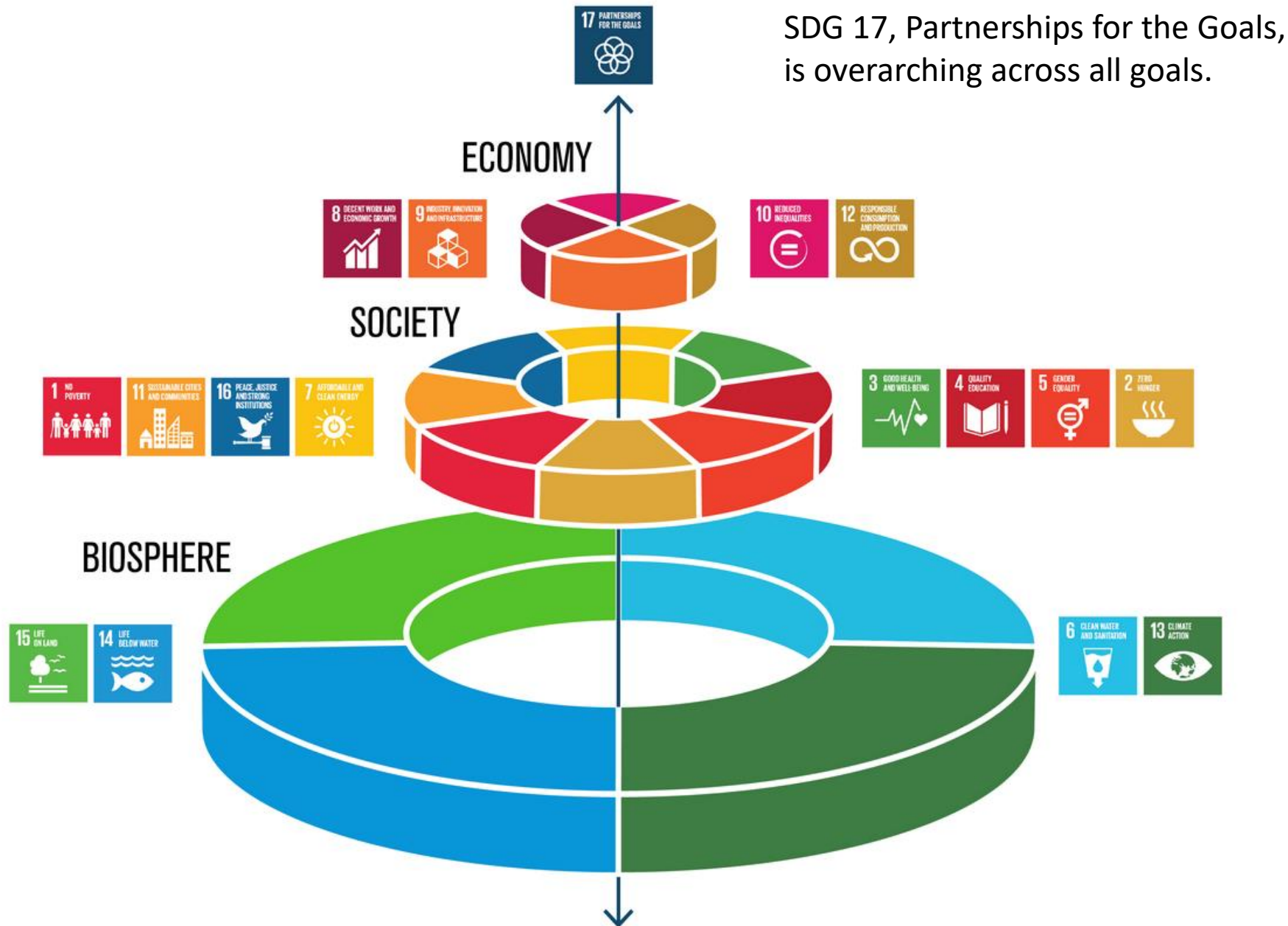
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



And business sees opportunities....!

- “The Business & Sustainable Development Commission was launched in Davos in January 2016. It brings together leaders from business, finance, civil society, labour & international organisations, with the twin aims of **mapping the economic prize** that could be available to business if the UN SDGs are achieved, & describing how business can contribute to delivering these goals.”
- Achieving the Global Goals opens up **US\$12 trillion of market opportunities** in the four economic systems examined food & agriculture, cities, energy & materials, & health & well-being





4 have their primary focus on economic matters

8 have a social focus

4 have an environmental focus

Johan Rockström & Pavav Sukhdev, 2016, showing economies & society as embedded in the biosphere

Illustration: Azote Images for Stockholm Resilience Centre www.stockholmresilience.org/research/research-news/2016-06-14-how-food-connects-all-the-sdgs.html

Are the SDGs a good framework for navigating to a sustainable future?

Are they a good framework
for really understanding what sustainability means/involves?

or Have they retained the bias that 'growth' is always good,
ignoring the reality of biophysical limits

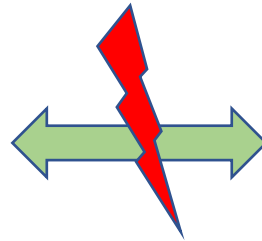
& the assumption that 'growth = development',
ignoring impact of growth policies
on inequality, subsistence cultures & nature

and so incompatible with a sustainable future?

Inherent conflict within the SDGs

Call for humanity to achieve
'harmony with nature'
& to protect planet from
degradation

Specific targets in Goals 6,
12, 13, 14, 15



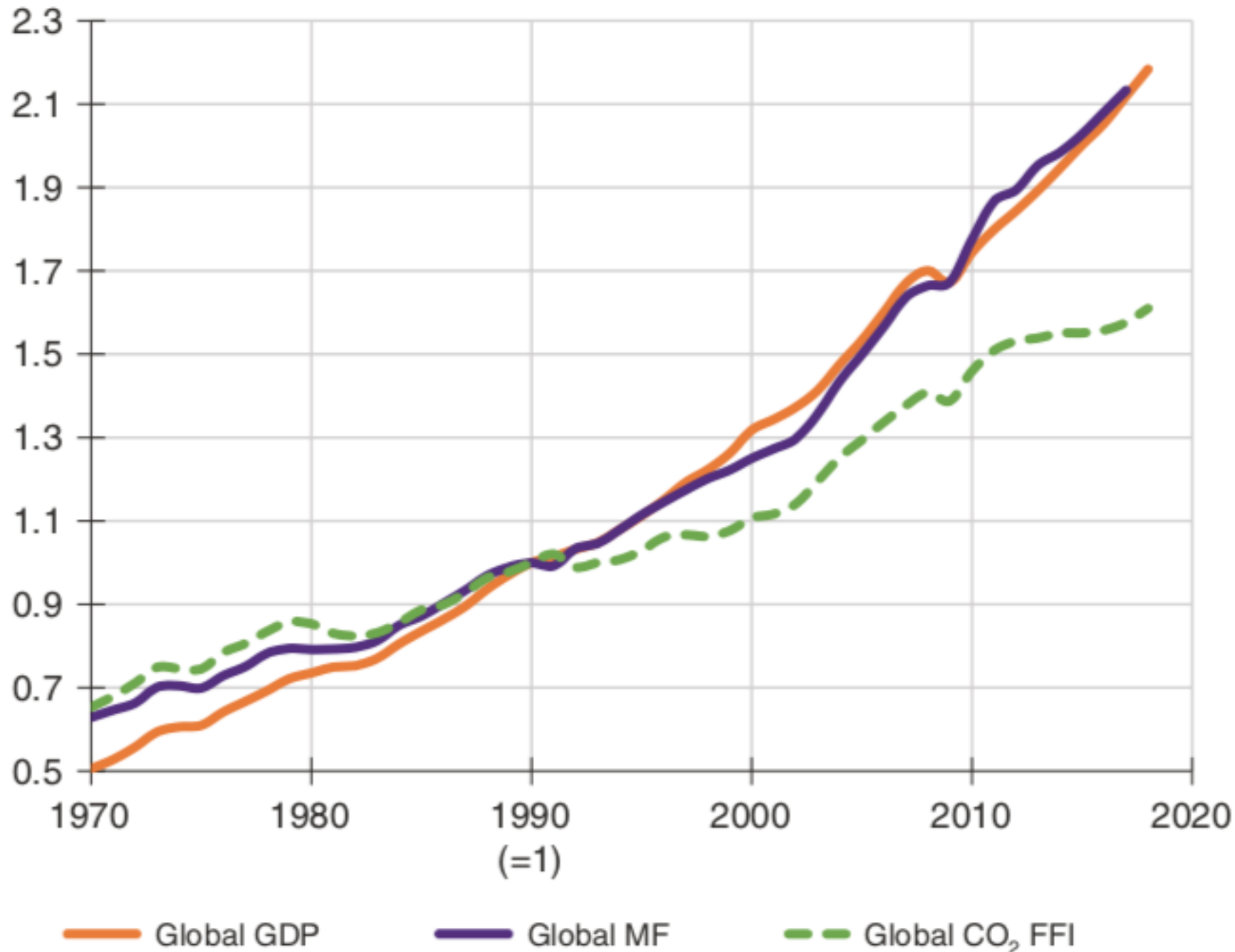
Call for continued global
economic growth 3% per year,
inc 7% for LDCs (Goal 8) & for
expanded industrialization
(Goal 9)

.. no rationale given, but
supposedly as method to achieve
human development objectives

Green growth

- Grow green tech, renewable energy sector
 - Eliminate deprivation for poorest billion. But is this the best way?
 - Assumes decoupling is possible
 - Goal 8.4 ...*endeavour* to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation...
 - Goal 12.2: By 2030, achieve sustainable management & efficient use of natural resources, as measured by ... *material footprint*.
- ...but GDP growth strongly linked to increased material footprint

Relative change in main global economic & environmental indicators from 1970 to 2017



- **Global GDP** (constant 2010 USD). Indexed to 1 in 1990.
- **Global material footprint (MF)** = global raw material extraction)
- **Global CO₂ emissions** from fossil-fuel combustion & industrial processes (CO₂ FFI)

Wiedemann et al 2020. Scientists' warning on affluence. *Nature Communications*

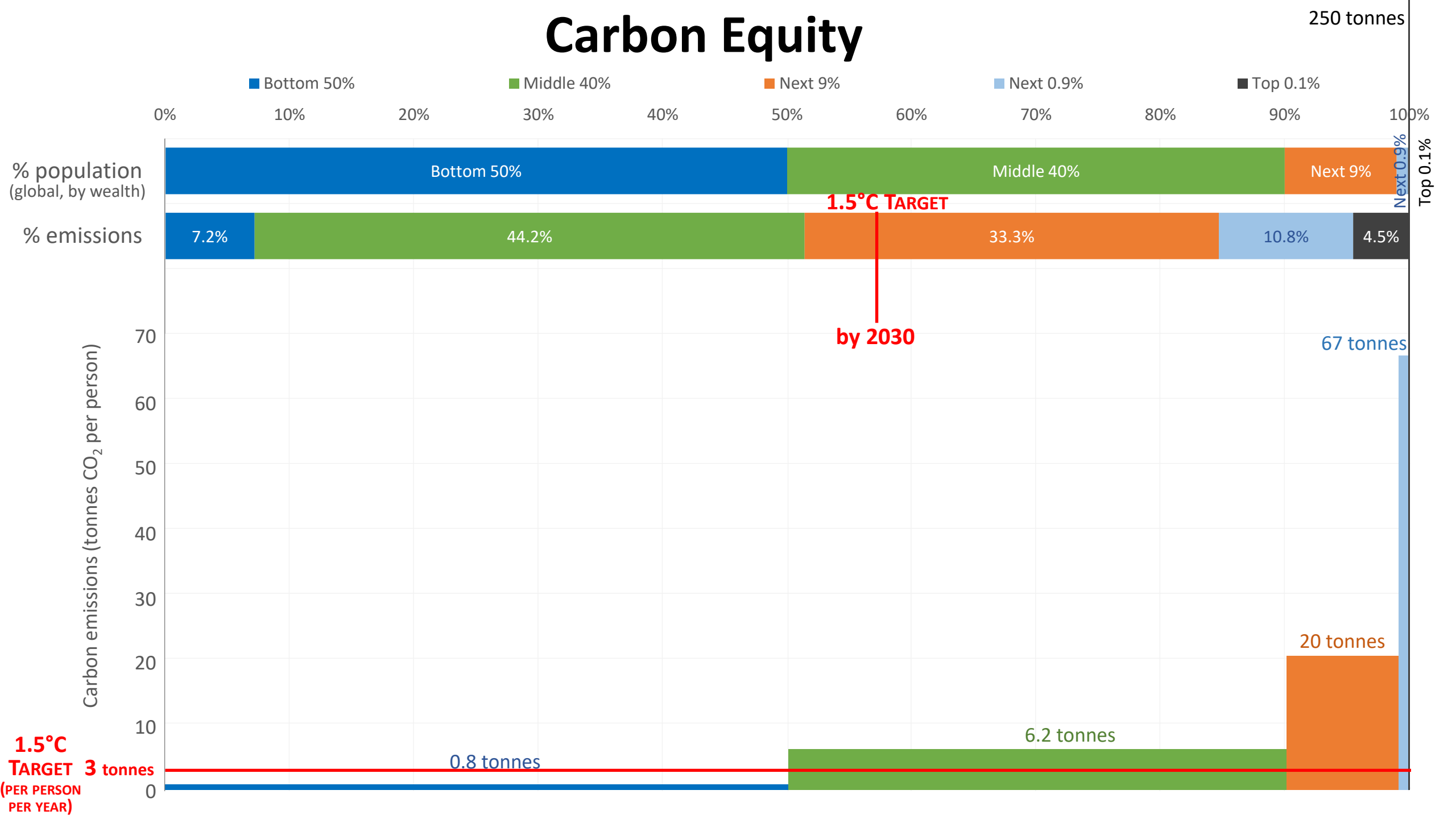
Data sources: www.resourcepanel.org/global-material-flows-database, www.globalcarbonatlas.org & <https://data.worldbank.org>.

Green growth

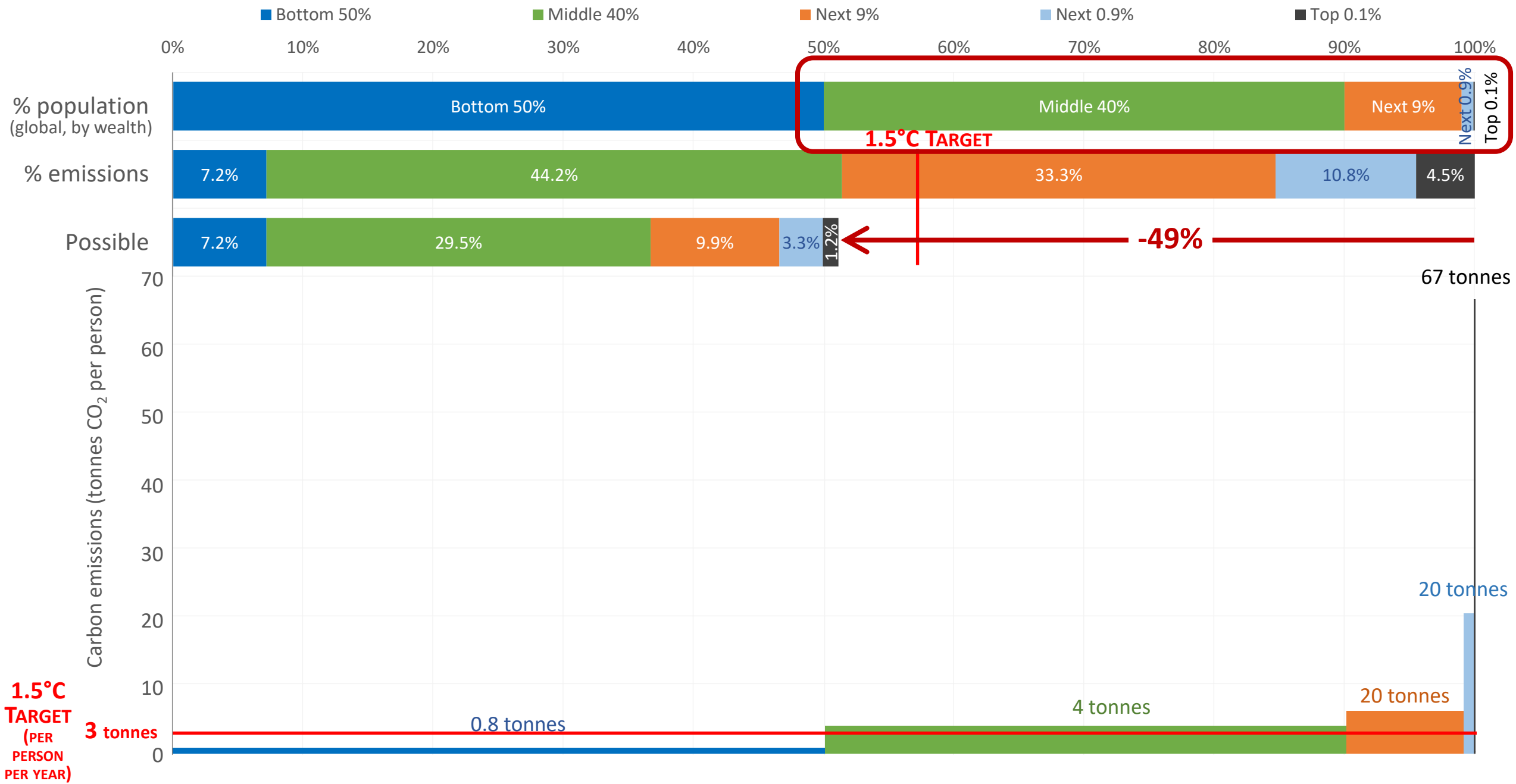
- Grow green tech, renewable energy sector
- Eliminate deprivation for poorest billion. But is this the best way?
- Assumes decoupling is possible, but GDP growth is strongly linked to increased material footprint
- Does not disrupt existing 'order', top 1% will get even richer
- Planet can't cope with consumption of top 10% increasing – or the middle 40%

We have to break our addiction to growth!

Carbon Equity



Carbon Equity



Scientists' warning on affluence

“The affluent citizens of the world are responsible for most environmental impacts & are central to any future prospect of retreating to safer environmental conditions.”

“Any transition towards sustainability can only be effective if far-reaching lifestyle changes complement technological advancements.

However, existing societies, economies & cultures incite consumption expansion & the structural imperative for growth in competitive market economies inhibits necessary societal change.”

Wiedemann et al 2020. Scientists' warning on affluence. *Nature Communications*, 11:3107

“Policy makers have to acknowledge the fact that addressing environmental breakdown may require a direct downscaling of economic production & consumption in the wealthiest countries”

Parrique, T. et al. Decoupling debunked: evidence and arguments against green growth as a sole strategy for sustainability, (European Environmental Bureau, 2019), p5.

Options for Impact Assessment in NZ

- Use SDGs as a generic framework

- Benefit from their profile across public & private sector & civil society
- Benefit from multiple tools to identify & track interactions between goals
- Draw on multiple tools to guide reporting
- Link to NZ work on alternate & additional indicators



- Adapt SDG framework

Note 8.1 & 8.2 biophysically impossible, 9.1 & 9.2 based on outdated concept of ‘development’ & threaten achievement of other goals, then either omit these goals, write your own goals & targets, or replace (eg Hickel 2019, or with “Livelihood sufficiency & opportunity”, Gibson et al 2013)

- Use an alternative sustainability framework that understands biophysical limits & inequality (eg Gibson et al 2013, Ch 5; The Natural Step) & adapt for local context & culture
- Recognise need for broader societal debate - ‘developed’ countries like NZ have to reimagine what we mean by ‘development’ & progress, & radically reduce consumption, yet concepts of ‘development’ & the ‘growth paradigm’ are deeply embedded



Summary

- SDGs provide a much more multidimensional way of considering sustainability
- SDGs have stimulated 'developed' countries, companies & organisations to think & act more broadly around sustainability, & enabled funding & focus for actions in 'developing' countries
- They *could* be used as a framework for Impact Assessment
- However they fail to face biophysical reality of limits & retain the bias that 'growth = development' & hang onto fantasy of decoupling; SDG 8 & 9 are incompatible with a sustainable future
- We need to re-envision what 'development' means
- Sustainability & wellbeing requires that 'developed' countries - & especially the global top 10% - *significantly & quickly* reduce their consumption levels, move away from a capital accumulating growth economies