

Towards Footprint Justice

A Fair Earth Share is a Human Right

Boxtel (the Netherlands), April 2018, Jan Juffermans



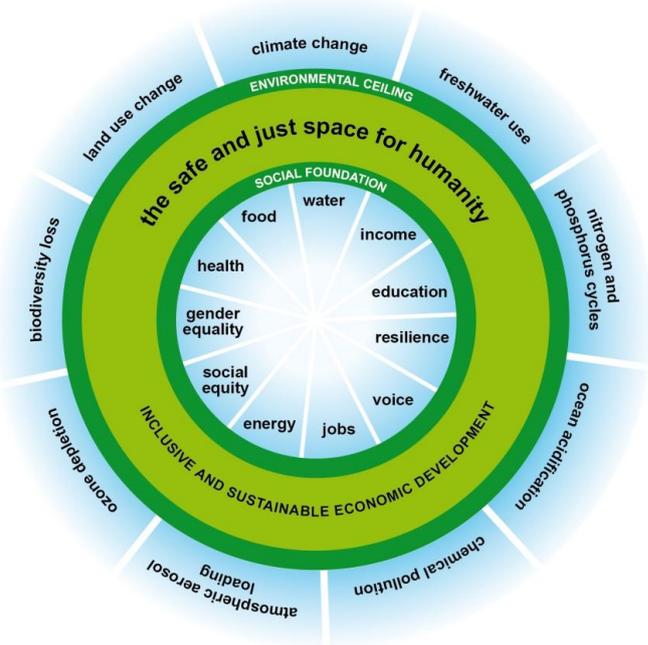
We have entered 2018. The world's population has grown to more than 7.6 billion people, many of whom suffer from a level of poverty unworthy of humankind. At the same time, we are plagued by increasing ecological damage that has impressive social consequences, such as damage to our climate, shrinking biodiversity, polluted air, acidified oceans, and degraded soil. No wonder that more than 15,000 scientists recently tolled the global emergency bell. What on Earth are we going to do, and how can we do it in time? Is there a fair and effective solution that could keep our planet safe and sustainable, liveable for future generations?

Rights for All

In 2016 I was invited to deliver the Domela Nieuwenhuis Memorial Lecture in the city of Heereveen in the Netherlands. Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis (1846-1919) was a famous Dutch socialist and publisher of the magazine ***Recht voor Allen*** (Rights for All). That event encouraged me to tell the story, inspired by his ideals, of my long search for recognition of a Fair Earth Share (as it's called today) as a human right. For this presentation, I was greatly helped by the Footprint model and the *Living Planet Report 2016*. Back in 1965, I received a wake-up call when I came across the numbers that illustrated the skewed distribution of goods among rich and poor. With friends we organised various activities around that issue.

On the basis of new analyses from the UN report *Our Common Future* (1987, the so-called 'Brundtland report'), I published an article in the Dutch national newspaper *De Volkskrant* in 1989. The crucial message was that rich countries violate human rights by making unfairly large claims on global resources. Later on, the gap grew even bigger, but no one called it a matter of human rights. On the contrary, the Dutch government now still calls for increased consumption in order to continue economic and financial growth. The story is the same in many other European countries and elsewhere. The mantra that echoes around the world is: grow, grow, grow!

In our Dutch group Platform for a Fair and Green Economy (www.platformdse.org) we have spent many years trying to change this orientation, and there are similar organisations in many other countries, for example, the New Economics Foundation (NEF) in London. Fortunately, more people have recently joined the chorus to promote a new economy, using books and presentations, like Kate Raworth and her Doughnut model (www.kateraworth.com), and Christian Felber and his Common Good Economy, accompanied by practical tools to structure real sustainable management (www.ecogood.org). Moreover, in 2017 in the Netherlands, we welcomed the student platform Our New Economy (www.ourneweconomy.nl), which helps to change the economics curriculum at high schools and universities.



The Doughnut model of Kate Raworth

Liberal Philosophy

In 2018, we are a long way from the liberal ideals dating from the time before the colonial period. At that time, there was shared understanding about the use and fair sharing of the commons, that is, the use of land and natural resources. The liberal philosopher John Locke

(1632-1704) wrote that every individual has the right to maximum freedom to live her or his life. He also formulated the basic rule that claiming unlimited use of nature is not allowed as our planet has finite resources. One is free, he wrote, to profit from nature's interest, but we should ***leave enough of the same quality for others***. One might call this liberal solidarity or social liberalism—in any case, it is quite a different position from that of present neoliberalism. So Locke advocated a very down-to-earth fair sharing. Nobody may profit more from nature than others, because the possibilities offered by nature are nobody's possession, he argued. That's all quite a bit different from the current decadent public opinion that we have the right to indulge in flights to distant resorts, gas-guzzling cars, and excessive meat consumption.

Rights of the Rich

At the time of Locke, colonialism was taking off. Embarking on large ships, our ancestors sailed across the globe to acquire many valuable products at the lowest prices. For those back home, the unfair effects of this 'clever' trade remained unknown for a long while—in Holland we say 'it was too far from our bed'. The era was one in which the rights of the rich became a global phenomenon. Alas, this remains the case today. We still benefit from prices of imported goods from poor countries that are far too low, while causing collateral ecological damage. In 1996, a report ('Dutch land Use Abroad') was published showing that the Netherlands imported products from 23 million hectares outside of our borders (our country has only 2 million hectares suitable for agriculture). About a year later, I asked Hans Pont, director general of our Ministry for the Environment, about measures to reduce our vast global land use. His reply was astonishing: 'Jan, here we do not talk about importing less, but about rendering our imports more sustainable.' Formally, this national policy is called 'no policy on volumes'.

4.9 Million Killed Each Year

Due to growing Western economies, 20% of the global population is consuming more than 80% of global resources. So not much is left for the other 80% of the inhabitants of our planet. If the poorer six billion people were to seek a similar level of consumption as the rich have, as advocated every day by advertisements, this would be far too big a load on our Earth. In the graph about our growing Global Footprint, we see that in about 1970, we crossed the 'sustainability barrier' of our planet, and we entered the new phase of global overshoot. At present, in 2018, the overshoot is more than 65%. This large percentage explains the many types of degradation of soil, water (streams, rivers, oceans), and air, as well as overfishing, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, and, of course, damage to our climate. Production and consumption of oil, gas, and coal currently kill 4.9 million people every year, of whom 400,000 are so-called 'climate deaths'. This is a silent ecocide. They are the victims

of growing damage to our ecosystems. These dramatic figures are published in the *Climate Vulnerability Monitor 2012* of the DARA Institute in Madrid.

Ten Apples and Ten Children

In 2018, the question is still simple: how do we share ten apples among ten children? In practice, we allow only two children to just take four apples each. The other eight children have to deal with the problem of sharing the remaining two apples. We show our concern by giving some formal development aid to alleviate cases of emergency and to provide some education and health care. Today, research shows, we succeed in extracting fortunes from those countries by cunning tax constructions, price manipulation by multinationals, and prices for raw materials and products that are far too low. This goes by the name of 'reverse development aid'. Professor Jan Tinbergen, Nobel Prize laureate in economics, calculated about fifty years ago that the rich countries should invest 2% of their gross domestic product in the poorer countries to reach a more equitable situation within some forty to fifty years. In practice, that 2% was reduced to formally only 0.7%, and many countries even reduced this goal further, as did the Netherlands. Therefore, we have to conclude that development policies have failed to reach global fair sharing; indeed, it is arguable that we exploit the poorer countries more than ever before.

Amnesty International

In 2006, my book (in Dutch) about the importance of the Global Footprint was released; I dedicated a chapter to human rights and Footprints¹. In Amsterdam, I offered my book to the director of Amnesty International and showed him this chapter on human rights. I suggested he include the violations of the rich countries with their overly large and unfair Global Footprints in Amnesty's annual reports. These additions would render the reports more balanced, because most human rights violations are reported as being committed in less developed countries. It was several months before I received the reply that there were several reasons for not embracing my suggestion. Some years later, I tried the same thing with the head office of Amnesty International in London. There, too, someone replied that it was not possible. Even climate justice was not yet integrated in the reports.

Fair Sharing via Quotas

So what is the way forward? How can we stop the overshoot of our planet's capacity and reach fair sharing at the same time? We at the Dutch Footprint Group (www.voetafdruk.eu) have presented our proposals. One of them is *The Road to Global Sustainability* (<http://www.voetafdruk.eu/onzevoetafdruk/index.html>). The main idea is to use quotas,

¹ *Nut & Noodzaak van de Mondiale Voetafdruk, Over de mondiale gebruiksruijme, duurzaamheid en mensenrechten*, Rotterdam, Uitgeverij Lemniscaat, 2006, ISBN 90 5637 839 2.

that is, to ration, because that can be effective and fair at the same time. The basic idea is to assign everyone a fair share, and this will be combined with a safe ceiling, for example, a fixed total emissions level of CO₂ per year. The same can be applied to water and other scarce resources. As for CO₂, Dr David Fleming of Great Britain came up with the clever model of Tradable Energy Quotas (TEQs): an annual, individual CO₂ budget (www.teqs.net). In our Dutch report on quotas, we propose several steps for their introduction. The first step is pricing and taxing fossil fuels; further we advise starting to limit the emission of CO₂. Since we consume more than just energy, we propose land quotas as the next step. That need will become evident after reducing the use of fossil fuels effectively—that will result in more bioenergy being grown (like rape seed, maize, and palm oil) at the cost of less land being available for food production. It will further encourage international land grabbing. That can be countered by Footprint quotas, with a yearly Footprint budget of, for example, 15,000 m². By using an electronic card system, one can pay using euros and a part of the Footprint budget at the same time. So the deduction from one's Footprint budget will be in accordance with the Footprint of the product or service one pays for (such as a bike or an airplane trip). Mr Bert Vink developed such a system of 'balance money' and called the quota units 'Terras'. At the European level, several conferences and meetings have already been dedicated to quota concepts; these were attended by representatives from various colleague groups from Belgium, England, France, Hungary, and Spain.

UN Human Rights

You might think, 'That is not within reach!' We believe, however, that those systems of rationing will be needed quickly as soon as large groups of people start to protest, when, for example energy, meat, and airplane travel have become too costly for them while the rich can afford to live as usual. In that case, it will be necessary for a good quota plan to be available.

If we were already further along in this direction, such a plan would not be needed. This could have been put in place long ago, since every world citizen already—today—has the right to food, shelter, water, education, etc. on the basis of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). To enjoy those rights, everyone needs some space on our planet, so in principle there is already the right to a Fair Earth Share! I am afraid though that it is inevitable that we will need legal recourse to enforce people's basic rights. And each of us can begin individually to develop a lifestyle with a fair Footprint; the figures of the national and global Footprints are clear enough to draw a conclusion about the fairness of our own position. The model gives maximum freedom to make our own choices in life, on the sole condition that we will ***leave enough of the same quality for others***. Of course there will be more space for everyone in the future if we succeed in reducing the global population and Footprints that are too large.

Opinion for Human Rights Council

In 2015, the Dutch Human Rights Council (College voor de Rechten van de Mens) invited the public to submit opinions about human rights. So I did, and I included our view on fair Footprints, referring to the *Living Planet Report 2014*. After that, a long period of silence ensued. So I enquired about the follow-up: nothing was done with my opinion, and after asking for a reaction about the contents, I did not get any reply. Also when I sent a kind request for a conversation about this in 2017, I did not get a reaction.

On the basis of my experience to date, I cannot but conclude that most people just turn away from this issue when they learn about the figures of our large Dutch Footprint and the link with human rights. The many good intentions and projects to make this world a better place and the seeming impossibility of any fundamental change make me think about the sober assessment of Leo Tolstoy as recorded in his short poem (below). I propose making Footprint Justice an issue in 2018, effectively! We are still so far from **Rights for All**. We urgently need to stop further degradation of our planet now and to realize *Fair Earth Shares*. Maybe we need to pursue legal action again, like the case for climate action won by the Dutch foundation Urgenda (although being appealed) and the other lawsuits around the world..

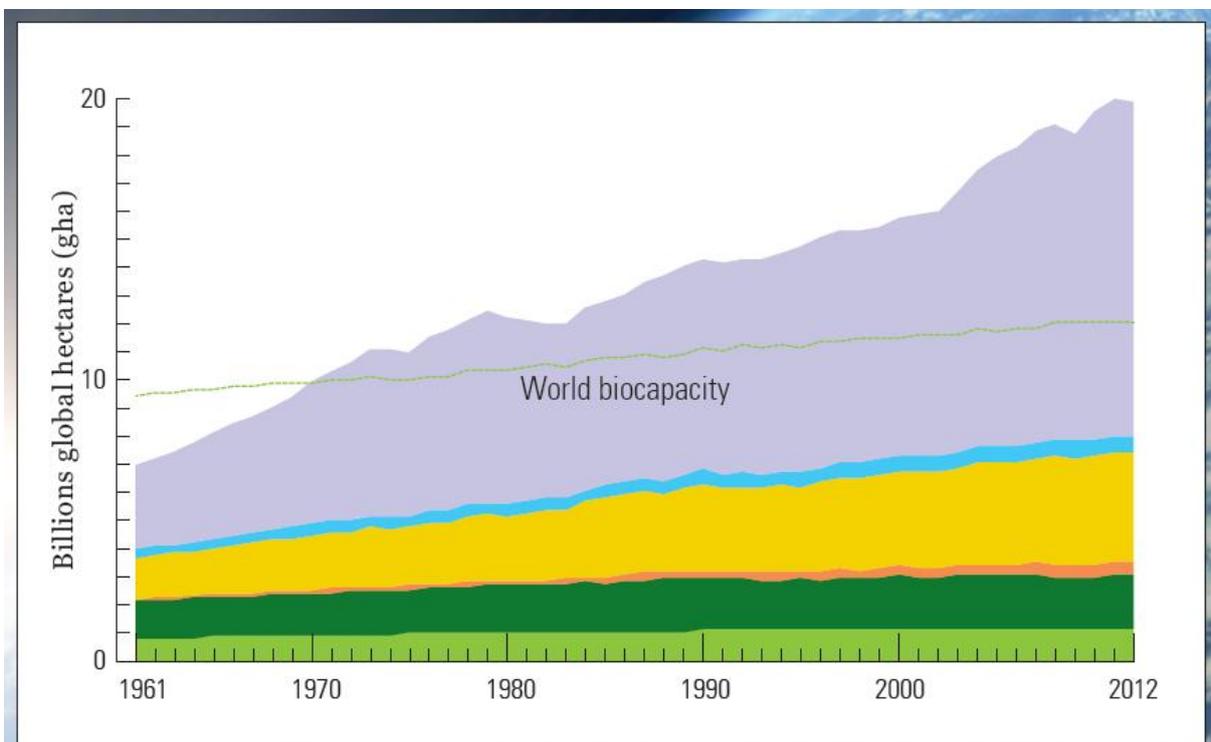
*I sit on a man's back,
choking him, and making him carry me,
and yet assure myself and others
that I am very sorry for him
and wish to ease his lot
by any means possible,
except getting off his back.*

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910)



Crossing the Sustainability Barrier

This graph from the 'Living Planet Report 2016' shows the quick growth of the Global Footprint of the more than 7.5 billion people now on our small planet. Around 1970 we crossed the 'sustainability barrier' or level of the biocapacity of planet Earth. From top to bottom we see the light purple layer that is the Carbon Footprint, the blue line is the Fishing Footprint, the yellow part is the Arable Land Footprint, the orange line is the Footprint of Buildings and Roads, the dark green area is the Forest Footprint, the light green bottom layer is the Meadow Footprint. This graph makes clear that far more than half of our Global Footprint is associated with damage to our climate.



Global Ecological Footprint Human demand on the biosphere more than doubled between 1961 and 2012 (Global Footprint Network, 2016)

