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Patrick Fine: Welcome to the first episode of the 2021 season of *A Deeper Look* podcast. I'm Patrick Fine, CEO of FHI 360, and I'm looking forward to 2021 when we take another deeper look into human development. Last year, our theme through the podcast was the shape of things to come, and we set out to explore the trends shaping human development. But by the third month of the podcast, by March, it was clear that what will be shaping human development for years to come is the global COVID pandemic that engulfed the world beginning around January of 2020 and which is still affecting all aspects of life across the world.

We can see that the COVID pandemic is going to affect the trajectories of social, economic and political development. We've seen it erase at least a decade of social progress. We can see that it is going to continue to influence the work we do in human development, the major challenges and the major opportunities for the rest of this decade. What we've experienced in 2020 is a year of massive disruption and so we thought that looking to 2021, that disruption and disrupters would be an appropriate thing for us to explore.

Voiceover *A Deeper Look. Exploring what works and what doesn't in development, and the changes we can make together to turn ideas into action.*

Patrick Fine: Now, disruption has been a popular buzzword since the early 2000s, and it's usually been presented as a positive; seeking disruption, we want disruption. It's been associated with innovation, with positive change, with social progress, and disrupters have been viewed as people who are driving forces, often for good. But in 2020 I think there is a consensus that the disruption that we faced has been, by and large, a negative and has set us back. So, this year we are going to be looking at both the positive and the negative aspects of disruption and asking the question: Is disruption really bringing creative destruction with new energy, innovation and solutions, or is it just throwing us off track and undoing the hard-won gains of the last decade?

We're starting this season with a topic that is, without a doubt, the greatest single disrupter facing mankind in the 2020s and that's climate change. It's implications and far-reaching effects are impossible to overstate. We're going to need disrupters to help us come to terms with the impact of climate change and help us understand the dimensions of climate change and help us find the pathways that will lead to global adaptation and transformation. Which is why I'm so pleased to be joined for this first episode this season by Dr. Kim Holmén, International Director of the Norwegian Polar Institute. Kim, thank you for joining me today.

Kim Holmén: Thank you, I'm pleased to be here.

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Patrick Fine: Dr. Holmén is a distinguished climate scientist and authority on climate change and one of those people who we need to listen to now, before it's too late, or maybe it's already too late, Kim, that's what I hope we're going to discuss today. Kim is joining me from the Norwegian Polar Institute in Svalbard in northern Norway. Kim, some of our listeners may not be familiar with the Norwegian Polar Institute. Can you start us off just by telling us a little bit about the work you do?

Kim Holmén: Well, the Norwegian Polar Institute is a directorate under the Ministry of Climate and Environment in Norway. The institute is focused on environmental management and needs in the polar regions. We are supposed to give advice to authorities, governments, and otherwise we produce scientific knowledge, conduct mapping, provide professional and strategic advice to authorities, and we're present both in the Arctic and the Antarctic. Norway is the only country in the world with claims both in the North and the South and the Norwegian Polar Institute is supposed to take care of Norway in Antarctica and Norway in the Arctic. We operate research stations, we carry out expeditions, we own a 300-foot research vessel – the Kronprins Haakon – we do all sorts of environmental authority work in Antarctica as well.

Patrick Fine: Isn't Svalbard famous for being the site of the seed vault where all the seeds from all the plants in the world are stored in sustainable sub-Arctic conditions?

Kim Holmén: Yes, in the mountain just across the valley here, the seed vault is confined. It's sometimes called "The Doomsday Vault." It is a backup seed bag for the world. And in fact, it has already paid for its existence. The Aleppo regional seed vault was destroyed, the backup seeds that were here were actually withdrawn to set up a new seed vault, regional seed vault, down there. So, it has proven that it is necessary.

Patrick Fine: I suspect that listeners who've heard of Svalbard will have heard of the seed vault. Now, let's turn to climate change. You're a frequent commenter and authority on the changing, what kind of disruption do you see over the next ten years with respect to tensions on the climate?

Kim Holmén: Well, for the Arctic, that wherever I look I already see change in the water, on the land, in the ecosystem throughout, and there is nothing that indicates that any of this is slowing down. On the contrary, we have an accelerating perturbation and disturbance on climate. So, we will certainly, for the Arctic, for high alpine regions, the Alps, the Himalayas, and the oceans in polar regions, we will see continued change, but we will see continued change everywhere on the planet.

Patrick Fine: So I've read that change, in terms of change in environmental conditions, is occurring faster in the Arctic than in other parts of the world. Do you see the physical changes in your own community?

Kim Holmén: Oh yes. The snow disappears about two weeks earlier than it did thirty years ago, the glaciers around here – I was out on a glacier this summer that had diminished this summer season by ten feet in thickness. It is dramatic. The Arctic is warming twice as fast as the rest of the planet, this particular part of the Arctic, where the tail end of the Gulf stream is warming at least twice as fast as the rest of the Arctic. The average winter temperature has risen by about ten degrees C.

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Patrick Fine: Wow!

Kim Holmén: Eighteen degrees Fahrenheit, over the course of the last thirty years. It is profound.

Patrick Fine: That's dramatic: ten degrees centigrade or eighteen degrees Fahrenheit increase in average temperature over the last ...

Kim Holmén: Thirty years

Patrick Fine: ... thirty years. What does that mean in terms of people's way of living? How's it affecting ordinary people?

Kim Holmén: Well, from the relatively trivial, altered recreational activities: we can't go snowmobiling on the fiords because they don't freeze anymore, it's open water where there used to be three feet of ice, but more importantly, avalanches, snow avalanches, mudslides, people are losing security, harmony. The beautiful nature is not attractive and stimulating anymore. We lost two inhabitants in an avalanche five years ago, and the Norwegian government has stepped up and spent more than 50 million dollars building fences around the town, and 50 million dollars for a town of 2,300 people is sort of an unusual reaction from a government. It shows the fear that was brought into the population that one really had to do something quickly. Climate change is a mighty expense.

Patrick Fine: And that expense and the example you gave, that would be an example of mitigation, is that correct?

Kim Holmén: Yes.

Patrick Fine: So we can expect and are seeing other examples of mitigation across the globe, particularly in places that are close to seacoasts where you see rising water levels. How do we see the costs of mitigating climate change in other parts of the world?

Kim Holmén: Mitigating will be expensive, climate change will be very expensive. At the mega deltas of the big rivers in Asia, the Nile delta, those areas, there are a lot of people that are under jeopardy of flooding and losing farming, losing their livelihoods. So, the cost will be immense, I have not quantified those numbers, there are people that do that sort of work, but the cost in human hardship and life loss is even more important to remember.

Patrick Fine: Mm-hmm. Now there are people who claim that climate change is just a natural phenomenon. That if you look back through history, there's clear evidence that the environment is always changing. One example, in Iraq, the city of Ur was a port city with three separate ports and is now over 200 miles from the sea and that's in a period of about –what? – four or five thousand years, and prior to the use of fossil fuels or prior to industrialization or the kinds of activities that are pointed to as the reason for climate change. How do you respond to skeptics who say "Climate may be changing, but that's just a natural process and we humans just need to adapt to it?"

Kim Holmén: Well, many of the more clever questioners of climate change will happily cherry-pick various pieces of information that isolates indeed are correct, like the Sahara having had a lush period or Iraq being ports. There are many examples, but climate has always changed and will always change. But, when one looks at the collective facts around the world today, it is obvious that something unusual is happening both with regard to the rate of change and the magnitude of change. With the science that I know it becomes extremely difficult to give a coherent explanation for the collective picture of change without ascribing a large portion of it to human perturbation of the atmospheric composition.

Patrick Fine: And that's primarily by putting carbon dioxide into the atmosphere?

Kim Holmén: Well, the greenhouse gases. Carbon dioxide is the most important one by sheer amount, but methane and nitrous oxide and the CFCs and a bunch of exotic chemicals stuck in there, sulfur hexafluoride and there's some more – they influence the radiative balance, and it gives us a planet with a warmer surface. There are uncertainties. We don't know everything, but it is clear that we, humanity, is the main cause of what has happened in the last forty years. Thus, we have a responsibility.

Patrick Fine: And, how do we act on that responsibility? What do we as a global community have to do in terms of addressing this existential disruption?

Kim Holmén: Well, scientifically it's quite clear that we have to decrease our emissions in one way or the other, carbon capture or a number of options are there. But, I think it's obvious that we cannot do it with only technology, that we have to look at the way we live, lifestyles, and we have to discuss questions about what is a good life in order to find ways of not defaulting to large emissions again.

Patrick Fine: And, by looking at what constitutes a good life and lifestyle changes, are you really pointing to moving away from a consumption-style lifestyle?

Kim Holmén: Well, the short answer is yes. If you discuss with people what comprises a good life, what gives long lives, it is clear that families, friendships, rich social life is fundamental for health and longevity. If we are happy, we live better. If you talk to somebody approaching the end of life, what they would have wanted more of, they will seldom answer bigger cars or whatever. They will talk about people, friendship, love, peace, security. None of these have a large environmental footprint and do not need big resources. I believe a softer society is happier, richer in culture, has a smaller impact on the planet and has a sustainable trajectory into the future.

Patrick Fine: So, that vision of a softer society, of a society that consumes less and that really has more modest objectives for material acquisition, that implies a major cultural shift in societies across the world. Do you think that the changes we see in our environment will drive societies to evolve towards lifestyles that are less acquisitive, that are less material oriented? Because that would be a break with the historical development of civilization, you know, going back thousands of years.

Kim Holmén: We are mixing the rational with the feelings, the irrational: “People will see the ecosystem collapsing and then they will change their lifestyle.” No, we have to talk about it. Technological development is nothing new. The car engine today is about five times as efficient as the T-Ford engine but we use as much fuel to move a mile because we drive bigger cars faster. Houses have better insulation, but we use more energy for our house because we have bigger houses.

Patrick Fine: Mm-hmm.

Kim Holmén: So, we have to discuss what we will use the new technology for. If we use it only for our own convenience, we will continue to accelerate our overutilization of the planet’s resources. The biggest innovation is rethinking our attitudes towards what is development, growth by quality instead of quantity. I believe we have to have a dialogue of that form, and we have to give people tools to participate in such a dialogue.

Patrick Fine: So, that’s a profound observation on our part that really the challenge facing us now and looking forward into the 2020s is to redefine what we mean by development. We need to redefine it in terms of quality of life rather than quantity in terms of possessing lots of things. That is not something that I’ve heard the major development institutions, like the United Nations or World Bank, other multilaterals or the bilateral development organizations, really take up. I haven’t seen that shift away from defining human development progress in terms of more opportunities for economic advancement, which really links to that definition around quantity versus trying to shift the discussion and the definition of development towards the quality indicators that you talked, about around community solidarity, around personal relationships and around lifestyles that can be sustained.

Do you hear policymakers talking about a shift of defining development around quality metrics rather than quantity measures?

Kim Holmén: Unfortunately, the short answer is no, but I have some new answers to that. The Norwegian Prime Minister has a high-level panel on the SDGs, Sustainable Development Goals. There are very many human beings on the planet with very small means. To lift them into a dignified life is an important task for us all. But, extreme poverty has been on the decline, at least until this year. Now, the Norwegian Prime Minister’s high-level group, I’ve had some very lively discussions with them.

I pointed out that a sustainable future must rest on a foundation of culture and we have to build a culture that strives for sustainability. And, what glues us together is culture. Sustainability is an intrinsic part of culture. And, the president of Ghana has invited me to come to Ghana to develop these talks further. So yes, if you delve deeply into these questions people do understand that it is not only a simple rational deterministic world, if we leave out the human being, it will never be sustainable. We must build a society where we respect the human being.

Patrick Fine: This concept really is truly disruptive and so a very fitting concept for us to examine on the podcast this season, because shifting the definition of what constitutes effective and desirable human development is about as disruptive a concept as I can think of. I also agree with you and appreciate the fact that you've raised the importance of culture, and that the only way to navigate the kind of change that you're talking about, a change that you're presenting as necessary really for the sustainability of our species and more directly to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change, is to address it through cultural change, and that then implies multiple dimensions of affecting people's behavior and their attitudes and their beliefs.

Kim Holmén: We have many levels of decision-making with various sizes of networks intermeshed. How do we influence decision-making in this maze? We do not have a totalitarian system, and we do not want one, where one node makes decisions for all. Then, we must have in some place some other mechanisms to bring wills of different nations, companies, formal, informal groups, families, individuals, you and I, towards common goals. It means a culture, it means ethics.

I'm a firm believer in education. Education gives people an understanding, but more importantly, it gives them skills and tools to influence their own future. If we ought to do one thing for the sake of population growth, climate action, sustainability, it is clear to educate the young, and in particular, educate the young girls and women in the world, because then they have the tools in their hands.

Patrick Fine: Over and over in the conversations I've had with leaders working across many different sectors of development, the importance of education, the importance of youth, and in particular, the importance of educating girls comes up over and over again as one of the key avenues towards positive change and one of the essential ingredients to positive change, so it's interesting to hear you mention the importance of education and education for girls in the context of this conversation about climate change.

What you're saying, and I strongly agree with you, is that what we're facing as a global community is the need to make fundamental changes. Those changes have to be embedded in culture; it will involve a massive enterprise that engages everything from the entertainment industry to our faiths, our belief systems, to mundane ways that we go about our daily lives. We've talked about your vision for the future and some of the changes that you think are essential. Do you see the problems that we face in terms of carrying out those actions as insurmountable?

Kim Holmén: It's not only climate change. It's even worse than you think. I have worked my entire professional career with climate change-related science, teaching about the subject ad nauseam, and spreading knowledge to society as best I can. But, if you look at the world today, look out the window from an airplane over land, you see a landscape profoundly changed by the human hand. We call it agriculture, we call it cities, we call it roads, dams and whatnot, all pretty good, but all of it is also the dramatic change of environment and habitats. If you look at the loss of species, it is mainly due to habitat destruction, habitat degradation and overexploitation.

Most loss of biodiversity to date is not due to climate change. I'm hard-pressed to mention a single species that has been lost because of climate change up until now. There are hundreds of them, thousands of them. Climate change is big, but humankind is big in so many other ways. We are doing too little about climate change and need to do much more, but if we only focus on climate, we will miss the even larger perturbations we are causing.

We need to look at sustainability in a holistic manner. It can indeed feel overwhelming. Insurmountable? No. One of the achievements of neoliberalism is that we almost carried the burden of climate change ourselves as individuals, and the flipside of that is: "What difference does it make what little I do?"

Patrick Fine: Uh-huh.

Kim Holmén: "Or little Norway does?" Both of these are... "I can't do it, it's overwhelming, and it doesn't make any difference what I do." But, we all make a difference, and I think an important reform is to think more about shared goals in looking for a better life together, positive thinking about how we can reach the goals. It's important that we don't default into pointing fingers: "You fly too much." "You eat too much meat." "You drive an SUV," etc., etc. And, that is another neoliberal trap, because we fight each other rather than the problem. We aren't disrupting, we are just fighting each other and aside from that people are seldom attracted by being scolded or attacked, we have to create positivity about the future.

Patrick Fine: Your advice and your observations about how to bring about the changes we need, you frame them in such positive and practical terms, terms that are actually doable and that avoid the kind of pitfalls that you were just pointing to – like, you know, blaming people is not going to be the most effective way to change people's behavior – so find the positive narratives, that narrative about what we gain, not what we give up, that narrative about improved quality as opposed to increased quantity.

Kim Holmén: There's one more thing that I want to point out and that is structurally in how we evaluate results, I mean, everything we do is evaluated on short time scales: our political appointments, you have annual reports, you have quarterly reports, you start optimizing to be successful on the micro-sector level, you have a set of considerations that do not bring in the long term, do not bring in sustainability. That's a structural problem in how we evaluate progress results that we also have to address.

Patrick Fine: It also ties back to the point you just made a moment ago about the fact that we're really talking about complex systems. So, it's not just about the change in climate, it's also about actions that we, that people, take. It's this complex interaction of different systems that both makes it difficult to comprehend and to sometimes feel just overwhelming but that is necessary if we are going to have practical solutions like the ones you've suggested.

Do you see those being ground up and originating at local levels and then spreading from the bottom up, or do you see them as being more top-down where national governments and the UN and international organizations will be promoting those kinds of changes?

Kim Holmén: We do not want, for umpteen reasons, for many, more totalitarian systems. It has to be one where the entire society has some ethics about sustainability, about the climate that we live in, which comes from within, from education, from the dialogue. And, the top-down is important to maintain the dialogue, the bottom-up is important to maintain the dialogue. We have the young people that refuse to go to school on Fridays because of climate change. Greta Thunberg. They are important to keep the dialogue vigilant, but the leaders must also understand that it's a responsibility to move in that direction.

Patrick Fine: Earlier on you mentioned technology and you talked about the ways technology can help us to both mitigate and adapt to the impact of climate change. But, it also sounded like you were saying that technology is not going to save us. It's going to take more than technology. Now, I know a lot of people are looking to the technological fix as the answer to the extraordinary events that there, you know, that we're seeing in the world today. Can you say a little bit more about how you view technology in terms of its role in addressing climate change?

Kim Holmén: It is not enough. It certainly will help us, must help us. We must use all our technological know-how to lift the people in poverty. Our values must be part of the narrative or the discussion. Many of our actions are built on dreams; you dream about a car, a boat or a house. We must find better dreams. We must turn the whole narrative into a positive. I mean, when we discuss smaller cars or whatever, it's always presented as giving up something. When new technology comes in, the debate is about why making the battery is worse than using oil, There's also why it cannot work and you have to charge it so you can't travel as far in a day as we can today. So what? [laughter]

Patrick Fine: [laughter]

Kim Holmén: So, we are looking for a better life. We are looking for opportunities. We are looking for sustainability where the culture, where what we do also, will have a value for our grandchildren. If it just collapses, then everything we did today was in vain. So, to ensure that our investment in time and labor and thinking has a sustained value, we must change our lifestyles.

Patrick Fine: So, what I hear you saying is that if we're to have any legacy at all, that we have to change our lifestyles, and that we have to redefine the narrative away from one of giving up things to one of what we're gaining by changing our lifestyles, and then going back to that earlier concept of redefining what development means, away from owning more things to one of having a higher quality of life, so moving from that definition of quantity to quality.

Those are truly disruptive concepts. If you look at the state of the world today, if you look at the policies that nations are pursuing and that the international community is pursuing, that is a very disruptive although also very practical set of recommendations. And, I think it's a great example for our listeners to hear a scientific of your stature articulating in practical terms and in human terms what we need to embrace to have a sustainable future.

Kim, earlier in the conversation you talked about the importance of youth. There's a new generation of climate disrupters and climate activists, some even starting before they finish high school. You mentioned Greta Thunberg as an example. What advice do you have for those young activists in order to effectively advance that agenda for a more sustainable future?

Kim Holmén: Well, fight the battles, feel moments of success, but stay with it because the war remains. Sustainability is something that never will be finished, it cannot be finished. We must stay vigilant. There will be setbacks and mistakes, but we must never give up. Forty years ago I wore my hair long. I wanted to change the world. I hope I've made some progress. I still want to change the world. I am an optimist because there is no alternative. Life is a precious endowment bestowed on us. We must work for good and dignified lives for all.

A civilized society, country, has responsibilities towards its citizens to ensure them dignified lives. And, we must break down structures, chase excuse makers. We must use what we have to build a better future. What we have, we cannot just destroy it; we have to use it to build a better future. So, my advice is go for it. We need you, we need you now, but we will also need you for the never-ending journey of sustainability.

Patrick Fine: I hope that the young climate activists and the young disrupters and the new generation who are working on human development challenges are listening, because that is a clarion call to action from Dr. Kim Holmén to just go for it, affirming the importance and the possibility to shape the future in a way that will both be disruptive but will also lead us to a more positive outcome.

Kim, I can't thank you enough for joining me today on *A Deeper Look* podcast.

Kim Holmén: Thank you for having me.

Patrick Fine: What a great start to the 2021 season. Listeners, we'd love to hear your thoughts on what we discussed in today's episode, how you see climate change impacting your life and what you're doing about it. Add a comment, rate the podcast, share it with

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your friends and, next month, join us for another episode of *A Deeper Look*. Thanks for listening.

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