Climate protection is now! But on its own it’s not enough

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It's not only Greta Thunberg or Fridays for Future that made it clear that we must respect our planet's limits. Sustainable development is more than just environment and climate protection; it is the guiding principle of our world and considers the environment, the economy and social affairs as equal and interconnected.

In 2015, 196 countries joined the Paris Climate Agreement to limit global warming average increase to well below 2°C, with a maximum temperature increase of 1.5 °C, comparable with pre-industrial times.

That same year, 169 countries signed the 2030 Agenda that outlines the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which are intended to guide world politics towards sustainable development. But while almost a third of the time has elapsed to achieve the 2030 SDGs, very few people even know them. Only ten percent of the population is actually taking action to ensure sustainability.

We're simply not yet on the right path to sustainability, and further blaming and shaming won't take away the fact that, for example, airlines around the world now carry more people than ever before - more than 4 billion passengers per year. This is happening even though more than 90 percent of all people in the world have never boarded a plane.

Zurich Airport also achieved a new record last year. More than 31 million passengers flew through Zurich Airport in 2018, almost 6% more than in the previous year, and the trend is increasing.
It's true that the main concern for climate protectionists is the reduction of CO2 emissions. But the figures on air transport alone suggest that a more comprehensive approach is needed for sustainable development. And that's why climate protection alone is just not enough.

The final statement of this year's G20 summit included the 2030 Agenda and the commitment to pursue sustainable development. However, more is definitely needed to boost it, as demonstrated by the mediocre interim results presented at this year's UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York in September.

At the current pace, even the most progressive countries in northern Europe won't achieve the SDGs by 2030. Indeed, the consumer behaviour of the rich industrialised countries [SDG 12] in particular is the subject of criticism. The UN has warned that without a better performance of the G20, which is responsible for 75 percent of global CO2 emissions, the agenda's aim won't be achieved.

If, as forecasted, the world's population increases from 7.1 billion to 9.7 billion by 2050, humans and the planet will face many challenges. Asia's rise will undoubtedly also lead to a higher energy demand, more consumption and production. This could undo the progress we have made on climate protection, on a global scale.

A "Green New Deal" has now been called for in order to make the EU climate neutral by 2050. However, a great deal of capital is needed for the transition to an economic model that focuses on resources and the environment. For that reason, the financial sector as a whole must support sustainability. To this end, the European Commission has recently presented the first legal framework that is now being put to a vote. It focuses on sustainable objectives to spark transformation and innovation.

For this to happen, a public discussion on a broader approach to sustainability is necessary. It should not be a look back to the 'Eco-agenda' but rather an aim to implement overdue reforms to enhance economic transformation, climate protection and innovation, so that we can continue to live well, and also offer the future generations of our planet a good life.