

Sadhguru: We must move fast to save our soil from dying

*The planet has enough soil for only another 80 to 100 crops, which will last 60 years at the most. **Sadhguru**, author and founder of the Isha Foundation, says that because we are removing organic content from the soil, 40% of the world's topsoil is gone. He says we still have 15 to 25 years to turn things around, otherwise we will soon be living in the desert. Sadhguru took part in a brief Q&A with LSE Business Review's managing editor, **Helena Vieira**, during the World Economic Forum's Great Narrative Meeting in Dubai.*

LSEBR: In the meetings you kept repeating one word: soil, soil, soil.

Humanity is facing many issues — economic challenges, lack of inclusion, disparity... Soil is an issue that we must attend to now, or we will regret it as a generation. Every scientific study is clearly pointing out that we have enough soil only for another 80 to 100 crops — 45 to 60 years maximum. In another 30 years' time, there's going to be a serious food crisis. That is inevitable, it's going to happen. At the same time, our population will be over 9 billion. I am not a doomsayer. Responsible scientists are pointing to this scenario. And this is not new in the history of the world. The Mayans, the Mesopotamians, and the Romans did the same thing: they over-farmed their lands—and their civilisations collapsed. Today this is **not limited to one geographic location, it's happening across the world. What is this about? We are turning living soil into a dead thing. Soil is a living entity: 87% of life on this planet is lived within the first 12 inches of soil, which is dying at an unimaginable rate, to a point where 80% of the insect biomass is already gone. That happened in the last 30 years. And they're saying that by the end of the century, more than 50% of the bio-organisms or micro-organisms will be extinct. When that happens, you cannot revive the soil. So, if we act now, in the next 15 to 25 years, we can turn this around. If we act after 50 years, it will take 200 to 500 years to turn this around. To pull back one inch of topsoil normally takes 500 years.**

LSEBR: Why is the soil dying? Insecticides, chemicals, overuse?

Those aspects are there, but the most important thing is that it needs organic content. The only way you can put organic content in the soil is through green litter from the trees and other vegetation, and animal waste. Animals have gone out of the farm. Machines replaced them a long time ago. Trees have also been removed from the farm. We've gone into monoculture, where we think soil is an endless resource and we can go on harvesting crop after crop. It is not going to work like that. We have to put back some organic content. I am not trying to say you should do organic or any other type of farming. Do whatever kind of farming you choose. The important thing is that a minimum of 3-to-6% organic content has to be there if we want to leave living soil for the coming generations. Otherwise, we will be living on sand. Desertification is one of the most important concerns on our planet. Because if we don't attend to our soil problem, we will all be left with deserts.

LSEBR: Should we let animals roam more freely?

That is out of the question, you can't do that. We have population pressure on the land, we cannot do that. If you have a piece of land, let's say 10,000 square feet of land, you can build six to seven thousand and the remaining has to be left open for yourself, your neighbour, whomever. Now, when we have 10 acres of land, every inch of the land is farmed with ploughs, 12 months of the year in tropical nations. It's important to understand that if we have a certain amount of land, we must dedicate a percentage of the area to generate organic content, which can go into the remaining part of the land. If we don't have that responsibility, it's not going to work. Is it going to happen out of awareness? I don't think so. We need policy. This is what the Conscious Planet initiative is about. *[Editor's note: the [Conscious Planet](#) initiative, run by Sadhguru's Isha Foundation, advocates for changes in the way soil is handled.]* We have created this movement to bring about policy change, initially in the form of recommendations. But as the situation gets dire, which it will, nations will feel the need to make it mandatory. This must come into everybody's mind. We can't take soil for granted. We're talking about soil extinction. It is not that it's going to happen tomorrow. It's already happening: 40% of the world's topsoil is gone, already gone.

LSEBR: Should we be focusing on agribusiness?

The important thing is every nation has to have a policy to preserve the soil. Because this is not just ours, we are just a link in the chain. We are enjoying it right now, but we can't deplete it completely and go away. Future generations have a right to rich soil. Soil is living, it's not dirt. In the United States, they refer to soil as dirt. That means we are all dirt bags, because we are all made out of that. So, it's very important that we understand it's a living soil and at least 3% of it has to be kept alive, a baseline minimum, I'm talking about keeping a minimum of 3% organic content. If you do that, with whatever kind of farming you choose, the soil will be kept alive. If we take that away and soil becomes sand, then it's over.

LSEBR: Today you said you hesitated to mention spirituality in a business meeting, because it could be seen it as esoteric. Do you think businesses are too distanced from spirituality?

They're a bit too distanced from life itself. It's all about consumption. We have structured the economic engine in such a way that reminds me of a fable in India. There's a man sitting at the wrong end of the branch and hacking it. When he succeeds, he will fall. We will be like that when we succeed with whatever we are aspiring for 8 billion people. *Living Planet* statistics say that if every human being on the planet is to have the minimum that an average American citizen has, we will need four and a half planets. But we only have one.

LSEBR: Could you tell me a little bit about the Isha Foundation?

The Isha Foundation is committed to human wellbeing. At its core, it is a non-religious, spiritual process called inner engineering, which is offered to millions of people across the world. It is a 100% volunteer organization. We have over 5,600 full-time and 11 million part-time volunteers across the world. So, it's a movement by itself. Just to tell you what our reach is, in 2020, our video views have been 1.8-2 billion.

LSEBR: What does your name, Sadhguru, mean?

Sadhguru means that I am an uneducated guru. That means I don't come from any tradition, book, or scripture. The only thing I know this piece of life, from its origin to its ultimate destination. Fortunately, every other life is made the same way.

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Notes:

- *This is the third in a series of five interviews that took place during the World Economic Forum's Great Narrative meeting in Dubai (11-12 November 2021).*
- *This interview represents the views of the interviewee, not the position of LSE Business Review or the London School of Economics.*
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