



It is with great pleasure that I once again have the privilege of being able to reflect on the past year as the Chairman of WESSA. In doing so, I have revisited, in my thinking, the 'signs' I have seen along the road we have been travelling on, and they have confirmed that we *are* well and truly on the right path in our core business.

In 2014, a study led by the University of Washington and the United Nations found that "world population is likely to keep growing throughout the 21st century. The number of people on Earth is likely to reach 11 billion" by the end of the century. Adrian Raftery, a UW professor of statistics and of sociology stated "We found there's a 70 percent probability the world population will not stabilize this century. Population, which had sort of fallen off the world's agenda, remains a very important issue. Most of the anticipated growth is in Africa, where population is projected to quadruple from around 1 billion today to 4 billion by the end of the century. The main reason is that birth rates in sub-Saharan Africa have not been going down as fast as had been expected. Other regions of the world are projected to see less change. Asia, now 4.4 billion, is projected to peak at around 5 billion people in 2050 and then begin to decline. Populations in North America, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean are projected to stay below 1 billion each."

I have always believed rampant human population growth lies at the root of much of the misery that exists in the world today. I am always perplexed as to the apparent broad paralysis that exists in addressing this matter by world bodies and governments. Man is singularly destroying the environment and most other creatures on this planet – which always have to give way to making room for more people and their needs. In our own country, highly visible family planning programmes (such as the one that was implemented by Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma when she was the Minister of Health) have dropped off the radar. Instead we have a Child Grant system being used whereby poorly educated young girls, with little hope of securing employment, are having children in order to secure a semblance of income, with all the social, economic and ultimately environmental ills that are the natural consequence, and perpetuating increasing unemployment and poverty levels. The topic has to start being addressed seriously in our country and globally. A logical look at the current trend informs us clearly that it cannot end well for anyone. There are clear signposts of where it's all heading.

I remember many years ago when the Western Cape Region had their AGM, I was invited down to speak at the event together with a long acquaintance of mine Clem Sunter. He, characteristically, clearly articulated that in the process of scenario planning, (for which he has become so well known), one cannot ascertain for certain the final outcome, but one can gain a rather clear picture from the signs along the way, as to the destination one is heading towards.

As a strategist in my professional capacity, I am continually aware of the principle that if you want to secure different results, you have to do things differently. Most of us instinctively or consciously know that, but many people and organisations fail to start making the necessary changes to achieve the new

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results required. I remember at that time looking at the signposts and they were clearly indicating that WESSA had to start doing things differently. WESSA did not have a sustainable funding model, membership numbers, fees and bequests could not be relied on from a financial risk perspective; the administrative and financial decentralisation model of WESSA was no longer effective in a vastly changed world where corporate governance and accounting standards had also, with the advent of the King Code on Corporate Governance, lifted to a whole new level.

The Board had resolved to centralise all accounting functions, as well as the management of staff and to begin with a new drive towards professionalism in the implementation of our new Mission. The new Mission would be to *'implement high impact environmental and conservation projects that promote public participation in caring for the Earth'*.

Upon reflection, and especially in the past 3 years, WESSA has undergone radical transformation. In order for this to happen, we knew we had to secure a CEO who had deep knowledge of complex project management, be able to remove the 'noise' and allow staff to concentrate on our core business, optimise our staff utilisation, improve on desired outcomes set by funders and partners, and grow our track record. This then to be done by creating a team of executives and senior management that were sound, both in competence and character. The transformation internally has been substantial and highly beneficial – our staff have had their abilities and skills elevated, our systems and processes have been radically improved, utilisation of resources and funds has been hugely optimised – all aspects that make us more appealing to funders, donors and partners.

Added to the above, Catherine Ritchie, the Marketing Manager, is admirably depicting the new WESSA – our branding, website, media flashes, social media platforms, etc all have the very distinct WESSA look and its speaks of the highly professional organisation we have become. This was so necessary if we were to survive in the modern world where expertise, effective and quick decision making, integrity and professionalism are requisite cornerstones for success and where an organisations' most visible presence is on the internet and in social media.

The result of all of these improvements are detailed in the CEO's report and the Financial reports. The large projects we have secured are clearly based on the *trust* that the funders have in WESSA. Group General Funds have risen (rounded to the closest million) from **R 18m in 2005 to R 46m in 2015 (155% increase)**, and Group Specific Funds from **R 11m to R 61m (454% increase)**. I believe the figures tell a strong story for themselves.

Over the next 2 years, the Board will continue to transform itself. We have made admirable progress on EE appointees to the Board and it is the Boards intention to secure additional EE appointments over the next year and the year thereafter. We now intend to have a stronger external focus and have a plan in place to start opening doors into the corporate world for funding partners. Membership structures are also making a concerted effort to revitalise membership and this is now starting to show signs of real progress across the country. A huge thank you to the 'Friends of WESSA' as well – thousands of little actions all helping to make a difference.

I want to acknowledge the CEO Dr Thommie Burger, for the manner in which he handled the changes within WESSA. Changes had to be made, and he as the CEO had to implement them. This often involved actions that did not make him popular with staff, or which created fear – as change always does – but he had the fortitude to do what was needed to be done in the first years of his tenure and now in this past year he has forged strong and positive working relationships with his team. It is my belief that many of them have found the channelling of their passion into effective ways of doing their work, and thereby also contributing to the sustainability of WESSA, rather invigorating. The CEO expects nothing but the best from his team and I believe this is what he is now getting from them. As Chairman, I have expected the same of the CEO and I want to acknowledge his success in transforming WESSA into a far fitter runner for the race we find ourselves in.

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I congratulate our CFO, Shelley Short, and her finance team, who for the first time, certainly in the 14 years I have been on the WESSA Board, ensured that not only did we have accurate financials and a seamless audit completed in time, but had everything prepared several weeks in advance! I thank our non-executive director of finance who is also chairman of our Finance and Risk Committee (FIRCOM), Andre Steyn for his support in this process as well.

To the Vice-Chairperson Dianne Perrett, who has been my deputy over all the years of my Chairmanship (and who is now stepping off and making way for an EE appointee to assist our EE strategy) – Dianne, you have been such a support; responsive, insightful, caring and always with positive energy that I personally really needed on many occasions; I cannot adequately express enough my gratitude and that of the Board for what you have done over all these years. You have played a significant role in keeping me strong over such a long time. We have been honoured by your commitment and look forward to your ongoing support of WESSA in other ways into the future.

To the members of EXCO, particularly Mike Ward and Jim Taylor, I extend the Board's thanks for their efforts over this past year as well as your participation on the Board.

To the Patrons – thank you for your Patronage – we trust that you will be proud of the association you have with us.

To the Board – it is a privilege to walk this journey of WESSA with you. Each of you brings a particular strength to the Board and I believe that the WESSA Board is currently an extremely effective and professional one, where the CEO receives sound advice, high level debate, and considered thought on the very many and varied decisions that have to be taken. To the new members of the Board, a special welcome and thanks for taking up the challenge.

To all staff – I know it's been a rough ride but you have been resolute and brave and hard-working – and as long as that continues, stakeholders will continue to see the value in WESSA. Thanks to each and every one of you.

I extend my thanks to all the members of WESSA for their ongoing support. I urge that we continue to grow the mindset that, actually, only *you* can take care of matters in your locality; so take up the challenge, rally others around you to join you in caring for your local bit of the earth and help grow WESSA's circle of influence across the country. Caring for the earth is exhilarating and I believe it is our duty to do so in every little way we can.

Finally, to our local and international funders and partners, WESSA continues to commit itself to honouring its agreements by implementing its projects in time, at due quality and within budget to the very best of its ability, thereby honouring your trust in us.

I remain as convinced as ever that our thrust of wide-spread environmental education remains the best way to bring about behaviour change in our society in order to create the understanding as to why we have to start caring for the Earth, now more than ever before.

Thank you



Dr Richard Lewis
Chairman of the Board