

## Towards a World of Three Zeros

Professor Muhammad Yunus was guest at George Washington University a few months ago and delivered an online seminar on reducing poverty through the concept of social business. Yunus had received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for founding the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, an institution that provides microloans to poor women. Up to now, roughly 10 million women have taken advantage of the loans by Grameen Bank to start a small business (selling vegetable, buying a cow,...) and thus have become part of the financial system. The Grameen Bank is extremely successful, because the repayment rate is well above 90% - and it is completely dedicated to the benefit of the public. In addition to the Grameen Bank, Yunus also founded several other social businesses; i.e. joint ventures with global players like Danone and Intel, using their financial and technological strength to create “Grameen Danone”, which sells yogurt to malnourished children and “Technology for Social Impact”, an enterprise that develops apps for farmers or improves users’ accessibility to healthcare and education.

Yunus’ publication “A World of three Zeros; The new economics of zero poverty, zero unemployment and zero net carbon emissions” (2017) is a roadmap on how to redesign the engine, as he called the current economic system during his online-seminar. His statement concerning programs of job-creation was notable: The problem of poverty cannot be alleviated through job-creation, it can only be solved through entrepreneurship. He emphasized that all human beings are born as entrepreneurs, against a common view that postulates only some people are gifted with the creativity and power to become an entrepreneur. This insight has strong implications: If we are all born as entrepreneurs, why do we not experience ourselves as such, why do many of us pursue jobs we do not like? Maybe the answer is that the education system mainly trains us to become job-seekers instead of job-givers, as Yunus tends to say. In other words, our universities, especially our business faculties are catered to foster the desire to obtain a degree that will get us best job we can – while being in competition with so many other thousand students who aim to do exactly the same. In my view, universities should offer additional entrepreneurship programmes without a degree. The infrastructure for upcoming entrepreneurs should not be inhibited by the grade and degree system. We could even go one step further: Yunus explained the founding of Grameen Bank at one of his latest social business conferences. When he was a professor at the University of Chittagong in Bangladesh, he found himself teaching economics while the population in the neighbourhood was suffering from a famine. Thus, he went to the next village called Jobra to find out the specific cause of the poverty. One major explanation was that many rural people were subjected to a form of

economic exploitation, since they were forced to lend money from loan sharks. This insight was the basis for the foundation of Grameen Bank. Yunus' reflection on the experience goes as follows: "The village was my university!" I think this is a valuable insight for every university professor who desires to make an impact. Why do universities have to be arranged as a sort of exclusive club that only harbours students and professors as club members? A university professor can have an important impact on the local environment, as Yunus' example has shown. Moreover, leaving the ivory tower of a university as Yunus did could also be reversed, in order to open to let more people inside this environment: A university could also serve at least partly as a local incubator for the unemployed people surrounding it, offering its knowledge and infrastructure to foster entrepreneurship. If we want to create an entrepreneurial infrastructure, we have to make bold steps!

After all these years as a social entrepreneur, Yunus questions a basic point of the economic system, which has been a pillar of economic theory and thus a pillar of our system: He claims that human beings are not simply selfish, they are also altruistic. In his last interview with me, published recently in the "International Journal of Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation", Yunus explained the concept of Supperhappiness. He said: Making money makes you happy, making other people happy makes you supperhappy! He once remarked that he does not own one single share of the companies he founded, they are all social businesses and have a single purpose, namely to solve social problems.

I think the concept of social business is one that has the power to transform the world. I cited the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in my PhD "Social Business Innovations". He developed a theory of different fields in a society, like the healthcare sector, the economic sector and the education sector. The economic sector has been the dominant force in our current society in my opinion, since its values and norms determines the other ones: The healthcare sector, for instance, is dominated increasingly by a cost-efficiency logic. The education sector is somewhat transforming in the same way in terms of the degree system and the competition among scholars with regards to publications and funding. Therefore, if we change can change the economic system to become more "social", the other sectors of society might benefit from such a change, too.

Our economic system has to transform as soon as possible, if we want to tackle climate change and poverty. The concept of social business is not reserved solely for developing countries like Bangladesh. For example, Yunus adopted the same group system of five women in the U.S. when founding "Grameen America" some years back. If we want to create a World of Three

Zeros, we have to change our education system, increase the awareness and the incentives of social business, in addition to developing a global political framework for tackling climate change. The Montreal Protocol in 1989 has helped to reduce the emissions of CFC and thus prevented further damage to the ozone layer. Our German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has recently founded a Climate Club starting with G7. This is a first step, but we need a strong international treaty among more countries developing a similar dynamic as the Montreal Protocol, if we want to save the climate.

We have to take courageous steps in creating a World of Three Zeros, because time is running out. Spaceship Enterprise has to become a Social Enterprise!

Wirtz, M. (2022): My vision for 2050 – The International Climate Club. Online: <http://www.mitten-im-web.de/isbi/data/downloads/285348/Buch.pdf> (p.105)

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