



Fluid Thoughts

WRC CEO, Dhesigen Naidoo

2016 – Year of the Monkey

There was much hope for an *Annus Mirabilis* or miracle year in 2015.

In the run up to 2015, the United Nations system and most of the global Community of Nations fell into step with the idea of 2015 delivering the Big Three with respect to the global sustainable development agenda. This was embraced with an enthusiasm not seen since Rio 1992.

The run up to and preparation for the Big Three had been surprisingly convergent, and the spirits were high. The first step was the International Conference on Finance for Development (ICFD). This forum was going to be explicit on innovative and creative financial mechanisms for global development. And, but being held in Africa for the first time, in the capital hosting the African Union – Addis Ababa, it provoked an optimism that the North was finally going to make good on the long ignored commitment on ODA targets.

The second step was the Summit of world leaders to engage the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at UN headquarters in New York in September. The SDGs taking heart from the successes of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was going to plot the global plan to attain a global eradication of poverty and ensure universal access to all basic services by 2030.

The third of the Big Three was of course COP 21 in Paris in December 2015. For the first time since Kyoto was there a sniff, indeed an alluring fragrance, of a global deal for climate change and carbon emissions with major movements from China, India and the USA in the preparatory talks. The clinching of this Big Three would indeed have organised for 2015's place in history as the miracle year for sustainable development.

Alas the reality bites of global economic contraction, the diversion of resources to global conflicts – in particular those under the banner of “the war on terror”, the structure of a global economy within which a high energy intensive industrial strategy remains the growth pathway of choice; all collectively ensured that the Big Three could not live up to its initial promise.

We had to settle for diluted outcomes. We can, however, claim an *annus mirabilis minor*. We could not collectively secure the more ambitious climate change deal, and the means of

implementation seem to be still locked in the debt capital paradigm with the Development Banks front and centre, and the rhetoric of domestic capital mobilisation punted as the paramount mechanisms. This is not particularly encouraging in a global austerity climate.

Still we have had a convergence of traditionally disparate political and ideological blocks to the point where we are at least agreed philosophically on our analysis of the global sustainable development challenge. We have universally accepted that human development choices and our carbon dependent economic growth paradigm are the major influencers of global climate change. And we collectively agree and accept that anthropogenically generated carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions are the major contributors to global warming. This is a big movement in the dialogue and one worthy of celebration.

The question is how we could use this *minor miracle* to catalyse a Great Leap Forward in 2016. As is characteristic of the 2016 mascot, the monkey, we have to be clever, very strategic, work as a team and perhaps have just the right spicing of simian mischief to make it all come together.

Team Water South Africa will be using the opportunities for scaling up of the game-changers like the Purple Pipe Revolution (reuse and recycling), New Sanitation and the War on Leaks to, in addition to the diversification of supply measures, increase both the water security status of the country and the region. This should not only make available the water we require to enable the achievement of the water and sanitation SDGs, but also make water available to enable further economic growth and empower more new entrants into the formal economy.

We will also do this from a scientifically sound and cutting edge technology enabled perspective that uses less energy with a radically diminished carbon footprint. We have a collective duty to ensure that Ma Dlamini not only has access to safe water and dignified sanitation, but it must be done in a manner that ensures that her great-grandchildren inherit from this generation a Planet Earth that is healthy and nurturing because we have enabled a sustainable development pathway.