

Transcript of 'Prioritising Planetary Health'

Season 3, Episode 32, Transforming Tomorrow

[Theme music]

Paul: Hello and welcome to Transforming Tomorrow from the Pentland Centre for Sustainability in Business. I'm Paul Turner.

Jan: And I'm Professor Jan Bebbington.

[Theme music]

Jan: Today we're talking about ways businesses and governments can prioritise planetary health. And at the same time, what do you think of making sustainability courses compulsory in all universities?

[Theme music]

Paul: How's your health, Jan?

Jan: Uh, well, um, given my age, it's not so bad. I could do things to make it better though.

Paul: What could you do?

Jan: Um, diet.

Paul: Diet. Ah, but you don't want to. [Jan laughs] Is that, is that it?

Jan: Well, it's tricky, isn't it? Because you get into habits, you get into ways of living and, um, and changing those habits are quite hard, even though you know in the longer term it's probably going to be good for you.

Paul: Yes. My, uh, godmother was around our house a couple of days ago because it was my son's birthday and she was there and she's got type two diabetes. And what she said is there's a way that she could possibly get rid of her type two diabetes, I'm no medical expert, I can't exactly understand how, but it would involve eliminating almost all the things that she likes eating from her diet.

Jan: Yeah, but then don't you think some of the things we like eating, we've been talked into liking eating? And of course, you know, at, at our base level,

you know, we love sugar, we love fats, we love all these things. And so as a result, we've kind of been acculturated into a diet that does create, you know, problems.

Paul: Yeah. But at the same time, wouldn't life be really dull if all you were eating was brown rice?

Jan: [laughs] I don't think it's between...

Paul: ...no, no, that's it, that's the options.

Jan: [laughs] Uh, a chocolate cake diet or brown rice, there's maybe something in the middle...

Paul: ...there's not though...

Jan: ...I'm just saying...

Paul: ...there's nothing in between. There's no such thing as a balanced diet. [Jan laughs].

The, the reason I ask is we're talking about individual health there, but I want to take it to a bigger scale. And I don't want to take it to the health of Lancaster, I don't want to take it to the health of England, I don't want to take it to the health of the United Kingdom, of Europe. I want to take it to a

Jan: ...ooh, that's a, it's a big scale change, so...

Paul: ...it is, yes. And if we're getting the whole world to eat just brown rice, then I suggest there's going to be a brown rice shortage.

Jan: There is, which is why my middle ground is the sensible answer.

Paul: I can't believe no one's ever thought of this before.

Jan: Well, there you have it.

Paul: Yes. But when we're talking about planetary health, we're not necessarily talking about people's diets.

Jan: Not just, I think.

Paul: Not just, no. There may be more to it than that.

Jan: Exactly.

Paul: Yes. And shall we talk to someone who maybe knows a little bit more about planetary health than we do when it comes to this?

Jan: [laughs] Who knows a great deal more about planetary health than we do.

Paul: I daresay who knows a great deal more about a healthy diet as well...

Jan: ...yes...

Paul: ...than, uh, than we do. Yes, yeah, when it comes to experts on that particular area, we are not the ones to speak to.

So let's bring in someone who is the Executive Director of the Planetary Health Centre at Sunway University in Malaysia, our old friends there, just outside Kuala Lumpur. She's a medical professional, there you go. Two decades of experience managing crises in health.

Do you feel you're in a health crisis at the minute?

Jan: Not yet.

Paul: Do you feel you're in some kind of disaster at the moment?

Jan: Not yet.

Paul: Uh, are you in conflict apart from with me?

Jan: No. [laughs]

Paul: Right. Okay, uh, that's it. So they're the three areas that she specialises in, but apparently not helping you with your dietary needs, never mind.

Uh, her previous appointments include serving as the Special Advisor on Public Health to the Prime Minister of Malaysia during the Covid pandemic. She's also the founder of Mercy Malaysia, which is a leading humanitarian organisation from the Global South. That's quite a CV.

Jan: I was, um, I've, I've met her, I guess. She's fantastic and amazing.

Paul: Well, we can all meet our guest now. We will say welcome to Professor Jemilah Mahmood. Hello, Jemilah.

Jemilah: Hello, everyone.

Paul: Before we get started on the serious topic, a diet of just brown rice, would you recommend that, as a physician?

Jemilah: Oh, absolutely not.

[Everyone laughs]

Paul: You're my kind of doctor. And, and Jan's idea though of a balanced diet, that just seems preposterous.

Jemilah: No, I think it is possible. I think that there are many reasons why, uh, you need to eat well. Um, you know, I'm a Malaysian. We live to eat and not eat to live...

Jan: ...that's right...

Jemilah: ...so we, we, um, we like our food, but we also need to eat properly and well so that not only are, we are healthy, but also the planet and future generations will also be protected.

Paul: See, uh, the, just bringing it right from scale of you, so you having a diet that protects the planet, Jan, that's what you need to do...

Jan: ...yeah...

Paul: ...a diet that protects the planet.

Jan: Uh, and it, and we'll put some, uh, elements in the show notes that sort of lays out some of the debates in those areas.

Paul: Yes. Yeah, because there's lots to consider there...

Jan: ...there is...

Paul: ...there really is.

So yo get us started, Jemilah, can you tell us a little bit about your background and how this has led you to be interested in planetary health?

Jemilah: Right. So I, um, I've always lived in Malaysia. Uh, I grew up here, went to university here. Uh, I did medicine. I specialise in obstetrics and gynaecology, and then later on, more, I would say 15,000 babies later, I decided that I needed to go from hospital setting to a setting where, uh, people who were most vulnerable ,were impacted by, um, conflict and disasters, um, and how their health, uh, was, um, important and how you would meet their needs.

So that's how I, uh, ventured into the humanitarian and development field. Now, the health sector writ large is very much a, um, preventive health, you know, curative, therapeutic. Um, but when I was working in many of the crises, and I can tell you so many stories, but one particular that I will, I, I guess was the tipping point for me to shift my career was, uh, in Mozambique.

In the year 2000, there was a terrible flood in Mozambique and at the time I was watching it on television and every single, uh, international media was showing, uh, the image of a woman clinging on to a, on the top of a tree, uh, with her baby in one arm, um, and which she had just delivered on the tree and waiting for, um, South African rescue helicopter to pick her up.

And I was so affected by that because, as an obstetrician and gynaecologist, I know how challenging it is for a woman to give birth, let alone give birth on her own on a tree clinging onto her dear life, um, with crocodiles and rising flood waters below her.

And that image lived with me for such a long time that I became a little bit obsessed, to be honest, and I started looking at all the media channels that were talking about her, and I followed her life history.

Uh, she had been a victim of, uh, gender-based violence. Her daughter, whose name is Rosita, grew up into this beautiful young woman who wants to be an engineer, and, uh, and I thought, you know, women shouldn't have to live like that.

Now, fast forward 2019, I was in Mozambique this time, and it, it was just after a flood, and I had gone there to bring some donors, uh, and some of our, uh, staff, uh, at, uh, in my capacity as the Under Secretary General for the International Federation Red Cross to look at our programmes post-flood in, um, a, a place in Mozambique.

As I approached them, and talked to the nurses and the communities and children who were playing, I then reflect, lamented to one of the midwives to say, "Gosh, you know, I never imagine I would ever come to Mozambique because this is a place that really affected me looking at this." And I recall the story of this woman who gave birth on the tree.

And she just smiled at me and she said, "Well, doctor, um, the boy you were playing with, his mother had to give birth on a tree, uh, with this recent flood." And I, that hit me so hard. How, how is it that 19 years later, things were just as bad, things had not change, you know, there's an underlying systemic failure on health equity and access. Uh, and as, as always, you know, women are, are most vulnerable, uh, in these situations.

So that was 2019 and very shortly after the pandemic happened, Covid-19. So I started to look at things from systems perspectives and planetary health was

emerging, it is a new field, so to speak, that, uh, came out in 2015 when a group of scientists and, and physicians came together, uh, to say, "We need to look beyond just public health because it's not just about communities and health, it's about how everything is connected."

And the health of human civilisation is very much dependent on the natural systems on which it depends. And this means our environment and so forth, right?

But at the heart of it, planetary health is really about equity and justice. It's about political systems, about economic systems, it's about values, spirituality, if you like, faith. Things that actually change behaviours and the choices that we make, uh, because health, you know, the determinants of health, 80% of them are outside the health sector.

And until and unless we look at health from a systems perspective, we will always be putting band-aid on gaping wounds, and that really hurt me in a way...

Paul: ...mm-hmm...

Jemilah: ...um, and I decided then that I would study more about planetary health, and lo and behold, the pandemic happened, which is in itself a planetary health crisis.

When you have a loss of biodiversity, development that is haphazard, when, you know, animals, wildlife come into contact with human beings, you know, wildlife will always carry viruses, but they don't leak to human systems because they don't come into close proximity.

But when we remove the environment and the protective barriers, when they are deprived of the food systems that they, they depend on, they need to move closer to, to where food might be available, and that could be urban settings. And of course, you know, widespread travel and so forth.

So it's come full circle for me to realise that was fantastic for me to do humanitarian work and serving people in need, uh, in crisis for 20 over years, when I now need to go down to where the systems have failed and that's planetary health.

Jan: And that term, planetary health, uh, is quite similar to another one I've heard, which is the One Health agenda.

Jemilah: ...mm-hmm...

Jan: ...are these the same things? And, and if they are, can you tell us a bit more about each of those component parts of those agendas?

Jemilah: Sure. Before I do that, I will say that I'm one of those who's not wedded to, to terminologies and I don't have an ego large enough to want to only protect the term planetary health.

There is a fundamental difference. One health arose because of the realisation of zoonotic transmissions and zoonotic leaks to hum- humans. And it was about bringing the environmental, uh, organisations and agencies, uh, and ministries to work closer with health authorities to realise that if you don't have a safe environment, then you would have, uh, animal to human transmission of diseases.

So essentially, One Health came out of a need to look at infectious diseases. Planetary health, on the other hand, um, and of course, One Health has evolved now to become a little bit more than planetary health, out of necessity, but planetary health was really looking at it from a systems point of view.

And it, and about, and as I mentioned, the whole issue around interconnectedness and that breaking the silos will be required, and really creating a, a powerful narrative that it is human behaviour that is actually changing the face of the world, but also changing the health of humans and everything on its, um, on this planet.

Jan: That's a really useful distinction and one that I wasn't aware of. So I think our listeners will find that really interesting.

So when you're saying breaking the silos, um, could you tell us about those silos and, and how they relate to each other in a, in a systems way?

Jemilah: Okay. Let's take, uh, put, putting, uh, I, I've described the infectious disease and zoonotic leaks, but let's take something concrete like another example. Uh, let's talk about climate change.

So when we talk about climate change, uh, we also have to look at it, at it from a broader perspective, and you may be familiar or may not be familiar with the concept of planetary boundaries.

Now, planetary boundaries obviously is very much linked to planetary health because there's only so much that the planet can, you know, tolerate in terms of how, uh, we cross safe limits for humanity. And in 2009, Rockström and his colleagues at the Stockholm Resilience Centre described the nine planetary boundaries. Water, emissions, biodiversity, ozone layers, pollutants in the air, and so on.

When he first described it only three planetary boundaries were crossed. As of now, seven of the nine boundaries have been crossed, which means we're living dangerously. That has led to global warming, um, acidification of the ocean and warming of the oceans, uh, loss of, um, uh, green spaces has led to us not being able to absorb the CO₂, uh, that is being produced. Uh, also, emissions from pollutants, uh, are affecting health.

So if you look at climate change itself, climate change cannot just be dealt with by the environment ministry. It, it is a, a whole gamut of different issues. So climate change happens because our rising emissions, growing population, growing demands of energy. But the one that, the elephant in the room is actually our addiction to fossil fuels.

So until we actually look at, you know, uh, the fossil fuel industry's refusal to transform and, uh, transition quickly, and the dependency on fossil fuels, we will always be putting band-aid, right? We'll always be treating people for the impact of climate change. We'll always be having seven to eight million deaths, uh, premature deaths a year because of air pollution.

We are now seeing, um, you know, the impact of heat, uh, in communities, but, uh, really affecting every community. And it, and for people in Asia, it's not just a heatwave in summer. It's the everyday heat that we live with.

We're seeing sea level rise because of the melting ice caps, uh, and glaciers and what's happening is coastal communities, particularly in the Pacific, in Bangladesh, who contribute so little to emissions, uh, getting the, uh, worst impact.

And here comes the whole question of equity, and why is it that people who do the least to damage the planet are suffering the worst, and the rest of the world's not doing enough for them?

So this is why, you know, I'm passionate about planetary health. It's about connecting the dots, if you like, and saying that until and unless we tackle

some of these big elephants in the room, until and unless we raise, you know, the importance of justice, of rights, um, the fact that every human being deserves a life with dignity, which means good health, good clean air, clean water, um, a right to natural green spaces, you know, a mental health right, um, to live in a world that you don't have to worry about a flood or pollution, uh, and other terrible things that happen. I think this is why, uh, you know, that systems approach is very important.

And talking about food, since we started with food. [Jan and Paul laugh] We talked about, uh, we talk a lot about fossil fuels and missions and so forth, but the second largest emitter is actually our agricultural systems. Because we have a great demand for food like rice, uh, you know, which was not the staple food of people in the UK for many, many years, but lately, you know, has become a global food source.

So which means the more food you need, the more you have to clear land, the more meat you eat, the more you have to also have grazing, uh, and large scale farms, which not only, uh, reduced by, uh, it's reduced by diversity and, and, and greenery, but also cause methane emissions, the use of fertilisers that actually then contribute to phosphorous and nitrogen, uh, which is part of our planet boundaries and so forth.

So how interconnected things are. So, you know, why a planetary health diet becomes really important, a diet that helps you, but also helps the planet.

Paul: I'm glad to see more arguments against my, everyone should just eat brown rice. That's a very, very, very key thing. But you brought this passion then, Jemilah, to the Centre for Planetary Health at Sunway.

Jemilah: ...yeah...

Paul: What is the centre driving for? What are your ambitions?

Jemilah: Yeah. So, um, the Centre turns five in August. We're very young, but we've, I think, achieved quite a lot.

Uh, I came in, uh, really to create an ecosystem of, uh, new thinking, uh, innovation, collaboration, um, really looking at how, as an academic institution, which is the University, the different centres and the different faculties now need to work together to realise that whoever we produce, uh, whether it's, whatever we produce, whether it's research or whoever we produce, which is graduates from the university and postgraduates, they have

to understand the interconnectedness of the world we live, and that education must really be for the betterment of not just our lives, but future humanity as well.

So the Centre, if you like, is a little bit of a 'think and do tank'. We're a little bit of a disruptor, I would say. Um, we work with other schools and faculties to say, "Well, what new economic models are going to bring us this justice? What is the measurement of growth that we need to, to actually look at? Maybe it's not GDP. What is our role in, creating, uh, young people, uh, or rather, nurturing young people who will know their rights and how to argue for that?"

So, uh, so we have, um, basically, three drivers, uh, for our work, governance, communication, and one of the other one is an education revolution. So really looking at education in a different way.

Um, primarily because of my previous work, um, not just, uh, as a doctor, but also as someone who's worked in public service before, as an advisor to government, somebody who's worked in the United Nations, international organisations, but also, um, a mother, a grandmother [clears throat] and somebody who believes passionately about intergenerational justice.

What we've also been able to do is really bridge the knowledge- policy gap. And translating science because often knowledge is so poorly communicated, and research is really to raise your H scores, but not really to create impact on society.

So this is where we are pushing, you know, the University and pushing the boundaries to do that. And I must say that, um, I think because we are persistent, uh, we have been able to convince the University to become the first university in the world, I believe, that has made planetary health mandatory for undergraduates. That they cannot graduate from university without completing a seven-week course on planetary health and community service.

So, um, whether you're studying engineering or culinary arts or medicine, you need to know what planetary health and sustainability is. You need to be able to apply knowledge that you're studying through that lens. And, um, and we've also been able to work closely with the Academy of Science and the Ministry of Science.

Malaysia has now just this year, uh, uh, end of last year, actually, launched what we also believe to be the first Planetary Health Action Plan in Malaysia. And the new higher education and educational transformation blueprint has now built sustainability and planetary health, not just from kindergarten to year 12, but also in all tertiary institutions of learning.

So the education revolution that I mentioned.

Paul: So what kind of expertise do you have across the Centre then? You've got yourself there with your medical professional background...

Jemilah: ...mm-hmm...

Paul: ...working in governance, et cetera. What other kind of people do you have involved in the Centre?

Jemilah: Yeah. For planetary health to work, we have to be transdisciplinary. And we don't need to have all the expertise in our Centre, we need to work with others. For example, we are working with the Future Cities Institute in, uh, Lancaster, Lancaster, Sunway, it is based in Sunway, but as you know, we have a very close collaboration with Lancaster.

Uh, we work with the medical school, we work with the engineering school, and others. But essentially in my 30 people team, uh, it started with three people, now we're 30. Um, here are a couple of doctors. We have some biodiversity experts. We have someone who specialises in listening to birds and bioacoustics and being able to tell the health of the city or the forests from bird sounds, uh, and how that's gonna impact, uh, human health as well.

We have an economist, we have science, um, scientists, pure scientists, we have communications experts, uh, we have people who understand, uh, policy, uh, policy experts. And we have young people who understand what young people need, and what young people need to, uh, engage with and be excited about.

So our programmes are very, very varied, uh, from hardcore research on pollution and health to teaching young people how to look at policies and how to practice diplomacy.

So we do diplomacy training for young people, we take them to World Health Assembly, we send them to intergovernmental meetings, we accompany them, we teach them how to do elevator pitches, we teach them how to argue with, um, ministers and international organisations to make their case.

Um, so really the soft skills are often missed, uh, when you educate someone in a university. Often it's very hardcore subjects, you know, which we're not even sure they use it when they graduate, but really putting values, uh, communication, uh, and the importance of transdisciplinary collaboration, uh, in among the students as well.

Jan: And, um, this podcast loves Malaysia. I mean, [laughs] we've, we've visited a couple of times and really enjoyed our time there.

And I, I think you're absolutely right that the Malaysian, uh, National Planetary Health Action Plan is the, the only one I've ever seen. And there might be other ones out there in the world. So, dear listeners, if you know of more, tell us, but that Malaysian initiative is just so important and so advanced.

So in general terms, um, and we'll put a link through to the plan and, um, the shownotes, what's in that plan? What kind of things is, is the Malaysian government seeking to champion?

Jemilah: Yeah. So basically, what it's seeking to champion, you know, is a, a prosperous nation, that healthy people, uh, a value-centric and humanity-centric approach. Economic development that recognises the importance of protecting our planetary boundaries, and also looking at it to several pillars and several shifts that need to happen.

One, the most important obviously is governance. What kind of governance models do we need to have? How do we make sure that as we talk about planetary health being transdisciplinary, working in governments and in institutions also needs to be also across, um, across, you know, disciplines, across ministries and so forth.

Uh, as I mentioned before, the determinants of health, 80% are outside the health sector. So you can't talk about pollution and health without talking to the health and transport ministry, uh, without making sure that, you know, uh, people have access to, uh, transport to get to work. Uh, people are protected against heat at the same time.

Uh, looking at food systems, how do you make sure that, you know, not only are you getting nutrition and nourishment, but also that you aren't in the process also destroying the planet. Choosing wisely what is healthy for you as a nation with a very high incidence of non-communicable diseases, what kind of diets would suit you, what kind of activity suits you?

Now for Malaysia, you know, uh, is getting warmer and warmer and, uh, one of the challenges with being in the tropics is that it's too hot for me to exercise. Whereas we know, exercise is probably the most effective way to cool down. So how do we now, you know, really build in this holistic approach to health?

Um, so I think that the plan has not just governance, but also key areas, results, results areas, uh, that we're looking at, which are health, environment, you know, economic, economic development, education, and so forth, but also looking at how do we, we have developed an accountability framework, uh, a genomic database, environmental genomic database, and then, you know, being able to track that, uh, but also, you know, demonstrate, um, progress and call out non-progress, but also telling the story right to get, you know, people to value, uh, health and the, and the planet.

Uh, and for that to happen, you know, behaviour change will be critical. So I think one of the areas, one of the pillars is culture, values and behavioural change. Because we can bring the science to people. It's not going to change policy.

We, things change when you feel that you have a stake in it. And for that to happen, number one, your story and your narrative has to be compelling. Your economic argument is solid. The understanding of social dynamics, geopolitics becomes very critical.

The health impacts for sure, but the benefits of actually doing this right. The benefits to economy, the benefits to development, the benefits to society. And very importantly, I speak a lot about this, the benefits to intergenerational justice.

Paul: So how does business have a stake in this then...?

Jemilah: ...yeah...

Paul: ...how are businesses affected by the plan that there is in Malaysia and what they might be able to do? You've mentioned the various different aspects and how it fits in with health, around transport, other industries, food systems, and that's gonna involve...

Jemilah: ...yeah...

Paul: ...a lot of businesses...

Jemilah: ...sure.

Paul: What's going on for them and what they might be doing and how they might be changing?

Jemilah: We, you know, the University, one of the sections in our University did a survey of more than 2,000 companies. Now, Malaysia is a high-middle income country, aspiring to be a high-income country, but our economy, you know, 70 to 80, 80%, I would say, of our economy is driven by small medium enterprise.

So we're talking about the, the supply chains, um, in, in the business world. And, uh, we know that in business, the most critical and most difficult area to resolve is the Scope Three emissions. And that really is about talking about small medium enterprise, you know, your supply chain and so forth.

So for this, we have developed something, uh, called for businesses to not look at return of investment, but looking at return on value. Value to business, value to society, value to the planet. Uh, when we did this survey, almost all, the majority of the companies that were surveyed said, "Yes, we know this is important. Yes, you know, the environment needs protection. Yes, climate change is real, we're worried about it. But we don't know how to, to go about this."

So it's my very clever colleagues in another Centre that has developed something called a ARAI framework for businesses that will actually get them to understand how they can tweak the strategies in their business to be pro-planet, pro-people, still make a profit, and being able to demonstrate to them that if they don't do it now, the risk [clears throat] to, uh, their future economic development of nation, as well as business, is going to be, is going to be terrible, right?

Because right now, businesses look at very short-term gains, shareholder value, rather than looking at, you know, stakeholder value. It's not just your shareholders, it's also the public, um, [clears throat] the nation, uh, that is developing.

So, um, it's interesting that we've started this now about a year, uh, engaging with, I think, 30 companies or so. Uh, and we've been able to, we've been able to see some of them saying, "Gosh, now we know what to do" and to tweak their strategies and they still make money, but they do it in a way that's thinking a bit more long-term.

Jan: Yeah. So, I mean, you're so energetic. I mean, it, it makes me feel like a slow poke, which I really like, just that energy and enthusiasm...

Paul: ...when I say things like this to you, you have a go at me. When you say it about yourself, it's fine, is it?

Jan: ... [laughs] something like that...

Paul: ...ah, ha ha...

Jan: ...something like that.

So what, what's next on your agenda in this area? What's next for you?

Jemilah: I think for the Centre, we need to consolidate. We want, uh, with this national Planetary Health Action Plan, you know, we are almost like the reference point for the nation now.

Other universities are coming to us to guide, we are developing the curriculum for the nation together with the Ministry of Higher Education. This is very exciting. We're also developing, uh, you know, systems thinking into, embedding systems thinking into the whole planetary health agenda, because it really is about systems thinking.

And then, uh, you know, going beyond Malaysia to the region and just before speaking to you, I was on a call with a neighbouring country to see how can their universities also take this on. Uh, we're talking to other universities in Europe, Africa, Asia, to see how they can take it forward in their own respective ways.

And I think, you know, it's not a one size fits all. Some countries are probably more ready than others, but how do we start getting people excited about this, right? The sense of opportunity, and not doom and gloom.

Uh, and I think this is where, you know, um, maybe because I've seen so much suffering in my life, uh, I'm, I've become an incurable optimist. Because I think that if I'm not an optimist, I cannot do this work. [clears throat]

Because I think people, we have, we live now in a world that has more knowledge than ever before. We live in a world where young people have power, we need to give them more agency, and we live in a world where we are, have a fractured geopolitical, um, environment. And, and that really calls for us to reignite values and connections, um, and seeing the bigger picture to things, right?

So this is where the, the professional becomes also very personal because I come from very mixed, uh, heritage, parentage. I'm very, very mixed in my family. I have family members across all continents. Um, so, you know, so at a personal level, it hurts me when I see fractures in society, because I've seen what that leads to, uh, in the conflict areas that I've been working in.

So, so a bit of the, you know, for me now at a personal level, I feel that my role is now to, um, you know, and I've done it, I think, to just let the young people lead. And I provide them, you know, this sense of, um, you know, they know someone's watching their back, and they can, and I encourage them to be, uh, very, very disruptive, uh, to think a little bit outside the box.

And I think, you know, trying to ignite imagination on what is possible, because I think many times we don't take time to dream. We don't take time to imagine what the world we want might look like, and therefore use the knowledge that we have already to create that world, uh, which is highly possible.

So, um, turning the negative to positive, telling the right stories, making science and economics real, and a lived experience. And most importantly, I think, you know, getting future generations now to lead us because I think they've got it right. I think they know, uh, we are the generation that has destroyed a lot of, you know, what we have. And I think it's our responsibility now, you know, to be stewards to help future generations lead us.

Paul: And then just finally, do you think other countries around the world will follow Malaysia's lead and adopt national planetary health action plans or similar?

Jemilah: I don't think it's easy, but, you know, it's like, um, it's like a ripple. You start it, you see who are the people who want to be on your, on your, on your journey. Uh, I've been really excited how I've received emails and, you know, letters from people around the world, you know, and governments around the world asking, you know, how do we do this?

Institutions of learning, particularly, because I think this is where institutions of learning become critical. We churn out the leaders of tomorrow. And until and unless we embed into their learning this sense of responsibility, the sense of hope in a, in a generation now that is probably, you know, they're facing things that I never faced, uh, when I was their age, um, and we owe it to them, right?

We, we have to give them not just the tools, but also inspiration and a sense of possibility. Because the reality is young people are very worried, uh, the incidence of mental health, disorders or rather, you know, climate anxiety is real. Uh, you know, we've done enough, uh, research on this to see that people are actually very worried about their future.

Um, but, you know, there are amazing people out there who, who want to do the right things, and I think we just need to create an ecosystem, a movement that will support them.

Paul: Well, Jemilah, thank you so much for giving us such a wonderful guide through the world of planetary health. Thank you.

Jemilah: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

[Theme music]

Paul: It kind of all puts into perspective your brown rice diet, Jen.

Jan: [laughs] It was never my brown rice diet. It was always yours...

Paul: ...that's not how I remember it. [Jan laughs] It certainly wasn't mine. I wasn't going to eat a riot of only br, riot. I wasn't...

Jan: ...we should make it clear, though, that brown rice is actually quite tasty.

Paul: Yeah. But, but it's the kind of thing, though, that you think about, if it seems dull. Brown rice, [sighs] it's all right. Yeah, it's...

Jan: ...but Jemilah was anything but dull in terms of putting together, you know, her own background, that humanitarian piece, which is something that we, will be speaking about on the podcast later on in the series as well with some other colleagues.

But then also one thing that she just blew me away, you know, '15,000 babies' later, who can save 15,000 babies later? That's a pretty impressive [laughs] start.

Paul: [laughs] We, we should stress in her role as a medical professional...

Jan: ...yes, indeed... [laughs]

Paul: ...because any lady who's given birth to 15,000 babies then, oh, wow. Yeah, I don't even want to think about that.

Jan: Yeah. So, and then that threading together of, you know, science, of technology, of communications, et cetera, to really sort of come to this thriving picture. I mean, it's absolutely astonishing.

Paul: Yeah, there's so much there. From going to seeing that lady giving birth in a tree surrounded by crocodiles in floodwaters...

Jan: ...unthinkable...

Paul: ...in Mozambique, and how that inspired her, and then meeting people years later thinking that problem itself must have been resolved. But no, there's still people giving birth to babies in trees.

And then taking that, such a life there and seeing so many things and being inspired to take positive action and then taking it to Sunway, taking it to her influence within Malaysian society and government, and things.

And what I really liked is how she summed it up, and saying that how people can have an effect on so many things around them that they're not realising, but also how when it comes to planetary health, you need to depend on lots of other aspects as well and there's levels of equity and justice within them.

Jan: And that whole equity and justice at the heart of the thinking is again, um, things that, you know, previous guests have talked about. So that keeps on coming back and keeps on being important.

But also that leadership of Malaysia as a country as well, to put together the Planetary Health Action Plan is just, you know, fantastic and we can learn a lot from that.

Paul: Yeah. And then seeing how there's an attitude where you can be pro-planet, pro-people, but pro-profit, within businesses. And we've talked about this quite a few times, of how you can still make a profit even if you're, well, not even if, because that sounds like it's a negative thing, but you can make a profit alongside being positive.

And I liked the, the term, as well, return on value, not ROI, return on investment, which you hear far, far too often in society generally, but return on value, showing what your actions are gaining, not just what your investment's returning.

Jan: And for our, our dear listeners, we'll, we'll put, uh, in the show notes the links to all of this. Because Malaysia might not be a country that you're very

familiar with, um, and Sunway University might not be a university you know very well, but we'll make sure there's links to all of these elements that have come together, and coming out of Sunway University as well.

Paul: And there was the stress, as well, that so much of health, human level is not just to do with medical profession...

Jan: ...yeah...

Paul: ...it was like 80% or something like that was beyond that. It's to do with industry, it's to do with pollution, it's to do with the transportation systems, it's to do with the food systems. Your health and as a result of the health of the planet is more than just your appointment with your local doctor, or anything that might go on operation-wise in a hospital.

Jan: And that's really inspiring that health professionals are saying that as well, because when faced with health needs of individuals, you could definitely, you know, focus down on that and, you know, make a huge contribution. But actually then opening it out and seeing all those other elements as well, inspiring.

Paul: So let's be inspired more next week. Let's talk to a company that's not based in Malaysia, but a company that likes to try and have a positive social impact closer to home.

Jan: Excellent. Who's that?

[00:40:29] **Paul:** we're going to speak to Brett Mendell, who's the Managing Director of Thomas Kneale and Company, who are manufacturers, importers and distributors of fabrics, bedding, textiles, other elements like that.

But more than that, they're a company that operates with very strong social values. We're going to be talking things such as the living wage and various other aspects to their operations.

Jan: That's great. And I, I have the advantage of having met Brett. He's fantastic, really energetic.

Paul: Well, we'll find out how fantastic and energetic [Jan laughs] he is next week and I shall be holding you to those standards that you have set.

Until then, thank you very much for listening. It's goodbye from me, Paul Turner.

Jan: And goodbye from me, Jan Bebbington.

[Theme music]