

CONVERGE – A MOVE TOWARDS SOCIAL EQUITY AND SUSTAINABILITY
SIGRUN MARIA KRISTINSDOTTIR; KRISTIN VALA RAGNARSDOTTIR; BRYNHILDUR DAVIDSDOTTIR
UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND.

Individuals, communities and governments find sustainable development ever more attractive as environmental pressures continue to mount and the critical boundaries of our planet become increasingly overstepped. Humankind now numbers more than 7 billion individuals, and according to the UN, our number will reach more than 9 billion in less than 40 years. While our numbers are rising, our use of renewable and non-renewable resources increases rapidly. We need and demand more and more food at the same time as we use up more and more of the resources and land that are necessary for that same production. If we are to move towards sustainability within planetary limits, a contraction of consumptive habits in the developed world must occur to simultaneously enable developing countries to increase the wellbeing of their citizens – facilitating convergence.

This presentation introduces the EU FP7 funded research project, Converge, whose aim is to evaluate how we can ensure equity for the Earth's population within planetary limits. The Converge team is a transdisciplinary research group that examines the concept of global 'convergence' – how communities can move towards consuming fairer shares of Earth's limited resources and thus promote truly sustainable development while supporting greater social justice. The project builds on Aubrey Meyer's Contraction & Convergence™ for CO₂ in the atmosphere, but takes a further step by framing the idea within systems dynamics, focusing on natural resources and adding the concept of degrowth. We aim to create a framework that communities can use to reach greater sustainability and equity, while remaining within biophysical planetary limits. This presentation will in particular discuss the creation of the Converge Framework.

Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, our team first investigated what mechanism and tools communities use to ensure a 'fair share' of the Earth's resources. The results will be used to make a holistic framework towards convergence and sustainability, building on The Natural Step's sustainability framework, along with mediated modelling, systems thinking and systems modelling. The framework is meant to act as a guide for communities who want to converge and thereby move further towards greater sustainability. The framework is tested with action research in three different communities – the country of Iceland, Bristol City (UK), and two small villages in India. The outcome of the workshops will result in a computer model created with the STELLA® computer program, which the EU and the communities alike can use to move towards a greater sustainability and social equity.

The Converge project is a collaboration between a small interdisciplinary group of academic and NGO partner organisations from the five participating countries – Iceland, UK, India, Sweden and Hungary. It is to conclude in the autumn of 2013 and the results will be made public through a variety of media.