

Sustainability in a Changed World- A Report on Two Kiwi Organizations

Alapan Roy Chowdhury

Department of Business Communication, Eastern Institute for Integrated Learning in Management (EILM), Kolkata, West Bengal, India

Corresponding Author's Email: alapan88@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The author has focused on the various objectives and activities that two New Zealand-based community organisations named Go Eco and Waikato Waldorf School are involved in, and how they are aligned with some of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which were framed with the objective of making the earth a better place. The research was mixed, but it was predominantly primary. The author came in touch with (and interviewed) multiple members of the staff of Go Eco and Waikato Waldorf School. I have gained further and in-depth insights into those various activities from them. The research findings helped in bringing out the real picture, which was positive, and perfectly in line with what the organizations have on their website. Although the influence of these organisations is limited to Hamilton city or the Waikato district, their activities, in turn, help in achieving the SDGs. The findings and analysis showed the level of their involvement and reflected the extent of their impact. It helped the author link his investigations with the literature review and the knowledge about the organisations he gained from their official websites. Thus, he suggested some recommendations. He has mentioned how these expanding organisations could work in association with the New Zealand government, which is supporting the United Nations' cause and the SDGs, to reach the people in other parts of the world in post-pandemic times.

Keywords: *Community Organization; Sustainable Development; United Nations; SDGs*

INTRODUCTION

The author was living, studying, and working in Hamilton, Waikato, New Zealand before COVID-19 changed the landscape of the world in many ways. New Zealand is a country known for its sincere focus on environmental sustainability. As the world recovers from the adverse effects and far-reaching consequences of the COVID pandemic, new thinking, planning, and approaches are necessary to tide over this crisis. However, here the objective would be to show how the goodwill activities of certain Kiwi organizations could help the world to build a better post-pandemic future, with an increased impetus for sustainable development, sustainable living practices, and environmental sustainability—all of which have become more important than ever.

The author was a volunteer at Go Eco (Waikato Environment Centre), which was the sponsor organization for one of the internships done by him in New Zealand. He had worked under their supervision on a project focusing on the potential place of alternative farming or agricultural practices such as permaculture, organic farming, and regenerative agriculture in achieving water quality and positive environmental outcomes. His research for Go Eco has helped the organisation and the ACRE (Advisory Committee for the Regional Environment) in forming recommendations for Block-3 of the Healthy Rivers Plan Change hearings in New Zealand in the second half of 2019.

The focus of this chapter is on two Hamilton organizations- Go Eco and Waikato Waldorf School. They are both community organisations with activities ranging from the field of education to environmental sustainability. The author initially came to know about the various activities of these organisations from their official websites.

The Go Eco website significantly mentions that the organisation is a centre for learning and that they want to be an agent of change working for their mission which is the development and preservation of healthy environments orchestrated by thriving communities. When coming to the values, they give central priority to the community, to empowerment, to inspiration and to integrity. They engage in several activities which promote environmental well-being through projects like Kaivolution Food Rescue, E-Waste Recycling (electronic devices, batteries, light bulbs, toner cartridges), by running a Sustainable Living Retail outlet, by imparting community education, by collaborating with environmental groups, and by working on environmental projects (Go Eco, 2019c).

The Centre relocated to even bigger premises in 2017, after relocating previously to an even smaller premises. The food provided by Kaivolution Food Rescue to community organisations and charities was in high demand. They also serve this rescued food for free to people who need it through the Kaivolution Freestore, which welcomes everyone. Food-waste management through the distribution of excess but edible food, is also environmentally helpful. This, in turn, is a Go Eco Climate Action Project, as it reduces the amount of food going into landfills and its ill-effects (Go Eco, 2019c). Events and workshops were also gaining popularity, and this created a natural need for more space. There was a change of name again, along with the change of premises- it was changed to the present name, 'Go Eco', and a new look for the centre better reflected the scope of its activities. (Go Eco, 2019a).

The Waikato Waldorf School is a special school based on the model created by an Austrian educational philosopher named Rudolf Steiner who established the first Waldorf School in Germany hundred years ago. Steiner's focus was on the children's needs, and hence he created schools which give impetus to free thinking and creativity (Waikato Waldorf School, 2022). This is a very important quality of education.

The Waikato Waldorf School in Hamilton was set up in the 1990's. As more and more families inclined toward inclusive and imaginative education for their children, it has grown bigger with time- like Go Eco, it has also evolved into a Waldorf community including early childhood facilities with full-time daycare, parent/child play circle, a big kindergarten, a primary school and a junior high school. The campus is dotted with many fruit trees, native plantings, and a big vegetable garden. There is catering facility for the students too (Waikato Waldorf School, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable Development and the United Nations

The literature review deals with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is specifically based on the meaning of sustainable development, the goals, and the importance of the United Nations (UN) and its role in implementing the goals. The review focuses on the various sustainable development goals, the necessary background information, and also the larger implications of some of those goals.

Sustainability is the concept of developing in such a way which preserves the planet for the future generations, without depleting the available resources through present use, while maintaining a balance between economic growth, care for our environment, and social well-being. Sustainable development is a concept which alerted people about the ill-effects of economic growth and globalization on the environment, when it first appeared in published form in the late 1980's. It also tried to find remedies to the issues created as a result of population growth and industrialization. Many of the perils that we face today (like climate change, water scarcity, inequality and hunger, etc.) can be countered with implementing sustainable development all over the world (Acciona, 2020).

Now, the UN has the power to take action on the grave issues that we face in the 21st century. The United Nations aids in the maintenance of international peace and security, the protection of human rights, the delivery of humanitarian aid, the promotion of sustainable development, and the enforcement of international law (United Nations, 2019).

The good thing is that the 2030 Agenda, which contains the roadmap for the SDGs, was approved by the UN. These goals provide the objectives of protecting the planet and its people within the next decade. These common goals demand the dedicated engagement of people, governments, and businesses to turn them into reality (Acciona, 2020). The objectives of the SDGs, or Global Goals, include ending poverty, making the planet habitable, and ensuring peace and prosperity for all earthlings (Morton, Pencheon & Squires, 2017).

The UN's 17 SDGs are sub-divided under the five Areas of Critical Importance or 5P's, that is, People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships. Each P incorporates several SDGs. They are as follows: People includes No Poverty (Goal 1), Zero Hunger (Goal 2), Good Health and Well-being (Goal 3), Quality Education (Goal 4), Gender Equality (Goal 5), and Clean Water and Sanitation (Goal 6), Planet includes Climate Action (Goal 13), Life below Water (Goal 14), and Life on Land (Goal 15), Prosperity includes Affordable Clean Energy (Goal 7), Decent Work and Economic Development (Goal 8), Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (Goal 9), Reduce Inequalities (Goal 10), Sustainable Cities and Communities (Goal 11), and Responsible consumption and production (Goal 12), Peace and partnerships include Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (Goal 16), and Partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17) (Morton, Pencheon & Squires, 2017).

According to Freistein and Mahlert (2016), the SDGs have a strong potential role to play in addressing inequality in today's world. It is also one of the 17 goals (Goal 10). However, Mohammed and Ghebreyesus (2018) have pointed out that the increase in prosperity around the world has been a double-edged sword as it has led to new health threats that have resulted from changes in diets and lifestyles and rapid, unplanned urbanization.

Williams and Taylor (2017) refer to the importance of child health under Goal 3, which is good health and well-being. They stress the global implications of the shared values and aspirations, based on Goal 3, and especially child health. The fact that the SDGs offer great opportunities to improve child health throughout the world has been attested to by Taylor *et al.* (2015).

It might escape one's attention, but there is something which is both essential for life on earth and for sustainable development. Akinsemolu (2018) has emphasised the integration of microbial technology in achieving the SDGs. In the review, Akinsemolu also mentions that several problems could be solved if society was educated properly about how to use microorganisms intelligently for positive outcomes. The role of these organisms could be pivotal, and according to the author, it is in line with multiple SDGs.

The success of the SDGs is directly dependent on the adoption of the goals by the people, and when every empowered citizen turns into an agent of change (Chin & Jacobsson, 2016). This might sound like an ideal scenario, but it is definitely rewarding when we work to keep it as an objective or goal.

Now, research question is: How are the two organisations (Go Eco and Waikato Waldorf School) contributing to achieving the different Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in general, and in particular the SDGs like Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well-being, Quality Education, Clean Water and Sanitation, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Climate Action, and Partnerships for the Goals?

Objectives

The aim is to find out:-

- How the two organisations are working to ensure sustainability.
- What they are doing in terms of overall community well-being cum sustainability.
- How the multiple SDGs are being combined through their activities.
- What role the government can play in this.
- How this could also be emulated on a global scale.

METHODOLOGY

Although the project is heavily based on primary research, secondary research has also been done materials have been collected for the literature review, references, and personal knowledge. As part of the project's primary research, a series of interviews were planned. People from multiple organizations, like Advisory Committee for the Regional Environment (ACRE), Organic Farm New Zealand (OFNZ), Waikato Waldorf School, and, of course, Go Eco, were contacted to see whether they were open to interviews for this project.

The author talked to Interviewee-A, Interviewee-B, Interviewee-C, and Interviewee-D, who are from Go Eco. Interviewee-E and Interviewee-F from Waikato Waldorf School were also interviewed. Their experience of the field scenario and their expertise in their respective spheres helped him gain valuable insights for the project. The author tried to keep the interviews limited to 30-45 minutes, but at times it extended to more than an hour of both formal interview-based conversation and informal conversation. The casual conversations also provided the author with important information in certain cases.

The qualitative data analysis method of content analysis was used to analyse what was gathered from the interviews, and to compare and corroborate the findings with the literature review, and with the websites of the concerned organisations too.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The investigations led to certain findings which are being shared below

Go Eco works for good health and well-being through the eco-friendly and sustainable products that they sell. Interviewee-A from Go Eco introduced the author to the products. The author also did a close survey of the kinds of products they sell, which included popular ethical and sustainable brands like Ethique. They also support food-growing through natural farming methods to ensure good food quality through reduced use of artificial chemicals. Go Eco's Interviewee-B told the author that Kaivolution feeds 150-200 people every single day. They do not turn people away, even if the same person keeps coming back every day. They do not judge whether a person has money or not. The author has himself seen people queuing outside the Kaivolution shop for food every day during the span of his internship (Go Eco, 2019b).

Interviewee-C told the author that Go Eco has participated in all three blocks of the Healthy Rivers Plan Change Hearings arranged by the Waikato Regional Council in New Zealand. Interviewee-C has placed recommendations on behalf of Go Eco to ensure better future policy making that would improve water quality in the water bodies of the Waikato region. He came to know from interviewee-C that Go Eco and the ACRE have worked together to prepare recommendations for the three blocks. The author himself talked to members of the ACRE whom interviewee-C had introduced him to.

Moreover, the incentives and objectives of business or profit organizations and those of community or non-profit organizations differ starkly. Hence, there is a difference in the way they state their opinions, arguments, and recommendations. So, it naturally divides the groups into two broad categories. The role of the community is very important when it comes to the collective good of any country. The role of the government is also important; but ultimately, it is the people that constitute the core of any society. Hence, interviewee-C represents the side of the non-profit community organization at the hearings and voices her recommendations that are good for the environment. Go Eco had different objectives for all the hearings; the objective for Block-3 of the plan change hearings was to promote alternative agricultural practices (especially organic farming) as an alternative because it reduces the amount of nutrient nitrogen run-off into rivers and other water bodies and thus enhances water quality. It is also better for the overall environment when compared to conventional farming. This promotion of organic farming as a sustainable choice through raising public awareness is also one of their objectives. They organised a workshop on the topic and a climate change talk when the author was working there as an intern. They also organized a rainwater harvesting workshop and other important workshops later.

Apart from alternative farming, there are other ways that the community could get involved in the improvement of water quality and environmental health. The Waikato Waldorf School has a plethora of other direct and indirect involvement, activities, and plans other than just encouraging good education. The author was enlightened on these other aspects by his interviewees from the same school. Interviewee-E from Waikato Waldorf School promotes and actively participates in riverside plantations. This helps in soil conservation by reducing the run-off of nutrients like nitrogen and phosphate into the rivers. Interviewee-E has been into organic farming before but has now shifted his focus to cleaning rivers and maintaining riverbanks. He has made holding ponds on the plot of land behind the school, uses sustainable techniques to clean them, and he is also working on plantations on his own farm to reduce run-off into water. He is taking other measures too and has set an example for the others. The author talked to interviewee-F from the same organization, who shared valuable insights too.

Go Eco also participates in and supports other events and organisations. Here, the author would like to refer to interviewee-D as an instance. The author came to know about a Hamilton-based children's adventure group called Kirikiriroa Explorers from her. It is supported by Go Eco. Interviewee-D helps the group on behalf of Go Eco during their events once a week. The author himself has also volunteered at one of their events on behalf of Go Eco. Both organizations are doing substantial work in the field of children's education—not just formal education, but environmental education too. This includes providing them with much-needed exposure, tutoring them about the environment and its major issues, teaching them basic sustainable practises such as gardening and basic food preparation, taking them on trips along rivers and to gardens, and teaching them about the cultural elements, myths, and practises associated with the environment, which in turn teaches them to respect it. These not only help in educating the children, but also help in educating the parents who come to the events as guardians and participants. This is essential for community awareness. Moreover, these children would grow up to be environmentally well-informed citizens in the future. Due to their past grooming, they are expected to make wiser decisions that would be more sustainability focused.

The indigenous Iwi communities have also shown great concern for preservation of nature and conservation of natural resources. The indigenous Iwi population has been closer to nature culturally. Certain community organizations such as Go Eco and Kirikiriroa Explorers have made Iwi prayers and invocations addressed to nature, a part of their organizational culture. They celebrate various Maori tribal festivals with the involvement of the community, and with a message for promoting sustainability. Maori prayers and songs revering the earth and the environment are sung during special events, volunteer inductions, staff inductions, birthday parties and on other occasions at such community organizations.

Interviewee-D is also looking forward to helping Waikato farmers in various procedures and in legal needs whenever they require it. He is also associated with another group which is into environmental well-being.

Now the author comes to the analysis part, where the findings would be summarized, while relating and connecting them to the literature review, and to what was found on the websites of the two organisations. In this way, the former and the latter would be compared and corroborated at the same time.

Good Health and Well-being is ensured by Go Eco through their products, and their pro-natural food growing stance. Both the organizations are providing Quality Education too. It is evident from what was gathered from the Waldorf School site. In case of Go Eco, they are giving children the valuable exposure to things related to nature and the environment by connecting them with it. They are educating them to live a life which is close to nature and in harmony with the environment. There is plenty of 'nature' on the Waldorf School campus, which the author visited personally. It provides an ideal environment for the students to flourish. The sustainability-focused stance of the school and its environment would affect the students in a positive way, even if it is on a subconscious level. The author is saying this from personal experience as he has studied in a college based in an organic farm for food

crops with a big medicinal plant garden, and whose campus is dotted with orchards and lakes. These aspects also affect the mental health of the child in a positive way.

The nature and the environment are an integral part of education, and more essential in our times. The children are the future citizens of the earth, and the work that the two organizations are doing, is having a constructive impact on the children and their parents. This is how they are building Sustainable Cities and Communities for both the near and the far future by making the children the agents of change.

Zero Hunger is Goal 10. Go Eco's Kaivolution distributes the collected food to anyone who wants it, in order to reduce food waste, thereby reducing hunger. This is instrumental in reducing inequality too. According to their website, the Waldorf School also feed their students. Kaivolution is also a Climate Action project, as mentioned on the website of the organisation.

It has already been mentioned how Go Eco has contributed to the future of Clean Water and Sanitation for the Waikato region. The author feels fortunate to have been a part of that goodwill project. The recommendations prepared by Go Eco (it was partially prepared by the author) for the Healthy Rivers Plan Change Hearings was pitched by the author's mentor and the author to the panel on the Block-3 hearing day with the objective of doing their part to create a better future for both the inhabiting humans and the natural ecosystem of Waikato, which are inseparable. There were several recommendations, one of which referred to how soil microorganisms could be managed through improving soil awareness among farmers. Soil awareness is directly related to microorganisms in soil and soil health, and good soil health means better crops, better water quality, and ensures overall environmental benefits. The activities which interviewee-E from the Waldorf School has been involved in, and the steps he has taken to ensure better water and environment quality, have also been mentioned above.

It is also inferred both from the author's findings and from the organisation's website that Go Eco has established effective partnerships with multiple organisations like Kirikiriroa Explorers, and the partner organisations have increased their strength through this effective cooperation.

The interviewees from the Waikato Waldorf School also shared some of their future plans, which the organisation has also briefly referred to on their website.

Hence, the findings and analysis have shown in some detail how the two organisations are working to ensure sustainability, what they are efficiently doing or planning to do for overall community well-being cum sustainability, and how they are clearly combining multiple SDGs through their activities. It has also revealed the real depth of their activities, which they refer to on their website. Thus, the work of Go Eco and Waikato Waldorf School are definitely contributing to a great extent in order to ensure the achievement of the SDGs mentioned in the research question, and the work and the role of these organizations in realizing the different SDGs is significant, even if their influence is limited to Hamilton or Waikato only.

CONCLUSION

It has been seen how both organisations have tried to fulfil their objectives and have done what they have claimed to do. They work for sustainability and for the community, and their progress is helping the United Nations' cause and, therefore, helping in turning the SDGs into reality through their real-life constructive activities and through the implementation of sustainable future-friendly policies that govern them. The SDGs were meant to ensure that no one is left behind, and these two organizations are doing their bit. They are also constantly expanding, reaching more people, and they have future plans too. The two organisations have similar goals, and their paths occasionally cross and overlap. The author is personally satisfied with the efforts they are putting in to ensure a better future.

Although this research project does not cover it, it would be interesting to further study other such organisations in New Zealand, India or other parts of the world that have a common purpose. I intend to focus on whether or not they are putting in more effort to fulfil the SDGs. The author would also like to know in detail about the Kirikiriroa Explorers.

Recommendations

If more organizations shifted their focus in the same direction, then almost every locality in Waikato and New Zealand would become clean and green one day. The same is true for the whole world. This would be easier with the help of the government. A cross-government effort is required to achieve the SDGs. The New Zealand government is open to help from the private sector and civil society to help the government agencies with the SDGs, and they were already engaging with the government for the same purpose in 2019. New Zealand would contribute to the achievement of the SDGs through international leadership on global policy-related issues and helping other countries through the New Zealand Aid Programme (New Zealand Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d.). This is perhaps more important in the post-pandemic period than ever before.

These are welcome facts. The community organizations, such as the ones that were dealt with in this chapter, could join hands with the government agencies and work on a global scale, even if it is limited to the Oceania at first.

The COVID-19 outbreak has changed everything. However, with these organizations expanding, and more such organizations coming of age, the post-COVID future looks full of hope. With increased awareness and implemented action, it is essential to fight the challenges that are plaguing mankind today. Thinking on a global scale is important as the earth is a common and shared heritage, and this has been proved by the pandemic once again. The borders are just in our minds. Sharing knowledge and tools with and lending necessary resources and help to the countries and communities in dire need, would help in healing the wounds of the human society and our mother earth. There is more awareness today than what was there even fifteen years ago. The COVID pandemic has also been a hard learning lesson for humanity. So, the efforts of the United Nations would be more effective when conscious citizens would work shoulder to shoulder as conscious change agents, along with it, and with the various government agencies of different countries, to make the planet better for the future generations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author is grateful to Prof. Michele Orgad of the University of Waikato for inspiring me to take up the above-mentioned project, and for guiding him while he was working on it. He is thankful to all the interviewees from New Zealand without whose active participation and support in the project, this chapter would have never been written. He is grateful to his friend Guillermo (William) Revelo for helping him during the project. He especially thanks Dr. Ashish Kumar Sana of the University of Calcutta for providing him with this opportunity to write about the project. He also thanks Lincoln University College, Malaysia for making his chapter an integral part of this esteemed book.

REFERENCES

- Acciona (2020). Sustainable Development. <https://www.acciona.com/sustainable-development/>
- Akinsemolu, A. A. (2018). The role of microorganisms in achieving the sustainable development goals. *Journal of cleaner production*, 182, 139-155.
- Assembly, G. (2015). Sustainable Development goals. SDGs), *Transforming our world: the, 2030*.
- Chin, A., & Jacobsson, T. (2016). The Goals. org: mobile global education on the Sustainable Development Goals. *Journal of cleaner production*, 123, 227-229.
- Freistein, K., & Mahler, B. (2016). The potential for tackling inequality in the Sustainable Development Goals. *Third World Quarterly*, 37(12), 2139-2155.
- Go Eco. (2019a). Our History. <https://goeco.org.nz/about/>
- Go Eco. (2019b). Kaivolution. <https://goeco.org.nz/portfolio/kaivolution/>

Go Eco. (2019c). Our Projects. <https://goeco.org.nz/#projects>

Mohammed, A. J., & Ghebreyesus, T. A. (2018). Healthy living, well-being and the sustainable development goals. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 96(9), 590.

Morton, S., Pencheon, D., & Squires, N. (2017). Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and their implementation: A national global framework for health, development and equity needs a systems approach at every level. *British medical bulletin*, 1-10.

New Zealand Foreign Affairs and Trade (n.d.). Sustainable Development Goals. <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/peace-rights-and-security/work-with-the-un-and-other-partners/new-zealand-and-the-sustainable-development-goals-sdgs/>

Taylor, S., Williams, B., Magnus, D., Goenka, A., & Modi, N. (2015). From MDG to SDG: good news for global child health?. *The Lancet*, 386(10000), 1213-1214.

United Nations (2019). Shaping our future together. <https://www.un.org/en/>

Waikato Waldorf School (2022). <http://waikatowaldorf.school.nz/rich-history-from-humble-beginnings/>

Williams, B., & Taylor, S. (2017). Squaring the circle: health as a bridge to global solidarity in the Sustainable Development Goals. *Archives of disease in childhood*, 102(5), 459-462.