Transcript of ‘Global Tipping Points 2026: The Power of a Good Story’

Season 3, Episode 48, Transforming Tomorrow

[Theme music]

Paul: Hello, and welcome to Transforming Tomorrow Tipping Points from the Pentland Centre for Sustainability and Business, in association with the Sunway Centre for Planetary Health.

We're here at Global Tipping Points 2026 at Sunway University in Malaysia. I'm Paul Turner.

Jan: And I'm Professor Jan Bebbington.

[Theme music]

Paul: Jan, it's been a wonderful conference, bringing together so many figures from around the world. And there's been so much discussed across the whole range of this week so far.

Jan: My head's buzzing, I don't know about yours, but there's, um, you know, gradually every time I, I get to sleep, even in my jet lagged state, I sought out another wee part of the puzzle in what we've been talking about in the various sessions. And, like, quite big panel sessions, so getting lots of contrasting perspectives and discussion between them, as well as sort of more set piece, you know, presentations as well.

Paul: Yeah. To give an idea of the range of topics that we've had, we've discussed nature, we've discussed, uh, the tipping points themselves and the positive tipping points and what that all means. So an, an overarching picture. We've discussed business and uh, industry. We've discussed AI. We've discussed marketing and messaging around climate change. We've discussed faith and culture.

There's been elements to the discussions here in Kuala Lumpur that you wouldn't have expected if maybe this was held somewhere else in the world.

Jan: I think so. And uh, the, also we say we're in Asia, but we're actually, we, we are in Asia, however… [laughs]

Paul: [laughs] …we're lying, we're lying, we're really recording this from a secret bunker somewhere under Bognor Regis.

Jan: [laughing] Yes. So, but, but when people think Asia, they don't often really appreciate the variety there is.

So, so the, the different countries here have different priorities, have different populations, have different environmental pressures, have different natural hazard profiles, et cetera.

So being in a place where there's many countries in quite close proximity who do have conversations about this together, through the likes of the ASEAN association, has been really valuable, 'cause you've got that even bigger picture again.

Paul: So we're gonna be discussing the whole big picture of this conference today, and we've got one of the MCs. We're gonna be joined by MC Said Faisal and the Tipping Points crew. Or maybe it'll just be Said. It does sound like whenever, he's put MC in front of there, someone's name he should be part of a rap group or something.

But [laughs] Said Faisal is not part of a rap group as far as I know, but he has many talents, so I wouldn't rule it out entirely. Um, he's an advisor on disaster risk management. He's the former executive director of the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Centre. So he's got a background when it comes to natural disasters, and disasters generally, and when it comes to humanitarian care.

So he's bringing that perspective, and he's also sitting in on all the sessions this week, So he's got a really good overarching view of what's going on.

Let's go to the conversation.

[Pause]

Paul: Said, thank you very much for joining us.

Said: Pleasure.

Paul: You're one of the MCs for this event, and that's more than just introducing people who come on, uh, stage. Doesn't boil down to just that. You've got a role of observing and commenting on what's going on here at Global Tipping Points 2026.

Said: Mm-hmm.

Paul: What kind of message have you felt has resonated from across the sessions so far?

Said: I think one of the, and being the, providing information during the whole of the session, you got the ability to capture as well some of the essence that being discussed. And one of those that we don't realise that we are really at that tipping point, uh, and we have option, uh, to make whether a negative tipping point or the positive tipping point.

Now the challenge is. It's not a decision of one or two person, it's not a decision of one or two agencies. And observing this, I see the, this is where the collaboration being tested, uh, whether a different stakeholders, uh, willing to move forward together toward a direction that really save this planet Earth.

And, and today, I think what is interesting as well to see how close our relation with the planet, a simple term, if the planet is not healthy, then we are not healthy, as simple as that.

So it's very interesting as well to see, one of the thing that struck me most in term of the economic values, how do we value things? Uh, because apparently in economic term, we value things when it is not liveable anymore. For example, we can value tree, uh, we can value wood.

Paul: Mm-hmm.

Said: But we cannot value trees. So this is very interesting. How do we shift the swell, saying, how do we value something before it lost its value?

Paul: Yes. There was a point that was raised in one of the sessions we've had here at Sunway this week which was, we value dead nature...

Said: …mm-hmm…

Paul: …but not living nature, and…

Said: …exactly, yeah…

Paul: …that really resonated. Yeah. Um, petroleum is essentially dead nature, albeit quite old dead nature…

[Jan laughs]

Said: …yes, yes…

Paul: …and that's obviously particularly valuable. Yeah, yeah. You're not valuing though, necessarily the animals and lots of points have been made on that regard.

Yeah. It's, I really take your point there.

Jan: And I was really interested how you talked about, about both the tipping points negative and positive. I, I do wonder, and you know, you can disagree with me if you'd like…

Said: …okay…

Jan: …but I wonder actually, we might have both happening simultaneously. So as we tip into a climate regime which is really very difficult, the positive tipping points, which are social and people and markets and communities coming together to address that, could happen simultaneously.

Makes me kind of think of, you know, like humanitarian disasters. Yeah, that's a really negative tipping point, but at the same time there's positive social tipping points, uh, evolving with it.

Is that a fair characterisation or do you think it's gonna be one or the other? Are they mutually exclusive?

Said: I, I think, uh, it's like flipping a coin. You have two sides, right? But the problem is which side that we want to see more often. So this really depends on those who flip that coin.

Now, in order to see more positive tipping point, then we will need to have a critical mass for people really moving forward to this positive tipping point.

Now, in order to have this critical mass, we will need to have a good story to tell. Now, in order to have this good story to tell, we gotta have to craft a message for that story. And telling that story more often, uh, to more people, with consistency.

So that's where the game now because, uh, collaboration involve many partners. But many partners means, uh, many heads and many heads has, uh, many thoughts. So, shaping the common thought toward a common goal, I think that were the challenge, but it's, it's a doable challenge.

Paul: There's certainly many heads, many voices, many thoughts that have been on the stage…

Said: …mm-hmm…

Paul: …over the course of the last few days. People coming from different aspects of life, whether they be scientists, whether they be people working in the humanitarian sector, whether they be people with more of a business connection.

Do you see positive signs from all of those people up there coming from those disparate backgrounds and disparate professions having a common cause in this?

Said: Yeah. I, I think as, as, as we said earlier, that uh, we need many people to get involved with the consequence of many perspectives, right?

And, and that's what the value of the groups, uh, value of the team, because come with the perspectives. Uh, this is important because when we talk about, uh, this tipping point, uh, it's not only about the, uh, social issue, it's also health issues. So economic issues, also political issues. So many think we need to craft it and put it together.

Now, bringing this all perspective as a com, uh, compl4mentary, uh, uh, approach. I think where, that's where the important thing is. Is not of whether if we save the planet and then we ruin the economy, that's very difficult approach. Uh, but the question is how do we, uh, have a different approach in economy where we reach our welfare, but we save our planet too.

Paul: This is yet another man, we should point out, who's joined our podcast, who does have a background in finance. We seem to be just digging them up this week. Everyone we find has a background in finance. [Jan laughs] I don't know what's going on, Jan.

Jan: Well, I, uh, well, we, we can maybe ask Said as well, but I, I think some of that change is that when you really understand a system, and if you're understanding the economic system, you see all aspects of it, then it's, it's easier maybe to get your head around how the whole system works.

I don't know. Is that, is your finance background crucial to what you are seeing now?

Said: You know, I, I start, uh, one of my degrees in finance insurance, and that was a long time ago, but that period, period is 1996. Uh, it's all about profit. That's the bottom line. You can tell whatever story, and then show me the money. That's the end game.

But today is very interesting. The shift, uh, one of the speaker mentioned about is, profit is no longer just an equation, one equation in this business. They said now it's about people, planet, profit. Profit is important for sustainability, but you cannot just have profit, because the other two are equally important.

Uh, what's the point of making profit without no customer anymore? Uh, and, and this is, uh, something that we see, it might shift the new generation in valuing a business. Uh, during my time when we value a company, it's profit, but now, uh, people, uh, value the reputation of the company. Before the risk, uh, is just risk. Now we have reputational risk.

Uh, now we see companies of which the brand is more expensive than the factory. You go for many companies, uh, that's where the asset. Now, this asset, the brand, is about reputation. And planet, people are part of safeguarding that reputation.

Jan: So as the MC, and the person that's sort of curating some of the panels, et cetera, your job was to listen most carefully over that whole time. [laughs] So you must be very tired. And, and…

Paul: …we now have 15 questions related [Jan and Said laugh] to very specific points that were raised, and you've got to tell us who said it and when.

Don't worry, we weren't listening carefully enough to have made 15 points, it's fine. [laughs]

Jan: So what did you hear that really excited you?

Said: It's, it's very difficult. It's, it's not hearing, but more feeling. The energy. So, uh, I think it, uh, surprises me that people coming from different background but sharing the same motivation, same concern, and same positive energy that let's do something about this, we cannot live like this anymore. So, so I think that is, uh, valuable because, uh, you know, this kind of, uh, journey, it's not a sprint. You not, it is not how fast that we can move, but it is a marathon. How long that we can stay.

It's not about speed, but it's about endurance. Now, endurance is driven by fuel, coal, energy, and that's what the motivation is.

Jan: Is it important that this conference is happening in Malaysia and taking, um, you know, the ASEAN perspective along with it as well?

Said: Yeah, I think it's very important because the Asia, the ASEAN, the Southeast Asia, as part of the larger Asia as well, this is where the development is taking, uh, place very much, uh, now.

But at the same time, uh, as we have seen that the, uh, the competition between development and nature, uh, somehow may be not that balanced. Uh, a, a sacrificed, uh, part, usually the nature part, because it's very difficult for politician to, uh, judge, let's say nature without developing anything. But I think that should not be the logic.

Uh, the, the problem statement should be how do we achieve our development without sacrificing this? So that will require a new model of development. And that's where I think, uh, this conference in Southeast Asia, in Asia, add values because, uh, the speakers coming from, um, the different countries, uh, telling the experience of their countries and also the challenge that they've faced in their countries.

So I think having a different perspective is, is one of the foundation in developing a new model of economy where we achieve the welfare, but also preserve the nature.

Paul: You've worked for regional, global organisations in the past.

Said: Yeah.

Paul: Do you feel that this region's voice, the, and the Global South's voice more generally, has maybe been ignored or underrepresented in the past in discussions like this?

Said: That's very interesting, uh, questions. I mean, it's just like individual as well. Uh, we could be ignored because of not being listened, or ignored because we haven't put our case rightly.

Paul: Mm-hmm.

Said: Meaning that, uh, what is your story? So in order to be listened, that we need to have the right story, that's a very human being, and that will go with a organisation, with a country. Uh, and in order to be, uh, listened, that we need to put a very solid case, uh, that this is our story, this is how we move forward, and this is how it will impact not only us, but the whole world.

So I would say that part that need to be engineered more for the region is about telling our story. And, and that's where I think the shift will take place. Because now they have listened a different story, the story of Asia.

Paul: Mm-hmm. Do you feel that the whole region, then it has found its voice and its ability and confidence to speak on that global stage?

Said: We have, but uh, I have seen a lot of voices on that, uh, direction. Uh, but coherence of the voice, uh, I think that's where, uh, something that we need to work more. Uh, because sometime it's not about, uh, being loud, uh, it's more about being focused.

Jan: One of the very interesting parts of the conference was the way faith communities are woven throughout the fabric of the work that we've been doing here. Um, for us, coming from the UK, that would be reasonably surprising to find faith representatives as part of these kind of conversations.

Um, do you have a sense of why that was done and what, what your impression of that is, and what you took away from that really joining together of faith in science?

Said: Oh, I think for me, that's also surprising. [laughs]

Jan: [laughs] That's interesting.

Said: So, because my background, uh, very rare, having the interaction with culture and faith.

So, uh, it, it's either, it's everything about shaping the logic. Uh, but then we forgot that logic is shaped by emotion, and emotion is shaped by belief…

Jan: …yeah…

Said: …so when we put culture and faith, this is basically those who, uh, shape how we think. And of course how we think we determine how we act. So having this culture and, uh, faith in the discussion, it really completes the picture.

So, uh, I, I, for me as well, it was a surprising and delighting as well, listening to, uh, to this and, uh, it's basically saying rooted in the faith, uh, in the faith and, and culture. It's all about preserving nature. So we are, like, deviating from this and then coming back, alright, now we see that's where the direction is coming from. So I think it's very important.

Paul: And, we should point out, we had representatives from various religions who took part in the, the faith panel.

Said: Mm-hmm.

Paul: Um, not just people from this particular country either. And you've got representatives of Christianity, Buddhism, Islam…

Said: …yeah…

Paul: …and I know, um, later on in the conference, not yet here, Yusuf Cat Stevens will be here. Um, for those of a certain vintage, better known for songs such as Father and Son and, uh, Matthew and Son, probably just songs that end in the word son now that I think about it. [Jan laughs]

Uh, but he, he's here to talk about the role of music and culture, but also…

Said: …mm-hmm…

Jan: …his faith, very famously Cat Stevens became Yusuf Islam, you know, so therefore that's there. And what I wonder is, do you think that in other parts of the world, it would've been possible to have this religion, faith aspect to an event such as this?

Or is it because we've come to Southeast Asia, we've come to Asia for the first time for the Global Tipping Points conference, that that's been able to be part of the conversation?

Said: I, I believe everything must fit into context. So whatever works here might work to other part of the world if the context having quite similar. But you, very difficult to expect a similar result when the context of that part of the world are different.

So in, in Asia, Southeast Asia, I think the context of having culture, um, faith, art, uh, is very important, because people living with this. So it's like now I can see a different, uh, perspective. Uh, it's not only my logic being entertained, but my heart too. So, and, and in that, some people may be more on the hard focus, less logic. Now this will serve that portion. So I would say, uh, when we replicate whatever it is, uh, then context must come first.

Paul: Following up on that context, in the regional context, do you feel there's been a good balance in all the discussions that we've had between the global picture and the regional picture?

Said: Mm-hmm. I, I think yes, and I, I said I was, uh, surprised to get so many perspective and, and at the end that ingredients create balance. Uh, now we see, uh, we, we get out of this, uh, four days, uh, event. Uh, we have very much having a different perspective. And then we, I can talk with economies, I can talk with the culture, I can talk, although it's not that deep talk, but I can engage. Now I can understand.

Jan: One of the things that the organisers of the conference want to generate by the end of the process is something they're calling the KL declaration…

Said: …mm-hmm, mm-hmm…

Jan: …so KL, for our listeners from elsewhere in the world is, stands for Kuala Lumpur, which is, um, you know, the, the biggest city setting where we're at.

What hopes do you have for that declaration?

Said: I think, uh. It's, it's still in process, but I think for me personally, when we study words, then we need to see the origin of words. And for me, declaration is more declare action.

So it, when we put it together, it's like you declare. The action is not that well spoken, but when you put this apart, it's about declare and action. And of course action speaks louder than declare. So, so that is the biggest hope if, if this, uh, declaration will more toward action

Jan: And what I did like about it as well, so we're doing, you know, some of the final drafting and, and the day to come, but it's been drafted and commented on every night…

Said: …yes, yes…

Jan: …and I think that's a really clever part of the process to, sort of, draw people into a dialogue or something, rather than saying, here's a piece of paper, sign it or not. No, it was much more organic and creative.

Said: It's also being shared in LinkedIn. Uh, people can comment and give their thoughts. So that's why at this point people ask what is inside that? I say, I can't. [Jan laughs] Because people still giving opinion…

Jan: …yeah…

Said: …so that's then when the opportunity to declare after, uh, what we call, uh, absorbing all the input, then we will see what the declare action looks like.

Jan: It's a model I'm going to steal for all sorts of future events, it's great.

Paul: Do you think when it eventually appears, it will have been shaped by the things people have heard on the stage?

People may have thought one thing, say, before the conference started and put one thing in there that they thought should be included. But then they've seen sessions, they've heard people, they've been involved in discussions, they've met people who've got different perspectives, and that might then make them think, actually, I want to go back in and suggest this instead.

Said: Mm-hmm. I, uh, for the declaration?

Paul: Yes.

Said: I think there is a, a mechanism where, uh, the comments that the, uh, people, uh, will, what we call, uh, suggest, uh, it's, it's not like changing the text directly, so it will be the, what we call the aggregations of different comment, and you get the essence behind that comment. That's what would be reflected in the text.

Paul: Now, before we come to a close, I want to move on to your specific area of expertise, humanitarianism and disaster risk management. In that area, and turn it into tipping points…

Said: …mm-hmm…

Paul: …have you seen a move or a shift in what's been happening in that area caused by the changes to the planet?

Said: Of course. I mean, now the intensity, uh, the frequency, the impact of disasters are, at least in Indonesia for example, or in Southeast Asia, is getting worse. We got more, uh, in terms of, uh, frequency, uh, and we got it harder in term of the, uh, impact.

And, and disaster risk management is the consequence of our ability to manage the climate. Uh, if we say we have the confidence, a hundred percent, in managing this, then this area, disaster risk management might not be needed that much, because this possibility has been, quote unquote, minimised.

But what would be the percentage that we would say that, okay, human will be able to control all the, uh, risks related to climate. Uh, so there will always be probability where disaster will occur. So this is where managing the risk,

managing the response, managing reconstruction, uh, are very important in this, uh, what we call field.

So I would say the attention, priority investment, not only in this, the climate part, but also what if a portion of it we cannot control, and how do we prepare for that? And that will also require, uh, investment.

And, of course, for disaster management it's not only about, uh, climate, we've got earthquake and some other thing. But I think now, uh, we should not see these two, even three, uh, area as separate. Climate, uh, disaster, uh, risk management and sustainable development. These three are connected.

And, and in Indonesia now, um, a term that being promoted, uh, even being promoted as well. We call it sustainable resilience. Sustainable resilience. You cannot be achieving a resiliency that's sustainable if you don't put these three things together. So we need to see climate, disaster and sustainable development as a unified, uh, event.

This three gets separated because administrative boundaries. Uh, one get amended about climate, and they will do only climate disaster management, only disaster management. And those agency or government that deal with, uh, sustainable development will only work in that. Government work in that way.

But if we go to the field, if we go to the village, those who are affected by climate change, those who are affected by, uh, disaster. And those, because of being affected by disaster, cannot achieve, uh, the sustainable development. Getting poorer, cannot get access water, uh, clean water, are the same person.

On the ground, same village, same person. But then on top, this gets segregated. This gets separated. So sustainable resilience is about listen, everyone, it's the same thing. Can we get this together? You will not be able to achieve sustainable development if you don't fix disaster management, because one, people get impacted by disaster, they get poorer. And then we, uh, cannot every day responding to disaster if we cannot control or reduce the risk of, uh, climate change.

Because if we fail here, then we fail in disaster, and then we fail in achieving sustainable development. So this is a package. Buy, buy one, get three.

[Everyone laughs]

Jan: It's a good deal.

Paul: Just a final question. At various points in the conference, business has been talked about, not always in a positive sense. But do you feel the business, and the business world, has a key role to play when it comes to achieving positive tipping points, and moving away from the negative ones?

Said: Absolutely. A very significant role, uh, to play. Uh, the business has all the, uh, resources, uh, knowledges, best people also going to the, uh, business. So, uh, I think it's a very important role to, for business, uh, to get involved in this, to produce a, uh, tipping point.

The, uh, planet, uh, the people, planet and profit is, is the approach of where, uh, business can, uh, play and, and contribute. I think, uh, what is important in achieving, uh, this tipping point is to get everyone involved and to get everyone with relevance in this field.

Paul: Said Faisal, thank you very much.

Said: My pleasure. Thank you very much, both of you. Thank you.

[Theme music]

Paul: You can see why Said is here as an MC, Jan, because he does bring such a great overview and he's obviously paying a lot of attention, and drawing thoughts and shaping his views, and being willing to reshape his views in some cases, by what he's hearing on the stage, and being able to sum it up really nicely.

Jan: And there were several things that he talked about that I found really engaging. Um, one of them was the, putting the case and being listened to, and that these two things have to come together, but also they're quite separate things.

And so it made more sense then, there's been quite a emphasis at various times, about what story we're going to tell. How do we tell the story? What are the different mediums in which we might tell the story?

And even at the end of the sessions, there's been a, an artist drawing sort of, you know, very beautiful mind maps, um, but a much more creative form than a mind map, about what's going on. So the putting of the case with creativity and with power behind it, but then also creating the capacity to listen when somebody's telling you a story.

Paul: And also within that, having a critical mass of people involved. So it's not just one person trying to tell a story, and not just from one region. 'Cause as we've pointed out, there's different regions with different voices and we're, we're hearing a lot of things from Southeast Asia that we wouldn't necessarily if this conference was held elsewhere, which is great to get those perspectives, along with the global perspectives we're getting.

And if you've got that critical mass of people from all the regions, from different industries, from different walks of life, from entirely different backgrounds, that's when something might happen.

Jan: The other stack that he made, which I really liked, um, was, uh, you know, shaping logic, emotion, and belief…

Paul: …mm-hmm...

Jan: …and that these things come together when you as an individual or a group of people, um, engage with an issue. So it's, it's kinda like the world doesn't stop at your neck and is only, you only exist from your head up, which I think is an, actually an academic disease, as it were, but rather it comes down into your body with that emotion and belief, um, informing everything else as well.

Paul: He's obviously done his comms training at some point, 'cause he does like his groups of threes. [Jan laughs] Either that or he's actually made of AI, which would be entirely surprising, 'cause I'm sure he was really sat with us. Uh, because he also talked about climate, disaster and sustainable development…

Jan: …yeah…

Paul: …as a group of three things that go together to build sustainable resilience. And you can't get that if you don't have all three of them.

I'll tell you one thing that I particularly enjoyed, he talked about when he worked in, uh, finance and he said it was 1996 and he said, you know, show me the money. That was the actual year that Jerry McGuire and 'show me the money' became, uh, a global thing. So, well, well done. [Jan laughs] I'm pretty sure he didn't mean that to be, unless he's a big, big Tom Cruise or Cuba Gooding Junior fan.

Jan: Yeah. Well, he, he caught the, the feeling of the time.

The final thing I really liked, and this is where he is a wordsmith, I know that he, he's got a background in finance, but he is so good with words.

He talked about the…

Paul: …you don't get to be an MC as part of a rap crew without being good with words…

Jan: [laughing] That's true. So he talked about the KL declaration being about declare action. And I thought that was a really clever play on words. Because a declaration sometimes feels like a bit of a, a static thing that sort of stands alone out there. But to declare action is quite a different thing. I found that really engaging.

Paul: Yeah, it's been a another really good conversation.

We've still got one more conversation that we'll be, uh, putting out there this week from our discussions here at Sunway. That will be on the subject of AI. So that'll be an interesting one to bring everything to a conclusion with, 'cause after all, AI is gonna be the end of everything. So why should it not be the end of this podcast series?

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

Jan: And from me, Professor Jan Bebbington.

[Theme music]