**[Making a fairer world?](https://nation.com.pk/23-Jan-2020/making-a-fairer-world" \t "_new)**

Atle Hetland January 23, 2020

The World Economic Forum is today concluding its weeklong annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland. This year, WEF has been celebrating its 50th anniversary. Professor Klaus Schwab, was only thirty three when he took the bold initiative of founding WEF, after he had authored his book about stakeholder responsibility, disagreeing with Milton Friedman that “the business of business is business”. All are responsible together has since been the cornerstone of WEF. The first and only employee in 1971 was Hilde, who had just become his wife and ‘partner in crime’. She was on his side at the first WEF meeting this year as every year. She has been in charge of much, including being co-founder and chair of the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, and she handles the cultural window of WEF Crystal Awards.

At the opening of this year’s event with about 3,000 participants, Klaus Schwab drew attention to the book from that time, and also his wife’s important work, at least indirectly. He said that he thought it was meaningless to make a difference between the social and economic spheres. They belong together, and today, we also acknowledge that environmental issues are also essential, he said. But this is today; I am sure that Hilde Schwab’s focus on social issues, made her husband realize that those issues are important. After all, he is an engineer and economist by training, so it isn’t taken for granted that he would have emphasized the social issues unless somebody had helped him see their importance.

I don’t know much more about the great personalities than what I see on TV, but I have immense respect for them, their style as seen on TV and, and obviously their work contributing to making a fairer world. Well, if that really is what they have being doing. I think it is, but Klaus Schwab, the WEF Executive chairman, stressed that he wasn’t into taking about legacy and showing off their work now when they celebrate the 50th anniversary. Yet, he said that he thought it was important to have brought people together, as WEF has been doing, especially a diverse group of people at the top, to discuss how to work better together, making the world fairer and better. He said that if there in future would be better cooperation between different stakeholders, then WEF’s efforts would indeed have been worthwhile. Yet, there is more work to do, he said, underlining that he was seeing progress, and that if we are not optimistic, we will not be able to solve the problems and challenges of the future. Several times, in his speeches, Klaus Schwab mentioned the importance of listening to the youth, who are well represented in Davos. Greta Thunberg’s role is indeed important, but there are many other youth with her, he said, telling us what to consider and what actions to take.

A trademark of the WEF annual meeting is its diverse inclusiveness, it has members from government, civil service, multilateral organizations, NGOs, cultural organizations, even religious organizations, and last but not least, the private sector, both multinationals, large companies and a few smaller companies, too. There were many heads of state and government, royalty, heads of NATO, EU and the UN, including Secretary General Antonio Guterres and High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, among others, and certainly, leaders from IMF, the World Bank, and other money men and women setting the rules for the world finances in our unequal world, which more than ever lacks necessary regulations. It is a scar on our leaders and organizations, and a worry to WEF, that we are not making much progress in these fields. In its report, Oxfam drew attention to the sad inequality figures – in a world which has the resources to do so much better in building a fairer world for all.

Prime Minister Imran Khan went to Davos for the first time. The Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg had planned to go, but then she had to make changes in her cabinet since the right-wing party pulled out of her coalition government. Last year, too, she also had to cancel her Davos trip because then, a new party, the Liberals, joined her cabinet. However, Norway is always in Davos, throughout the long and cold Davos winters, and warm summers, too; the WEF President, Børge Brende, is a Norwegian, who served in Solberg’s cabinet as minister of foreign affairs, and previously, as minister of environment, and trade and industry.

After the Swiss Confederation President Simonetta Sommaruga had given her welcome speech, emphasising the annual meeting’s main focus, climate and environment, it was President Donald Trump’s turn to give his ‘America first’ speech, yet, delivered in a more polite style than we sometimes see. In thanking Trump, Klaus Schwab said he was sure that Trump was working for an all-inclusive America – but he didn’t say that he had also wanted America to be more inclusive internationally. Trump mentioned that he had just signed trade agreements with America’s most important trade partners, Chine and Canada, and by coincidence it had happened the same week, he said.

“Our house is still on fire”, said Greta Thunberg, urging for more action, not only talk, in order to forge a sustainable path to a common future – the main overall objective of WEF and this year’s meeting. It should be less a ‘talk shop and more do shop’, Klaus Schwab reminded participants and media at the outset. Yet, WEF is a meeting place where people exchange views and opinions, listen and learn, tell and teach. It is after the event, that the action can come, if it indeed does. Knowing that there were some 400 meetings at WEF this year, plus all the informal talks, I am sure everyone took something with them home – otherwise it wouldn’t be worth the tens of thousands of dollars in membership and participation fees.

Before ending my article today, let me come with a few critical words about WEF, the organization I in the introduction praised. Some will say that WEF over the 50 years it has existed, has not done much more than cushioning and justifying capitalism, yes, even helping it to survive in a world without ideologies and competing systems after the fall of communism, even socialism. Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of WEF, believes deeply in cooperation, not confrontation. He seems to believe in the good in every human being, as I do, too. But then he believes a bit too much in the good in organizations, companies, multinationals, and governments, which I don’t do. Unless they are regulated and controlled by ordinary people, they are going to think about themselves, their interests and profits. If the Oxfam report is to be believed, where they say that only just over two thousand billionaires own or control some sixty percent of the world’s common resources, then we shouldn’t talk about cooperation. We should talk about clipping their wings – yes, grounding them so they cannot fly – fly away. Perhaps this should be the topic of the World Economic Forum’s 2021 annual meeting: how can we stop the looting of our nature, thoughts, lives, and future? How can we build trust and democracy, as Abraham Lincoln said, we must create government of the people, by the people, for the people?