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A GLOBAL BAUHAUS FOR SUSTAINABLE AND JUST FUTURES

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«**metapolis** is a pluralist space: it is a place to propose ideas that supersede the traditional borders of knowledge, mobilizing them to confront global challenges. **metapolis** is a territory of hyper-connection, liberated from past nostalgia, critical of the present and committed to a sustainable

and just future. It does not wait for reform that maintains the status quo, nor does it aspire to do so, either. In fact, in **metapolis** everyone suspects that this future may never come, but still are

not convinced to give it up for good. The latest political, economic, technological, environmental, sociological and health emergencies just reinforce the need for us to work harder».

metapolis is an initiative by common action forum. A collective effort of caf's team, members, collaborators and participants. Our goal is to develop and support a progressive agenda as alternative to the current model that has led us to a world of increasing inequalities, environmental devastation and unaccomplished freedom for most of the global citizenry.

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00. A GLOBAL BAUHAUS FOR SUSTAINABLE AND JUST FUTURES

Fernanda Ribeiro | Lola Allen

Jan-Jun, 2023

The world stands at a crossroads, caught in a maelstrom of interwoven crises—climate collapse, biodiversity loss, democratic backsliding, and entrenched economic inequalities. As these polycrises unfold, it becomes evident that the systems designed to govern, finance, and sustain our societies are not only failing but actively exacerbating global instability. In this context, the fourth volume of **metapolis** aims to foster a reflection around the underlying causes of these crises as much as to become a call for action: a proposal to integrate the ethos of a "Global Bauhaus" into interventions, policymaking and planning at all levels.

This vision is inspired by the original Bauhaus movement, which sought to break down disciplinary silos and forge new, integrative approaches to design and architecture. Similarly, a Global Bauhaus for the 21st century embodies a call for transdisciplinary collaboration—bridging the domains of arts, sciences, politics, and economics—to reimagine how we build societies that are both just and ecologically sustainable. It proposes to go beyond incremental reform and to inaugurate a chapter of disruptive rethinking of existing structures, advocating for systemic innovation that fosters inclusion, resilience, and regeneration.

Current climate change policies often disregard biodiversity conservation, financial reforms overlook ecological sustainability, and democratic initiatives fail to integrate economic justice. Rather than relying on compartmentalised responses to systemic issues, we must acknowledge their interconnectivity.

As **Audrey Irvine-Broque** and **Jessica Dempsey** argue in *Towards Serious Biodiversity Policy*, financial and ecological crises are deeply intertwined. The authors illustrate how global conservation efforts are often constrained by economic policies that prioritise short-term financial gains over long-term environmental sustainability. This contradiction is evident in the way international financial institutions and development banks continue to fund large-scale extractive industries in biodiversity-rich regions, undermining local conservation efforts. They argue that true biodiversity protection requires systemic change—one that involves restructuring financial systems to prioritise ecological resilience, aligning sovereign debt relief with environmental protection, and shifting economic incentives to reward conservation rather than exploitation.

The structural debt burden imposed on the Global South forces nations into extractivist development models, accelerating deforestation and environmental degradation. The omission of sovereign debt discussions from major biodiversity agreements underscores a fundamental failure in global governance—a failure that must be addressed by integrating ecological, economic, and social justice into a cohesive approach.

Needless to say, the erosion of democracy further complicates these crises. **Salil Shetty** and **Omar Waraich** highlight in *Why Democracies Must Deliver* that electoral

A global Bauhaus for the 21st century embodies going beyond incremental reform and inaugurating a chapter of disruptive rethinking of existing structures.

systems worldwide are being increasingly manipulated by autocratic leaders seeking to entrench their power, which in turn is eroding public trust in governance. They remind us that the crisis is not simply about those authoritarian leaders consolidating power but also about the failure of democratic institutions to address socio-economic inequalities that fuel disenchantment. Democracy must go beyond elections and embrace governance that is transparent, participatory, and responsive to the needs of the people.

This aligns with **David Koranyi**'s argument in *The Battle for Democracy: Empowering Citizens and Cities*, which states that democracy thrives when power is decentralised, and cities and local governments are empowered to take direct action in addressing socio-economic and environmental challenges. By reinforcing democratic processes at a grassroots level, communities can reclaim agency over decision-making, counteracting the erosion of public trust in national institutions. Moreover, these efforts should be complemented by policies that prioritise economic equity and climate justice, ensuring that democracy is not merely procedural but a lived experience that fosters resilience and inclusivity. In this sense, Koranyi skillfully emphasises that democracy cannot survive as a periodic electoral exercise—it must be a continuous engagement that empowers local communities and ensures economic policies serve the many, not the few. Civic participation, community-driven initiatives, and decentralisation must be at the heart of our response to global instability, reinforcing a democratic ethos in everyday governance.

However, we must face the fact that at the core of these challenges lies a financial system that sustains inequality rather than alleviates it. **Ivana Vasic-Lalovic**'s *Breaking the Vicious Cycle* argues that the financial system, as it currently stands, is designed to perpetuate cycles of debt dependency and economic marginalisation, particularly for the Global South. She outlines how international financial institutions impose stringent conditions on debt relief, limiting the ability of developing nations to invest in social infrastructure and environmental conservation. Furthermore, she highlights the role of speculative capital in exacerbating economic instability, as financial markets prioritise short-term gains over long-term sustainability.

The omission of sovereign debt discussions from major biodiversity agreements underscores a fundamental failure in global governance.

By maintaining a structure where economic growth is dictated by the interests of a wealthy few, the current financial system obstructs meaningful progress in addressing both ecological and social inequalities. Reforming this architecture requires a fundamental shift in how we value economic success, moving beyond GDP-centric measures towards frameworks that account for well-being, resilience, and ecological balance.

Similarly, it is essential to recognise, remunerate, value and share the burden of care: the reproductive and still invisible work–or rather, made invisible–which nevertheless sustains and organises the whole of life in society. As put by the author and politician Manuela d'Avila: "The question of how women reconcile work and family life is not offensive; what is offensive is that men are never asked" [1]. In achieving the goal of creating public care spaces and structures, the first step, as d'Avila pointed out, is to recognise that this work also counts and that "it is perhaps our most important work" [2].

Recognising the true value of unpaid care work is essential to achieve truly sustainable development. Similarly, if we do not value and protect biodiversity and the work of those who push for peaceful resolution and rights as fundamental as safe drinking water, any hope of a just and sustainable future will remain out of our grasp. Almost half of all drinking water sources on Earth are currently polluted, which particularly affects indigenous peoples, who are used to directly using rivers for their supply. In this context, we need more than ever to find a balance so that all of humanity has access to vital resources without damaging nature. In this sense, the fight for biodiversity conservation is no less important and cannot be extricated from others, such as the fight for local economic autonomy.

The UN's *Pact for the Future* [3] echoed this latter demand and called for equitable financial mechanisms that redistribute wealth rather than concentrating it in elitist circles. We must not lose sight of the fact that a radical financial restructuring to address these inequalities is not only necessary from the point of view of economic equity but also essential to guarantee the longevity of democratic governance and ecological stability.

In The 2024 *Summit of the Future*, Former UN Assistant Secretary-General **Youssef Mahmoud** argues that these economic and financial challenges are compounded by the failures of global governance structures—particularly the United Nations, which has struggled to adapt to an era of radical disruptions. He critiques the inertia of international organisations in responding to the structural inequalities and crises that shape the modern world, arguing that without fundamental shifts in the distribution of power within these institutions, their legitimacy and effectiveness will continue to erode.

Mahmoud asserts that current multilateral frameworks were designed in a different geopolitical era and are now failing to address the urgent need for inclusive, participatory decision-making that reflects the realities of an increasingly multipolar world. He contends that the UN must undergo significant reform to better respond to contemporary crises, advocating for a regeneration of multilateralism that is both inclusive and responsive to the needs of historically marginalised nations. Mahmoud highlights the necessity of reshaping decision-making processes within international institutions, ensuring that they reflect the realities of a multipolar world where power dynamics must shift towards greater equity. He calls for stronger cooperation mechanisms that bridge gaps between financial, political, and environmental governance, reinforcing the role of the UN as a facilitator of meaningful global transformation.

In his vision, reforming the UN involves not just procedural adjustments but a transformation in its ethos—moving from a reactive body to one that proactively fosters global solidarity and resilience. He emphasises that the UN must prioritise not only state actors but also subnational and civil society voices, ensuring that governance decisions are informed by the lived experiences of those most affected by global crises. This would require a renewed commitment to multilateral diplomacy, new funding mechanisms to support sustainable development, and institutional structures that elevate rather than suppress diverse perspectives in decision-making.

Reforming the international architecture requires a fundamental shift in how we value economic success, moving beyond GDP-centric measures towards frameworks that account for well-being, resilience, and ecological balance.

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True innovation does not emerge from isolation but from the intersection of knowledge, experience, and imagination.

The global economy must acknowledge and properly value forms of work that sustain both human and ecological life, such as unpaid caregiving and biodiversity stewardship.

Mahmoud earnestly and beautifully translates the spirit of our volume when he asserts that "When we are stuck in the same patterns of thought, knowledge, and behaviour that led to our problems, we are unlikely to find a way out of it all" [4]. This, in turn, provides a great basis for **Jason Hickel**'s proposition that the roots of the current economic and ecological crises are deeply entrenched in colonial legacies and that if we are serious about addressing those crises, we need to break the colonial cycle and set a new course for human history.

In his *Anti-Colonial Revolution*, Professor Hickel places the current crisis in a historical context, illustrating how centuries of extractivism and exploitation have shaped contemporary disparities. The Global North has long depended on exploiting resources and labour in the South, and climate solutions that do not account for these historical injustices risk reproducing them under the guise of sustainability. Recognising the necessity of reparations, land rights, and indigenous governance is essential in shaping a just environmental transition, one that moves beyond rhetoric and towards real, transformative change.

Hickel argues that the ongoing global inequality is not an accident but a continuation of colonial power structures that were designed to extract wealth from the Global South and concentrate it in the hands of the Global North. He emphasises that despite formal decolonisation, economic policies such as structural adjustment programs, trade imbalances, and debt dependency continue to perpetuate these historical injustices. Furthermore, he critiques the dominant economic model that prioritises endless growth and resource extraction, arguing that it is fundamentally incompatible with ecological limits. Instead, he calls for a radical restructuring of the global economy—one that prioritises self-sufficiency over excess, redistribution over accumulation, and ecological balance over profit maximisation. This would require not only financial reparations but also a transformation in governance structures that empower communities historically marginalised by extractive capitalism. His vision aligns with the principles of a Global Bauhaus mindset, as it underscores the necessity of systemic innovation in how economies and societies are organised to ensure a just and sustainable future.

A Global Bauhaus mindset calls for an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from multiple domains to craft holistic solutions. As Rainer Maria Rilke once wrote, "The future enters into us, to transform itself in us, long before it happens" [5]. This transformation is not passive; it is an act of intentional design, requiring us to dissolve the barriers that separate disciplines, governance models, and economic systems. True innovation does not emerge from isolation but from the intersection of knowledge, experience, and imagination.

To forge a truly just and sustainable future, we must redefine value itself—not as a measure of extraction and accumulation but as a commitment to care, renewal, and interdependence.

This means designing systems that are participatory and decentralised, allowing local communities to take the lead in shaping their own futures while recognising that economic, environmental, and social justice must be pursued together. It demands reparative and redistributive economic models that recognise the historical injustices underpinning current inequalities. It necessitates an ecocentric perspective that places care—both for people and the planet—at the centre of our political and economic decision-making.

This approach must be reflected in concrete policy actions. As author Audre Lorde poignantly reminds us, "There is nothing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives" [6]. This principle must guide policymaking, ensuring that environmental sustainability, economic justice, and social equity are approached as interconnected imperatives. Biodiversity conservation, long overshadowed by climate change in the public debate, must be given equal weight. The crises of biodiversity loss and climate change are inextricably linked—solving one without addressing the other is impossible. A shift in public and private funding structures is needed to reflect this reality.

Additionally, the global economy must acknowledge and properly value forms of work that sustain both human and ecological life, such as unpaid caregiving and biodiversity stewardship. These areas remain economically invisible despite their foundational role in sustaining societies. To forge a truly just and sustainable future, we must redefine value itself—not as a measure of extraction and accumulation but as a commitment to care, renewal, and interdependence.

The UN Pact of the Future sets the stage for institutional change, but a truly transformative process demands a radical dare of imagination. It will never be just about proposing new models, but about building new ways to understand governance, public policy and economic planing. The Global Bauhaus paradigm is not a utopian dream, it's a necessity.

In 1919, German urbanist Walter Gropius affirmed the importance of thinking innovatively. At the art school he founded, his Bauhaus, Gropius inspired students to come up with new ideas by using simple shapes and colours: blue, red and yellow; a triangle, a circle; and a rectangle. This edition of **metapolis** is but an invitation to look into the world the same way Bauhaus artists did: from the conviction that the simplest elements can build up great ideas, allowing us to keep our planet healthy and make the future fair for all.

We simply cannot continue to think in the ways we used to. The spirit of a Global Bahaus this volume explores calls upon us to rethink value, governance and justice. It demands that we integrate ecological imperatives with economic and political structures in a way that serves all of humanity, not just the privileged few. If we are to build a habitable future, we must start now with new ideas, boldness, creativity and collective action.

Fernanda Ribeiro

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01. TOWARDS SERIOUS BIODIVERSITY POLICY: FOREIGN DEBT IN THE LONG DUREE OF EXTRACTIVISM

Audrey Irvine-Broque | Jessica Dempsey

Jan-Jun, 2023

A Hamstrung Multilateral Agreement

It was the early morning hours of December 19th, 2022, and government negotiators were still locked in closed-door meetings. Behind those doors was also the document that everyone was here to see: the final draft of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the crowning achievement of the two-week negotiation, and the many weeks and years of meetings that came before that. Under the shadow of the last round of failed global targets for biodiversity, this framework would renew hope that governments could take action on the extinction crisis. Now China, the president of the conference, and other governments party to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) were under pressure to smooth out unresolved issues and announce a unifying document, one that would declare a new agenda for biodiversity—a roadmap to arrest nature's decline.

In those pre-dawn meetings, a small piece of text was removed from the agreement. It recommended that the CBD Secretariat: "*prepare a report on the relationship between public debt, austerity measures and the implementation of the Convention, with a view to removing specific impediments to the implementation of the Convention.*" This proposal was meant to advance our understanding of how constraining economic conditions pose significant barriers to governments' ability to uphold the mandate of the convention: the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources. It mandated no specific course of action on debt and austerity. It simply proposed a study to understand their impact on constraining public action.

It's hard to know what happened to this text—how the only mention of sovereign debt in the entire document slipped off the table. Most likely, it was unceremoniously deleted, considered—despite a looming debt crisis for developing countries—irrelevant to the global effort to protect biodiversity. A few hours later, the new draft of the Global Biodiversity Framework was announced, and accepted by all parties. Starkly absent was any mention of how to address one of the key underlying drivers of biodiversity loss: the political economic conditions under which nations are forced to further exploit their ecosystems in order to keep up with growing interest payments to international creditors.

Placing Biodiversity Loss in the Global Economy

The deleted text represented the first time that debt was, for a moment at least, mentioned within a draft CBD decision. But it can't be the last, given that a new round of debt crises threaten to sweep through low- and middle-income countries, with potentially catastrophic consequences for social and environmental stability. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) World Economic Outlook from July

2022 reported that "60 percent of low-income countries were in or at high risk of government debt distress," [1] while 136 out of 152 Global South countries are considered critically indebted by the Global Sovereign Debt Monitor as of 2023. [2] Indebtedness, on its own, is not a bad thing. Lending allows countries to invest in infrastructure, healthcare, education, and economic diversification, and foreign-lending, in particular, is needed for countries with small domestic lending bases. But, for many structurally-disadvantaged states in the Global South, the highly unequal conditions under which external debt was amassed—and continues to be disciplined—have led to a tailspin of crisis.

What makes this kind of debt so destabilizing? To start, debt for many Global South nations is vastly more expensive than that accessed by countries in the North. A recent report found that "countries in Africa borrow on average at rates that are four times higher than those of the United States and even eight times higher than those of Germany." [3] This means that countries pay more in debt servicing obligations proportional to the amount of capital they are able to access, leaving them all the more vulnerable to payment increases due to internal and external shocks (e.g., currency devaluations, interest rate hikes, investor flight). And when shocks do happen—think: recent pandemics, heatwaves, and floods—the arduous conditions and repayment terms of these debts undercut the ability of developing countries to direct spending towards public goods and services. The result is that countries are forced into seemingly endless states of austerity in order to keep up with high external debt payments and the demands of international creditors, limiting their economic options for investment and recovery. The headline figure of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)'s *World of Debt* report states that "today, 3.3 billion people live in countries that spend more on interest payments than on education or health," with these payments "growing faster than other public expenditures." That is, in many places, repaying *just the interest* on these loans eats up more public funds than some of the most necessary social spending. Under such conditions, it's hard to imagine public investment in ecosystem restoration and protection growing to meet the ecological crisis at hand.

A new round of debt crisis looms, threatening to devastate low –and middle– income countries, with potentially catastrophic consequences for social and environmental stability.

With their coffers perpetually drained, social and environmental spending—like for climate adaptation and biodiversity conservation—takes a backseat to attracting investment in sectors that can earn currency quickly and have a high risk tolerance, meaning that extractive sectors, oriented towards producing commodity exports, become paramount to financial stability. Not only do these debt repayments often have short tenors, requiring quick repayment (compared to long term sustainable development investments), but these arduous payments on external debt must often be made in foreign currency (mostly USD), meaning that countries need to generate high reserves of foreign exchange. To access this foreign currency, many Global South countries are driven into export-oriented commodity production, and therefore the increased extraction or conversion of natural resources. This means that intensifying biodiversity loss is often a precondition for access to capital, particularly for countries in the low and middle income categories (though not only these countries). And, given how challenging it is to get out of this cycle of debt, this dependence on commodity exports begets more dependence on commodity exports, driving extractive frontiers further into natural ecosystems.

Governments, of course, should not be so easily let off the hook for decisions that put people and the rest of nature in peril, often at the expense of communities who resist and contest these projects. But these constraints, born out of a colonial system, make it challenging for any other alternatives to take hold. Look into any of the commodity sectors that are most relied on to earn foreign exchange, and it becomes clear that ecological appropriation in the Global South extends much further than this current round of debt crises or the last. Activists have long-recognized the more than 500 years of siphoning off of ecological wealth from developing countries to developed countries, in which advanced industrialized countries have used and accumulated wealth from these nations without fair, if any, compensation for their value. These "ecological debts"—a term developed by Latin American activists

and circulated among Global South countries since the early 1990s—are not only a fixture of history. A recent study aiming to quantify these imbalances found that over the last 50 years, high-income countries were responsible for 74% of cumulative excess material use, compared to less than 1% for lower-middle-income and low-income countries combined. [4] While such studies don't account for the unequal conditions within nations (such as centuries of extraction from Indigenous territories) they indicate long-standing patterns of global inequality that set the stage for today's unequal ecological and economic relations. Where biodiversity conservation is sometimes considered a niche or hobby issue in the Global North, the plunder of Global South ecologies for consumption in the rich world tells an entirely different story.

Researchers have studied how dramatically these patterns of resource appropriation influence land use change at the global scale, and along North-South lines. One study found that agricultural commodities produced for international markets were estimated to drive around 26% of forest loss in the tropics and sub-tropics between 2005-2013 [5] (where forest loss, especially primary forest loss, is highest; it was also found that this trade contributed to 26–39% of deforestation-related emissions from 2010–2014 [6]). In Argentina—a major soybean exporter—60% of native forests were converted to farmland between 1987-2009. This followed substantial government intervention—including deregulation and preferential exchange rates for the sector—to expand the soy industry and increase export earnings as a way to manage international debt crises. But this increase in soy exports and conversion to farmland also comes while 40% of Argentina's population lives below the poverty

When crises occur, such as the recent pandemics, heat waves and floods, the arduous terms and repayment schedules of these debts undermine the ability of developing countries to invest in public goods and services.

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Debt interest consumes more public resources than some of the most pressing social needs. Under such conditions, it is difficult to imagine increased public investment in ecosystem restoration and protection.

line, struggling to find enough to eat amidst high prices. [7] Clearly, land use transformations towards intensified exports produce vulnerability to more than just commodity price cycles.

The brewing debt crisis—combined with large levels of tax evasion, preferential tax treatment for extractive industries, and international investment courts that protect the interests of mobile capital—make it harder and harder for Global South countries to uphold the targets put forth by the CBD. For these reasons, there is growing awareness that debt and tax justice will have to be on that table as a matter of ecological justice. [8]

Yet, at the Montreal negotiations, instead of addressing these major economic inequities like debt, the debate revolved around the "financing gap" for nature. While governments from across the developing world pleaded for rich countries to come to the table and fulfill their "common but differentiated responsibilities", Northern governments stated again and again that that money simply did not exist; that the only way to achieve conservation objectives would be to raise that money in the form of private investments in biodiversity conservation—a fundamentally unserious strategy for addressing the mounting pressures on global biodiversity given the past failures of this approach, both in terms of scale and impact. [9]

More funding will be needed to reach ambitious biodiversity targets, there is no doubt. But what is most needed is public funding, given that the best outcomes for most natures will not generate a profit. As we have written previously, even the CBD's own expert report has "*affirmed that 'many biodiversity-positive projects will need to be financed out of public funds, given the fundamental nature of public goods, and an understanding that, while it will be important to increase private sector finance, this alone will never be sufficient for meeting all of the challenges of achieving the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.' We must therefore work to understand what is currently limiting governments from spending more on the sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity*" as well as what is driving them to increase spending to further land use change and extraction. [10]

Rather than on the minuscule flows of funding earmarked for biodiversity objectives in a highly unequal system, our focus should be on changing the much broader patterns of extractivism, which undermine both sustainable development and sovereignty.

Ultimately, stopping ecological collapse requires reforming finance, not just having it. Extractive land use change drives 80 percent of biodiversity loss globally, [11] and the financial sector is implicated in these impacts to the tune of trillions. [12] Rather than focusing on the tiny streams of finance flowing towards biodiversity goals in a highly unequal system, our attention should be focused on changing these much larger patterns of extractivism, which undercut both sustainable development and sovereignty.

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)—akin to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) for nature—has also recognized that the status quo approach to environmental conservation is not working. In response to the unprecedented decline in the abundance and diversity of life on Earth, and the limited success of piecemeal or reformist approaches, this body has called for transformative change across technical, social and economic systems. [13] They acknowledge that environmental issues do not get solved in a vacuum—that a serious approach to biodiversity loss is one that recognizes its drivers within the structural constraints of current economic systems.

So far, parties to the Convention have shied away from even studying how this current arrangement of financial power, and the dire straits it has put governments in, would impact their targets for ecosystem health. At the Montreal negotiations, developing country governments advocated that biodiversity follow with the climate COP, taking up the mantle of "loss and damage" as a way to ensure that these crises are managed in line with historic responsibility and present vulnerability. No dice. What will it take for the direction of the Convention—gridlocked as it has been in the "arrested development" of market-based approaches—to come back to the table on distributive justice?

What Comes Next

The Kunming-Montreal agreement made some important strides, particularly with regard to recognition for Indigenous rights within conservation projects. But in the end, it did little to chip away at the conditions that make extractivism, the mode of accumulation that drives biodiversity loss across the globe, so prevalent. So what should policymakers do in the lead up to the next Conference of Parties? What would it look like to approach the problem of ecological crisis as the systemic, embedded issue that it is?

Plainly, debt forgiveness and cancellation will need to be on the table. Reforms to the institutions that manage these crises are also needed. Outside of the world of biodiversity conservation, proposals are circulating for a new international finance architecture. [14] Where the Convention on Biological diversity is concerned, we have listed out recommendations of what should be on the table for the multilateral process. [15] While debt-for-nature swaps have garnered attention as a way to address this issue, they are, at best, a stop-gap measure to open up fiscal space. With persistent concerns about their transparency, and limited potential to transform underlying conditions, it will be necessary to see past one-time arrangements and tackle root causes.

There is a widespread understanding that those who have least contributed to environmental destruction should not continue to be forced into extractive relations to the benefit of the financial sector and the Global North. Without changing this context, unequal conditions on access to capital (including sovereign debt conditionalities, incentives to attract foreign investment, and IMF surcharges) will continue to drive extractivism while undermining public investment in sustainable development. It might be tempting to turn away from such daunting structural conflicts, but what comes of these debates will have direct bearing on what kinds of nature thrive, or not, all over the world.

There is a widespread consensus that those who have contributed least to environmental destruction should no longer be forced to maintain extractive relationships for the benefit of the financial sector and Northern countries.

Audrey Irvine-Broque

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02. THE 2024 SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR U.N. REGENERATION IN AN ERA OF RADICAL DISRUPTIONS

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We live in a threshold moment, a liminal space in human history where the world we have known is dying and a new one is yet to be born. During this unsettling interregnum, the multilateral governance system expected to help us navigate the ongoing state of reconfiguration [1] is under severe stress. Imaginaries such as the much-flouted rule-based international order and other single normative narratives that presided over its creation nearly eight decades ago are proving woefully inadequate for the interlocking and complex economic, ecological and security emergencies of our time. Unable to imagine new narratives, understandings and arrangements, the system's effectiveness and legitimacy have waned over the years and, as a result, lost the trust of people living in nations big and small, in particular those that did not participate in its creation. Following the invasion of Ukraine, the Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations declared that multilateralism was lying on its deathbed. [2] A nail to its coffin has been recently added after a divided UN Security Council failed on four occasions to act in the face of the horrifying violence in the Palestinian Occupied Territory, prompting the UN General Assembly (UNGA) to hold an emergency special session and pass a non-binding resolution on the matter. Time will tell whether the Council's subsequent adoption of a resolution calling for urgent and extended humanitarian pauses and corridors through the Gaza Strip will redeem its dented credibility.

The current 78th session of the UNGA convened under these and other inauspicious circumstances, was charged with rebuilding [3] trust in the multilateral system and reigniting global solidarity, which is approaching a danger zone. [4] Now that the high-level week of the Assembly and related summits have come and gone, many observers are wondering whether Member States have measured up to expectations [5] and produced the level of energy and commitments needed to lay the transformative foundations for next year's Summit of the Future (Sept 2024). The Summit was called for by the UN SG in his September 2021 "Our Common Agenda" report for the purpose of forging "a new global consensus on what the future should look like and what we can do today to secure it." [6] The Summit is expected to provide concrete answers on how to reinforce the cooperative "frameworks that are necessary to move us from the path to destruction to the path to prosperity".These frameworks "must be […] grounded on trust, solidarity and universality", the SG further expounded in the New Agenda for Peace (NAfP).

The Summit has been hailed by a number of eminent persons as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to help restore trust in multilateral cooperation in a world with long-simmering rivalries and competing visions over the future trajectory of the international order. [7]

On 01 September 2023, the UNGA made an important decision on the scope of the Summit and on the elements to be reflected in its outcome document to be called "A Pact for the Future". According to the text, the Pact will comprise a chapeau and

five chapters, the last one calling for transforming global governance. Many elements slated under this chapter garnered wide support among member states, [8] including the reform of three of the principal organs of the United Nations (Security Council, General Assembly, ECOSOC), the strengthening of the Peacebuilding Commission, the deepening of cooperation between the UN and regional organisations, the development of measures to complement or progress beyond GDP, and the reform of the international financial architecture. [9] Consensus was also achieved on the need to foster the peaceful and sustainable use of Outer Space.
The Pact is expected to be negotiated and endorsed by countries in the lead-up to and during the Summit. To facilitate the preparatory intergovernmental work for the summit, the UN SG provided Member States with 11 policy briefs, including a proposal for a New Agenda for Peace (NAfP) with five key messages and outlines reforms for the UN's fracturing multilateral governance. The UN SG hopes to see a future version of a new agenda for peace as one of the outcomes of the Summit. [10]

In addition to the NAfP and the report of the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism (HLAB), numerous policy briefs, reports, studies and essays were also widely disseminated and debated ahead and in the margins of the GA high-level week. They all call to varying degrees for fresh thinking and normative and policy shifts to revitalise or strengthen the multilateral system. Some are of the view that the UN, for all its flaws, remains an indispensable forum [11] for dialogue and action on global political, security and development issues, especially for developing countries often excluded from minilateral clubs such as the G20 or the expanding BRICS. [12] Others believe that the time for incremental structural reforms has long passed. Even if agreed and enacted, these reforms are likely to keep in place a deteriorating global governance system with diminishing effectiveness and legitimacy.

Yet, at this time of geopolitical disorder and entrenched divisions and interests, others view the hope for deeper structural change as fanciful. While international cooperation and multilateralism are at a historic low, it's an open question, they contend, whether a Charter negotiated now would rise to the level of ambition of the current Charter. The Security Council is often cited as an entity in need of an overhaul. The prospects for such a transformational change are also judged dim, [13] short of a major geopolitical shock akin to the one that impelled the creation of the current multilateral system, including the UN. The Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the ongoing war between Hamas and Israel, the unfolding climate disasters and other ruptures were judged not sufficiently galvanising as geopolitical tipping points to bring about such an outcome.

The UN, so far, has changed under the pressure of external events. There is now a growing consensus that if it wants to remain relevant, it must lean into the future and start changing by design rather than by accident. The question before us is what needs to be done to help ensure that the Summit of the Future lives up to its touted transformational potential and helps the United Nations become the organisation that wants to be born, [14] fit for delivering global public goods and serving as a catalyst for bringing about an equitable, just, humane and democratic global governance system. Short of this, those who fear that the most likely outcome of the Summit would be laudable words on a page would be proven right.

This paper offers some action points and process suggestions on what could be done to make this undesirable outcome less likely. The points are designed to support the collective leadership of those member states entrusted with the intergovernmental negotiations of the Pact, planting the seeds of hope that a transformed UN could rise in these times when the world seems unmoored and in turmoil. In formulating these suggestions, the paper draws on the cornucopia of innovative ideas generated by the above-mentioned policy briefs and a multitude of civil society inputs. [15]
It also draws on insights from complexity theory, thinking systems practices and the three-horizon foresight tool [16] to reflect on current assumptions, emerging

changes, and possible and desired futures. The process points suggested in this paper are also inspired by the work of pathfinders who know how to lead in uncertain times and how to treat the collapse of current regimes [17] as a gestation period or compost for their renegotiation or replacement.

Due to limited space, the action points will focus primarily on reform and possible transformation of the international peace and security system that fall under chapters 2 and 5 of the Pact.

Ensure Bottom-up Conversations Are Generative and Future-Anchored

In his October 2023 letter to the co-facilitators of the preparatory process for the Summit of the Future, the President of the 78th UNGA requested that all relevant stakeholders participate and engage meaningfully in this process. Germany and Namibia, entrusted with facilitating the intergovernmental negotiations leading up to the outcome document "A Pact for the Future", sent a letter [18] to member states outlining the schedule of informal consultations on the various chapters of the Pact. On 13 November, the co-facilitators invited major groups and other stakeholders, as well as civil society, to a virtual consultation on 13 December 2023 and announced plans for the UN civil society conference to take place in May 2024 in Nairobi, Kenya. [19]

Consortiums of civil society organisations such as the Coalition for the UN We Need are already playing a proactive, supportive role by seeking the views of various key stakeholders on what they hope to see under each of the five chapters of the Pact.

On 12 September, the UNGA decided that the theme of the Summit of the Future shall be "multilateral solutions for a better tomorrow." [20] To ensure that these hybrid consultations lay the foundations for a transformative Pact, it is highly recommended that they be generative, with visions of the future serving as a starting point. Generative in the sense that these conversations should engage in fresh thinking, probing the assumptions, [21] biases, and deeply held beliefs that have informed the work of multilateralism and discern the ones that are no longer fit for purpose. The conversations should also engage in *future-back* thinking as a way of disrupting the present and generating visionary aspirations for a United Nations that is fit for a radically different world.

Unable to adapt and transform in the face of mounting global challenges, the United Nations as a complex system kept revealing over the past decade's internal contradictions, systemic and normative cracks.

Starting with a vision of the future breaks away from the *present-forward* thinking approach that tends to focus on what needs to be done to fix existing broken systems. Once a "better UN future" is re-imagined, [22] a consensus will then be developed around the options or the "solutions" that need to be explored in the present and under the various chapters of the Pact to make that future a reality. On the part of the conversation participants, this back-casting exercise requires fearless imagination, open curiosity and deep listening, characteristics that challenge inherited ways of thinking and resist offering "solutions" that might unwittingly extend the lifespan of a problematic present—one whose expiry date may have long passed.

For these bottom-up conversations to yield the expected generative and transformative results and have a catalytic impact beyond the Summit, they should not be treated merely as fora for consultations on an already agreed Pact draft. Genuine listening motivated by the desire to reflect the views of civil society in the formulation of the Pact should be the overarching approach.

Such outreach and consultations with civil society through which imagined futures are leveraged to transform the present. They could also be initiated by individual member states as part of a national listening exercise, as suggested by the UN SG in his "Our Common Agenda". If properly facilitated, these national consultations

In its many instances of inaction and non-intervention or paralysis, the Security Council is functioning precisely as it was intended to operate: designed for deadlock, built to be explicitly unfair and undemocratic.

could go a long way towards strengthening a culture of genuine multilateral cooperation and a sense of solidarity and trust across the societies in which they are embedded.

In curating the outcomes of these conversations, every effort should be made to ensure that the voices of youth, the custodians of the future, are properly reflected and that these youth and the young women among them are afforded the space for meaningful participation in the Summit, as foreseen by the modalities announced by the UNGA. [23]

Other Pathways for Unleashing the Transformational Potential of the Summit

Parallel to or enriched by the outcome of the above people-generated dialogues, a coalition of like-hearted and like-minded member states and UN officials and staff could engage in similar conversations in the margins of or as part of the intergovernmental negotiation processes aimed at facilitating agreement on a meaningful Pact of the Future. To help ensure that the text paves the way for transformative change and not only recommitment to or repairing what exists—important as these are—the following additional steps are suggested. As alluded to above, these steps are inspired by the work of conscious systems entrepreneurs [24] and the imaginal cells among them who, as they coalesce and multiply, help a collapsing system gradually transit from breakdown to breakthrough and regeneration.

1. Help the system see its cracks so the light gets in

Unable to adapt and transform in the face of mounting global challenges, the United Nations as a complex system [25] kept revealing over the past decade's internal contradictions and systemic and normative cracks that can no longer be papered over or managed through incremental change or reforms. Yet in both Our Common Agenda and the New Agenda for Peace, the SG kept inviting us to observe the multiple gaps in the existing multilateral system and offering recommendations for future solutions without interrogating the outdated and, at times, hegemonic assumptions and worldviews informing the system.

Going forward, and in order to avoid such a linear problem-solving approach, it is suggested that the co-facilitators identify systems entrepreneurs who can empower internal imaginal cells among member states and other stakeholders to hold a mirror up to the system. This way, it could deliberately see its flaws and cracks while resisting the urge to offer solutions that may end up sustaining a decaying status quo. It has been shown that slowing down in urgent times [26] when the system is in distress and resting into the discomfort of its cracks makes it possible for imaginal cells to help it loosen its grip, suspend the scripted certainties and let go of what no longer serves. It is also through the cracks that the light gets in, and different possible futures become visible. For this to happen, these imaginal cells will have not only to linger in the cracks but also work like nurturing gardeners rather than engineers, allowing for conscious, transformative learning [27] to happen and for something new to be born. A process that those with vested interests in maintaining the status quo will actively seek to thwart.

Some of the systemic cracks and gaps outlined in the NAfP could benefit from the generative systems entrepreneurship approach outlined above. Under the overarching heading of "normative challenge", the Secretary-General laments the violation of international law and the erosion of human rights and other international frameworks. These normative gaps, in his view, pose a potentially existential dilemma for the United Nations "when the different interpretations by

Member States of universal normative frameworks become so entrenched as to prevent adequate implementation". To solve this dilemma, he proposes "rebuilding consensus on the meaning of and adherence to these frameworks as an essential task for the international system".

A generative, honest conversation would dig deeper into the diagnosis and discuss whether the proposed solutions would lead to transforming these frameworks or entrench their inherent contradictions and their contested normative moorings.

In a separate section of the report, the SG mentions the growing backlash against women's rights and calls for "the dismantling of the patriarchy and oppressive power structures which stand in the way of women's full, equal and meaningful participation in political and public life". Unlike the prescriptions for addressing the normative challenge, this proposal carries the seeds of transformation and can benefit from the thought leadership of key entrepreneurial member states supported by some think tanks and young women's associations who have begun focusing on some of the innovative steps [28] that can help the sprouting of these seeds, for which the Pact should serve as fertile ground.

Another major systemic fissure or gap that could benefit from a genuine regenerative conversation is the dysfunctional structure of the UN Security Council, which has become more pronounced during this time of deep geopolitical fractures among its veto-wielding permanent members, as evidenced by its paralysis in the face of the raging Israeli-Hamas war. The reasons for this dysfunction are well-known and legion, [29] as are the competing plans for its reform. [30] The most recent proposal is contained in the NAfP where the UN SG emphasises the urgent need for a Security Council "more representative of the geopolitical realities of today, and of the contributions that different parts of the world make to global peace", as well as a "genuine democratisation of its working methods". With respect to structural reform, the NAfP recommends that "urgent progress" be made in the intergovernmental negotiations on Council reform in the General Assembly. This process, which began in 2008, has yet to make clear progress. Global perspectives on the likelihood of such progress in the near future are not optimistic. [31]

A generative conversation among systems change entrepreneurs, and their imaginal cell allies would not necessarily use the above cursory state of play as a starting point for transforming the Security Council. In looking deeper and listening with humility, the starting point could address the myth [32] that the Council was designed by the framers of the Charter as a collective security mechanism. It is not. It is a tool for selective security [33] whose primary aim is maintaining peaceful relations between the most powerful states in the international system. To incentivise these states to both join the United Nations and remain within the organisation, the Charter granted them permanent membership on the Council and endowed them with the ability to veto any proposed action that they deemed would threaten or jeopardise their security or interests: "The veto is viewed to be a power unrestrained by law." [34].

Seen through this angle, the Council's frequent inability to intervene to prevent crises, resist acts of aggression, or enforce international law is, therefore, not a "failure". Rather, in its many instances of inaction and non-intervention or paralysis, the Security Council is functioning exactly as it was intended to operate, [35] designed for deadlock. [36] It was built to be explicitly unfair and undemocratic [37] and crafted to give the P5 control over the narratives of what constitutes threats to international peace and security and how to address them largely through the penholder system. [38] This has added grist to the mill of those who find it untenable that 5 member states that won WWII, some of whom are instigating crises, should wield more power than the rest of the membership in the context of a radically changed world and a Charter that prescribes the much debated sovereign equality of all nations large and small.

Once the cobwebs around this myth are out in the open and their implications are understood, UN member states may need to make an informed judgment as to whether shifting the power away from the P5 or adding new permanent members would be the appropriate entry point for enhancing multilateral actions for dealing more effectively with pressing international peace and security issues. They might come to the realization that it is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick system, to paraphrase J. Krishnamurti. Thus, they may decide that the time has come to shift the conversation away from the obsession with reforming a dysfunctional entity that has become an insecurity Council [39] to imagining a new collective, not selective, security model. Just as it takes the total disintegration of the caterpillar's structure in order to create a butterfly—it may take the complete breakdown of the present system before a better future dawns.

In order to hospice what is breaking down and midwife what needs to replace it, three simultaneous catalytic processes are required. The first is to nurture the innovative self-corrections the international system has improvised over the years to repair its cracks. The second is to interrogate, unlearn and let go of the dominant epistemic and ontological narratives informing some of the paradigms and frameworks whose universality can no longer be taken for granted. The third is to initiate a transformation process before the global order moorings implode and the system irretrievably hits the shores of irrelevance.

2. Nurture reforms and innovations as stepping stones towards transformation

Engaging in people-centric generative conversations and helping the UN patiently diagnose and contemplate its cracks are critical first steps towards creating systemic self-renewal and transformation conditions. To better leverage the outcomes of these two strategies, a deliberate collective effort is needed to nurture the multiple ways in which the organisation, as a complex system, has attempted over the years to improve its inherent ability to renew itself without resorting to a review of its Charter. This pragmatic approach is informed by the view that structural change should be gradual, and any additional innovations or repairs should build on and safeguard the hard-won reform gains while recommitting to the values and principles enshrined in the present Charte—that still benefit from the adherence to the overwhelming majority of the UN membership. This does not mean giving up on transformational change, but rather, in the face of an obdurate international system, secure what seems to be working and hold space for additional repairs, which, as they coalesce, become seeds for new future paradigms—that would eventually make old ones irrelevant or obsolete. In this connection, it is incumbent on the system entrepreneurs to ensure that the collapsing system does not coopt these seeds to justify its continued relevance.

The General Assembly's innovative inroads in the area of peace and security illustrate the above argument. The Assembly, as commonly known, has had a long-standing ad-hoc working group charged with identifying ways to further enhance its role, authority, effectiveness and efficiency. Over the years, it has made commendable advances [40] towards the revitalization of its work. In the area of international peace and security, the Assembly played, most recently, a critical role in the uniting for peace resolution, which is activated whenever the Security Council fails to exercise its primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. In addition to the above, the Assembly has undertaken several notable normative and procedural innovations that would benefit from the nurturing approach outlined above.

One of these is the landmark resolution, adopted in April 2022, aimed at holding the five Permanent Security Council members accountable for the use of the veto. By the text of the resolution, which was adopted without a vote, the Assembly decided that its President shall convene a formal meeting of the 193-member organ within

10 working days of the casting of a veto by one or more permanent members of the Council and hold a debate on the situation to which the veto was cast, provided that the Assembly does not meet in an emergency special session on the same situation. Further, the Assembly invited the Council, in accordance with Article 24 (3) of the Charter of the United Nations, to submit a special report on the use of the veto in question to the Assembly at least 72 hours before the relevant discussion is to take place. As intimated earlier, the above processes were activated most recently [41] when the veto was used under the agenda item "The Situation in the Middle East Including the Palestinian Question".

Since its adoption in April 2022, the veto resolution, despite its uneven application, has enabled the General Assembly to aspire to a more robust role in matters of peace and security when the Council fail. Some have argued [42] that the General Assembly needs to go further and pass an existential resolution that would give it precedence over the Council in times of conflict.

Pending this radical transformative step, serious thought should be given to the recommendation by the SG in the NAfP calling, under the sub-heading "Revitalization of the General Assembly" for the Assembly to put forward measures for the peaceful settlement of any situation that it deems likely to impair the general welfare or friendly relations among nations.

Equally serious thought should be given to the proposal calling for the creation of a World Parliamentary Assembly or a Global Citizens' Assembly [43] as a subsidiary organ under Article 22 that would ensure that "we the peoples" have a say in the decisions taken in their name. [44]

Every effort should be made to ensure that the voices of youth, the custodians of the future, are properly reflected in the Summit.

The above systemic innovations, many initiated by small states, and similar ones introduced by elected members of the Security Council to improve the working methods of the Security Council, [45] must be valued and cultivated as steadying ballast in these times of systemic turbulence and radical uncertainty. They constitute a critical component of a gestation period that could go awry if not properly steered towards system renegotiation and transformation. In this regard, the vigilance and collective leadership of small states is critical and should not be underestimated.

3. Unlearning and relearning: navigating epistemic and ontological transitions

Albert Einstein famously said that no problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it. This essentially means that when we are stuck in the same patterns of thought, knowledge and behaviour that led to the problems we are facing, we are unlikely to find a way out of it all. Most of these patterns, which dictate our understanding of ourselves and our relationship with each other and the world around us, remain steeped in single narratives about how the world should be ordered, policies governed, nature harnessed, economies developed and peace and security built.

Building foundations for transformative change would not be possible without disentangling ourselves from the above epistemological and ontological certainties. This entails unlearning what we know and entering a liminal space where we no longer belong to the old identity. This state of unknowing, while unnerving, opens us to learn alternative ways of knowing, being and doing that may have been displaced by hegemonic, top-down paradigms judged to be universal. To paraphrase futurist Alvin Toffler, the illiterate of the 21st century are those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn. [46]

One aspect that can benefit from this process of unlearning and relearning is the notion of peace so central to the work of the UN. Even though we are beginning

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to understand what drives people to work for it, [47] peace remains largely an elusive goal. Its fortunes continue to be tied to the presence or absence of violent conflict. Attempts to value its importance tend to be conveyed through counting the costs of war.

One of the reasons for this enduring negative appreciation of peace is the proposition that if we can gain a sophisticated enough understanding of what drives violence we will be able to better foster and sustain peace. This linear assumption of peace continues to inform the practice of UN peacebuilding, largely conceived as time-bound, exogenous interventions solely relevant to unstable contexts. While such interventions may calm the ravages of conflict, numerous studies have shown that all they produce is a modicum of stability often mistaken for peace.

In light of these deficits, [48] researchers, policymakers and practitioners have been calling to make room for decolonial peace and for multiple understandings of peace, conceived in a majority of societies as the norm of human life, not the exception. Likened to a tree that grows from the bottom, peace is experienced as an ongoing quest, the doors to which open only from the inside. A quest that is motivated by the humility to learn from what still works well in societies under stress and to respect that these societies, however broken they may appear, are not blank pages and their peoples are not projects. On the contrary, they have knowledge and agency, not just needs waiting to be fulfilled by well-meaning outsiders. [49]

Unless we pluralise our understanding of peace, [50] a task that could be entrusted to the Peacebuilding Commission, and rethink the ways we analyse and build peace in conflict contexts, the UN will continue to prioritise securitised stabilisation as a default solution with little self-sustainable peace to show for it.

Such an unlearning and relearning and the space it creates for epistemic and ontological [51] freedom and diversification could equally apply to other pillars of the UN's work, be it in the sustainable development, humanitarian or climate emergency fields. All of these endeavours are beholden to a mindset designed to address the symptoms but not the root of the institutional failures and the spurious knowledge systems underpinning them, including the monomyth of growthism and the disastrous social, economic and ecological divides it has spawned.

The above conveys that subverting what we know and embracing other epistemologies that have been othered will help us transition to a pluriversal world without a centre or margins, a multiverse world made up of multiple worlds. Pluriversality [52] thus becomes a gateway to regenerative futures that work for all and, in the short term, might address the normative challenge that the UN SG laments in the NAfP.

4. Midwifing transformation: a litmus test for the Summit

Harnessing the outcomes of people-centred, generative conversations, helping a stressed system contemplate its cracks, recommitting to what still works, valuing and nurturing curative reforms and engaging in unlearning and relearning are catalytic processes which, when simultaneously and aptly deployed, could lay the foundations for system's transformation.

Transformation is not incremental change. It is the death of the obsolete and the birth of the new. [53] The processes outlined above provide us with the wisdom needed to hospice what must pass and birth what is waiting to emerge. Properly harnessed, this wisdom would enable systems entrepreneurs to leverage the fractious geopolitical realities of today and the existential planetary tipping points as sobering entry points for initiating transformative change. It would also allow them to activate the self-renewal mechanisms foreseen in the system's act of creation.

In the case of the United Nations, this self-correcting mechanism is enshrined in Article 109 of its Charter. It stipulates that a Charter review can be called by "a two-thirds vote of the members of the General Assembly and by a vote of any nine members of the Security Council".

As alluded to above, much has been written about this article and the pros and cons of activating it. Those against it remind us of the least quoted sobering part of Article 109, which states, "Any alteration of the present Charter recommended by a two-thirds vote of the conference shall take effect when ratified in accordance with their respective constitutional processes by two-thirds of the Members of the United Nations, *including all the permanent members of the Security Council*". (italics added). This is admittedly a tall order given the historical realities that presided over the creation of the Council, the myth surrounding its work and the ongoing bitter rivalries among its permanent members.

In light of the above and fearing that an overall review of the Charter might be long overdrawn and costly and might distract the organisation from other equally pressing emergencies, the High-Level Advisory on Multilateralism (HLAB) recommended that "The Summit of the Future is an opportunity to reaffirm our common commitment to the UN Charter and announce a Charter Review conference focused on Security Council reform." [54]

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While I agree with those who have argued that the focus of the Charter review needs to be broader, [55] no reform of other organs would have far-reaching consequences for the future relevance of the United Nations than a reform of the Security Council. If the Summit, under Chapters 2 or 5 of the Pact, concurs with this HLAB's recommendation, it might breathe new life into the stultified intergovernmental process looking into the reform of the Council. More importantly, such a Charter review would create a regenerative space for the other catalytic processes outlined above to take root and even flourish.

Concluding Thoughts

Las acciones propuestas en este documento, que implican reafirmar lo que funciona, The action points outlined in this paper, calling for recommitting to what is working, reforming what is not and interrogating the anachronistic assumptions informing the current system's structures, they are all self-reinforcing and must be pursued simultaneously. [56] By themselves, however, they will not make headway towards transformation if the Pact does not, at a minimum, endorse the recommendation of HLAB on Charter review. Such an endorsement would trigger the difficult but necessary conversation on the palliative care the Council should receive pending its transformation or replacement and make room for the majority of member states to continue exploring the role of parallel inter-governmental fora for maintaining international peace and security. It will also create an incentive for the United Nations as a whole to gradually and proactively move from what is to what if. For this to happen, the generative leadership of the Pact's co-facilitators supported by like-minded and like-hearted member states is critical. Without such leadership, the Summit of the Future may not measure up to its transformative potential. In this scenario, the goals of addressing the trust, universality and solidarity deficits plaguing the United Nations will remain elusive.

Disheartening as the above prospect may sound, it does not have to be an inevitable outcome. A better outcome is possible if member states can forge a common vision of the UN they need and "we the peoples" are enabled to produce a compelling People's Pact for the Future that can enrich that vision and guide the transformative steps needed to realise it. [57]

Should the Summit meaningfully seize the transformative opportunities these urgent times offer and decide not to sacrifice the historic mission entrusted to it on the altar of the lowest common denominator consensus, it will be remembered for midwifing a thriving, living Pact that is truly fit for the Future.

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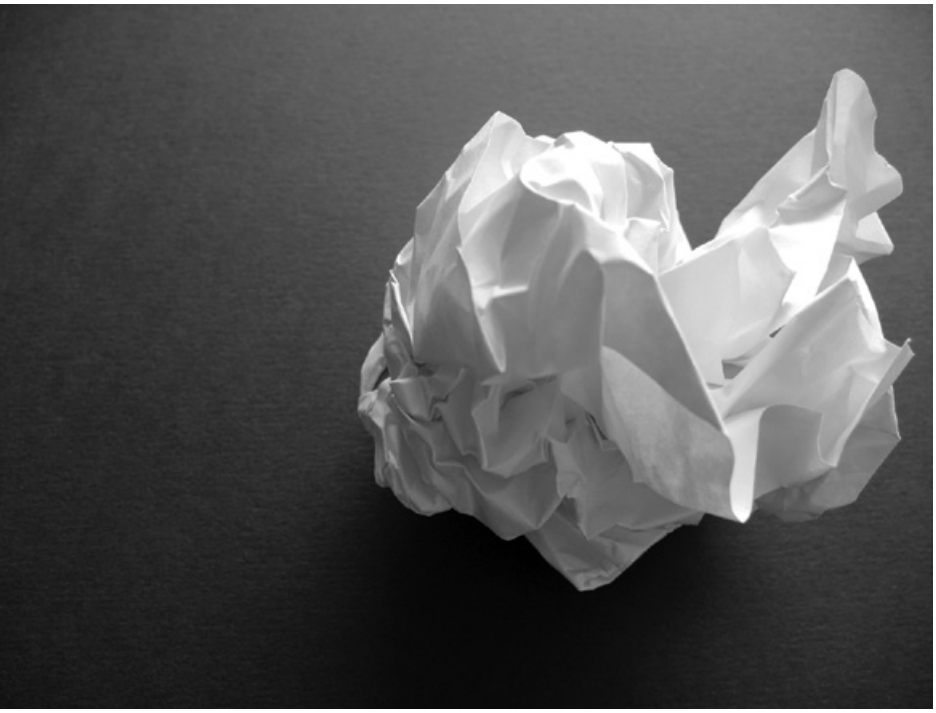

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03. WHY DEMOCRACIES MUST DELIVER

Salil Shetty | Omar Waraich

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When the people of Brazil threw off Jair Bolsonaro's authoritarian rule, the celebrations were heard far beyond Bahia, Pernambuco and Maranhão. Across the world, numerous countries have witnessed strongmen vaulting to power through the ballot, using their time in office to eviscerate democracy from within. For alarmed onlookers, Bolsonaro's fall created an important opening. "Thank you, Brazil", the Indian journalist Rana Ayyub posted on social media, just as Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's victory was confirmed. "You give us hope".
The electoral triumphs of progressive parties in Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Guatemala in recent years offer hope not just to the region, which had plunged to its lowest levels of democratic decline since the end of the Cold War, but also to minorities and other groups of people across the world—particularly in the global South—who are resisting the onslaught of autocratic forces in their countries. They can also take heart from the recent victories in countries as diverse as Zambia, Poland, Slovenia, and Malaysia, where democratic forces have also staged an impressive comeback.

It's a fight that won't be easy. According to the Swedish research institute V-Dem's Democracy Report 2023, advances in global levels of democracy over the past 35 years have been «wiped out» [1]. As of 2022, nearly three quarters of the world's population lives in autocracies. For the first time in more than two decades, there are more dictatorships than democracies in the world. There are now 42 countries that are "autocratizing" and just 14 that are "democratizing". Seeking to cement their rule, autocrats are also targeting their opponents with ruthless impunity: removing them from the political process, imprisoning them, or in the tragic case of incarcerated Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, apparently assassinating them.

But faith in democracy hasn't disappeared. As the 2023 Open Society Barometer recorded, a global average of 86% recognizes the importance of living in a democracy. Some of the highest figures appeared in countries where democracy has suffered great setbacks or is absent altogether: 96% of people in Türkiye, 95% in China, and 93% in Egypt—compared with 80% in the U.S. Democracy is also, overwhelmingly, the preferred form of government. Only a fifth of people believe authoritarian countries are more capable of delivering «what citizens want» [2].

Democracy Isn't Working

The problem is that democracy isn't working in its current form. We see this, for example, in the reactions of many governments to the incredible human suffering in Gaza. Even as the death toll nears 30,000 civilians, hundreds of thousands take to the streets each week, and large majorities call for a ceasefire to put an end to the human suffering, governments in many western capitals remain unmoved. Democracy cannot be reduced to a procedural exercise conducted once every four or five years.

Numerous countries around the world have witnessed strongmen vaulting to power through the ballot, using their time in office to eviscerate democracy from within.

It must be a sustained effort to respond to people's needs and to be accountable throughout the periods between elections.

For too long, there has been a narrow and restricted conception of democracy that is fixated on elections—on how power is transferred, rather than how it is exercised. The mere fact that elections take place with some frequency is not enough. In fact, the most serious setbacks to democracy over recent years have come about when strongmen, claiming to represent the popular will, have used elections to seize power. They are more dangerous than military dictators. They use elections to claim legitimacy for their rule, spend their time in office crushing the very institutions that democracy depends upon, and then rig the process to block effective challenges to their rule.

The democratic systems we have on offer currently are ill-suited to serve the contexts we are confronted with. Designed by patriarchs who sought to preserve their privilege, they do not represent the interests of women and the youth. There's also a striking absence of young or female leaders in the countries that have revived their democracies.

In the Brexit referendum, 70% of British voters aged 18-24 voted to remain. For women in that age category, the figure was higher, at 80%. Women have been steadily claiming a larger income share across the world—though still, dismayingly, far from levels of gender parity. In Chile, Mexico and South Africa, this share has risen by 10% over the past 30 years. But they have not been given a larger share in their political systems.

Women have often been at the forefront of movements resisting autocracy. In Brazil, there were protests against Bolsonaro's misogyny from the moment he sought the presidency, through the famous #EleNao ("Not Him") mobilizations. A record number of indigenous women stood for public office in the most recent elections. In India, women have been a key part of social movements, from the protests against the anti-Muslim Citizenship Amendment Act to the economic justice work of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a trade union representing two million Indian women in the informal sector.

According to the ILO, global youth unemployment levels are more than three times as high as the adult rate. In Sri Lanka, nearly a quarter of people under 30 are unemployed. In Spain, it's nearly 30%, and in South Africa, the figure rises to a startling 60%.

According to the ILO, global youth unemployment levels are more than three times as high as the adult rate. In Sri Lanka, nearly a quarter of people under 30 are unemployed. In Spain, it's nearly 30%, and in South Africa, the figure rises to a startling 60%.

Meanwhile, there are high levels of political disaffection recorded among the youth. That disaffection is partly a function of the rising income inequality that disadvantages them. According to the International Labour Organization, global youth unemployment levels are more than three times as high as the adult rate. In Sri Lanka, nearly a quarter of people under 30 are unemployed. In Spain, it's nearly 30%, and in South Africa, the figure rises to a startling 60% [3]. For those in the workforce, young workers are twice as likely as adult workers to live in extreme poverty—earning less than $2 a day.

Youth, Climate, and Technology

Pero no son sólo las cuestiones económicas las que les preocupan. Los jóvenes también perciben la democracia en términos muy diferentes. Aunque la participación de los jóvenes es relativamente alta en América Latina, las cifras son sorprendentemente inferiores a las de los adultos en el resto del mundo. Los jóvenes son menos proclives a afiliarse a partidos políticos. La clase política no aborda sus preocupaciones más importantes, como los estragos del cambio climático. Una reciente encuesta mundial reveló que tres cuartas partes de los jóvenes creen que «el futuro es aterrador». En Filipinas, esa cifra es del 92% [4].

But it isn't merely economic questions that trouble them. Young people also perceive democracy in very different terms. While youth participation is relatively high in Latin America, the figures are strikingly lower than adult rates across the rest of the world. Young people are less likely to join political parties. The political class fails to address their most important concerns, like the ravages of climate change. A recent global survey found that three quarters of young people believe that "the future is frightening". In the Philippines, that figure is 92% [4].

Despite fears of bleak prospects, researchers note that young people are more civically engaged than ever. They are more involved in their communities. They take part in demonstrations. They hold strong views on important questions that confront their lives and the wider world around them, evident across a proliferation of social media platforms where they seek and respond to the news, at a distance from staid traditional outlets [5]. They do not, however, appear to have faith in the governance systems that have built the unfair world they will inherit.

Coming generations aren't willing to wait for the slow and weak compromises of procedural democracies to address these existential crises, one election cycle at a time.

We are in the midst of what some commentators have described as "the polycrisis": the collective experience that humanity is confronted with in the form of a confluence of multiple, overlapping crises. These include the burdens of debt on some of the world's poorest countries, the enduring effects of the pandemic, the outbreaks of conflicts and the shockwaves they have sent across the world, and the soaring costs of energy, commodities, and the general cost of living. Dysfunctional democracies are incapable of resolving these crises. We need better, more responsive governance to begin tackling this difficult task.

One tragic consequence of the rise of autocrats has been their callous attitude towards the environment, exemplified by Jair Bolsonaro's damaging years in power. The Amazon was ravaged at breakneck speed, and it will be hard to reverse. Autocrats pose a double threat to the climate. Not only do they deny the facts presented by science, but they are also prepared to accelerate its destruction to feed the insatiable greed of the extractive industries that bankroll their governments.

Coming generations aren't willing to wait for the slow and weak compromises of procedural democracies to address these existential crises, one election cycle at a time. In a reflection of the technology that increasingly define their lives, they want to see responsive and accountable governance in real-time. This tension will become more acute with the advances of generative artificial intelligence, which will further complicate their lives in ways that will not all be positive. We are already seeing the effects of artificial intelligence being used to manipulate flows of information, notably during elections. The broader effects of artificial intelligence will reshape economies, potentially leading to job losses and further economic precarity for young people.

B. R. Ambedkar warned that the ceremony of political equality through the ballot box in the form of "one person, one vote" will not survive if other inequalities remain untouched.

Young people, like any social group, are diverse in their views. One negative effect of the ubiquity of technology is that it has exposed more young people than ever to the seductions of demagogues, who offer simply packaged explanations and solutions, wrapped in toxic ideas associated with ethno-nationalism, religious extremism, and other dangerous varieties of division. A failure to create a governance system that is responsive to their needs will make the appeal of these merchants of hate even stronger.

Democracies that Deliver

Fixing democracy means creating democracies that deliver. This is partly an economic question. We have seen that the decline of democracies over recent decades correlates with rising inequality. This wasn't always guaranteed. Rising growth could have, with the implementation of effective policy, diminished inequality. But the triumph of neoliberalism in the early 1980s meant that accumulation of private wealth, helped by the loosening of regulations and taxes,

was prized over all else. The result, a generation later, is that the wealthiest 1% have benefited the most in societies that have become staggeringly less equal—and less democratic.

Autocrats like to position themselves as anti-elite, but often create a crony capitalist class that helps them consolidate their rule. This is glaringly apparent in Russia, where Putin surrounded himself with a new oligarch class as he tightened his grip on power. But it's also evident in countries like India, where a "billionaire raj" has carved up large chunks of the economy amongst itself, including snatching control of once lively and independent media houses to convert them into pliant instruments of the ruling party.

The failure to create a more equitable order can imperil democracies. BR Ambedkar, one of the principal authors of the Indian constitution, warned that the ceremony of political equality through the ballot box in the form of one person, one vote will not survive if other inequalities remain untouched. "How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life?" he asked, in a powerful speech in parliament in 1949. "If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy".

Tunisia was the birthplace of the Arab Spring, with a revolution sparked by the despair of a street vendor. Over the past decade, as successive governments barely lasted a year on average, the culture of corruption and clientelism went unchallenged. Inequality persisted within cities and between regions. The mismanagement of the pandemic, which led to the second highest death rate in Africa, triggered President Kais Saied's *autogolpe*. The generation that led the revolution did not lament the departure of the political class that had failed them. As life is drained out of the country's brief experience with democracy, the youth unemployment rate is now higher than it was on the eve of the 2010 revolution.

Dreams of Dignity

Less inequality is a necessary, but insufficient guarantee of a democracy that delivers. We have seen people prepared to inflict great harm on their democracies without any promise of economic rewards. The UK's decision to leave the European Union cannot be explained by economic factors. The country is now poorer than its former colony India. Another former colony, Ireland, now boasts three times higher GDP per capita—with EU membership a key source of its robust growth. The idea that animated the Brexit campaign was a pursuit of "control", of "sovereignty".

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As ridiculous as the notion of a former empire losing its sovereignty sounds, it had wide resonance.

The idea that animated the Brexit campaign was a pursuit of "sovereignty". As ridiculous as the notion of a former empire losing its sovereignty sounds, it had wide resonance.

Supporters of democracy have often failed to think beyond an appeal to numbers and other metrics that can be neatly translated into progress on, for example, the sustainable development goals. We have failed to appreciate the intangible things that people reach for in their lives, their dreams of dignity. Dreams that aren't easily comprehended but derive from a yearning that exists at a more visceral level. Dreams that can also be manipulated by those who listen for them carefully, but answer them through toxic appeals to race, religion, and nationalism. Liberals and progressives have tended to scorn politics along these lines, seeing them as stains on their pristine universalist visions of humanity. But this is a mistake. The identities that people cherish the most have to be honoured, not dismissed. The difference is that we must honour them through appeals towards inclusion, rather than division.

We have failed to appreciate the intangible things that people reach for in their lives, their dreams of dignity, their most visceral longings.

New Champions of Democracy

There are other divisions that we must be wary of geopolitically. We are living at a time when the unipolar order is receding, and a new multipolar order is emerging in its place. We no longer live in a G7 world but increasingly in a G20 world, with the wider community of states represented across the global South—especially less developed and climate vulnerable countries—demanding a greater say on issues of international importance. There are opportunities for democracies in this moment, but also dangers. One clear danger is having to choose between the United States and China or being caught in the middle of their rivalry.

This is not a choice that the new champions of democracy are willing to make. "The bifurcation has not helped regional or international cooperation," Anwar Ibrahim, the recently elected Malaysian Prime Minister, told an interviewer. "We should be fiercely independent, and interact and engage with both". The same goes for Lula in Brazil, who values his relationship with the United States and also plays a leadership role in the coalition of BRICS countries with China. As for Hakainde Hichilema, the new Zambian President, who realizes that the only way to lift his debt-distressed southern African nation out of its economic struggles is by engaging both Washington and Beijing.
Democracy will only flourish in this new emerging order if its new champions can protect it from global bloc politics. By pulling democracies to one side, and locating it solely within a pro-American camp, we risk diminishing its appeal. For many across the global South, a more just and equitable domestic order must exist within a more just and equitable international order. This also offers possibilities to imagine democracies in different, more compelling ways that are better suited to the different environments in which people are challenging the grip of autocrats. Democracy cannot be reduced to a fast-food franchise menu that looks the same at every store.

Brazil, Malaysia, and Zambia are very different countries with very different leaders and very different systems. And yet there are notable similarities. Each of their leaders was imprisoned on politically motivated charges by the autocrats who came before them. When we worked at Amnesty International, we visited Hichilema at his home in Lusaka after he had been tortured. We also campaigned for Anwar as a prisoner of conscience after he was unjustly consigned behind bars. Like Lula, they embody the struggles they lead. The fight for democracy unites us today, even if it looks a little different in different places.

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04. BREAKING THE VICIOUS CYCLE:

THE URGENCY OF REFORMING THE INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL ARCHITECTURE

Ivana Vasic-Lalovic

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A New Volcker Shock?

Speaking after the IMF-World Bank Annual Meetings in October 2023, Joseph Stiglitz likened today's looming debt crisis to that of the 1980s, which was precipitated by a sharp spike in the US Fed rate, known as the Volcker Shock. [1] The extreme interest rate hikes caused debt to become unsustainable around the developing world, resulting in a "lost decade" in Latin America, characterized by defaults and subsequent waves of austerity. Indeed, the hikes of the US Fed rate since 2022 have led to heightened financial volatility, exchange rate depreciation and significant capital flight from developing countries, substantially increasing the risk of defaults.

The significant gap in financing for climate and development, combined with the lack of an effective mechanism to address sovereign debt problems, means that developing countries have no meaningful path towards recovery and resilience against future shocks. At a time when they urgently need funding for climate resilience, biodiversity conservation and public services like healthcare and infrastructure, developing countries are forced to funnel scarce resources to creditors. Without a fundamental reform of the international financial architecture, including significant debt relief, countries around the globe may be headed towards another lost decade, or worse.

In the period following the Global Financial Crisis, developing countries experienced capital inflows and significantly increased borrowing, taking advantage of low-interest rates in advanced economies. The external public debt burdens of low- and middle-income countries doubled during this period, reaching over $3 trillion in 2022, and about 15 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on average. [2] This period ended with the COVID-19 pandemic, and the resulting economic contraction and shift in global monetary conditions. Today, the significant tightening of the United States (US) Federal Reserve, followed by increased interest rates in other advanced economies, threatens to push many developing countries over the edge and into debt crises.

Larger debt burdens, combined with higher interest rates and difficult global conditions, mean that the cost of servicing debt has substantially increased. Interest payments for low-income countries are particularly high relative to export income, which is the main source of foreign reserves in developing countries. Because external debt is mostly denominated in US dollars and other foreign currencies, high debt payments erode foreign reserves and threaten their balance of payments stability. They also make it difficult for countries to cover the cost of necessary imports, currently exacerbated by higher food and fuel prices around the globe. The continued global economic slowdown further diminishes the prospect of trade and investment in developing countries, keeping recovery out of reach. [3]

Another Turn in the Vicious Cycle

When increasingly frequent climate disasters strike, low—and middle—income countries lack the resources to cover loss and damage, and thus have little choice but to borrow in order to finance an adequate response.

For climate-vulnerable countries, the increased debt burden and difficult global economic conditions take on another dimension in the context of climate change, trapping them in a vicious cycle. An unfair global financial architecture keeps them indebted, while simultaneously blocking progress towards climate & biodiversity action and other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

When increasingly frequent climate disasters strike, low- and middle-income countries lack the resources to cover loss and damage, and thus have little choice but to borrow in order to finance an adequate response. The structure of debt provides an additional challenge, as private creditors now hold the majority of the stocks of developing countries. Private creditors, the majority of which are bondholders, lend at market rates. This too translates into higher interest payments for low- and middle-income countries. Debt from this creditor type also comes with shorter maturities and is difficult to restructure. Middle-income countries are most affected, as they have little to no access to concessional finance. To make matters worse, climate-vulnerable countries face poorer borrowing terms due to the perceived risk of their climate vulnerability, resulting in an even higher debt burden. [4]

Growing debt burdens and increased interest rates in turn result in higher debt payments, straining developing countries' budgets. This creates a direct trade-off between servicing debt and making essential investments in climate adaptation and mitigation, as well as key public goods, including healthcare, education, and infrastructure. Insufficient investment in public institutions further undermines a country's capacity to respond to future climate-related disasters, perpetuating the vicious cycle. High levels of debt servicing also compel fossil fuel-dependent economies to deplete their biodiversity and postpone their energy transition. Many countries obtain foreign exchange reserves through extractive industries, which in turn need to be financed through external debt in foreign currencies. This forces countries to rely on fossil fuels and other extractive sectors, and ultimately threatens progress towards biodiversity conservation and the global reduction in carbon emissions.

The Inadequate International Response

Many middle-income countries face poorer borrowing terms due to the perceived risk of their climate vulnerability, resulting in an even higher debt burden.

Wealthy countries and leaders of international financial institutions have expressed concern over the climate crisis and acknowledged the growing burden of debt in the Global South. At their most recent summit, the G7 recognized that "responding to global challenges, including the climate crisis, and addressing debt vulnerabilities in low and middle-income countries are urgent, interrelated and mutually reinforcing". [5] The limited response to these intersecting crises in developing countries has nevertheless been inadequate compared to their needs.

The lack of a comprehensive debt resolution mechanism remains one of the key factors that prevent highly indebted countries from accessing sustainable recovery. The G20 launched the Common Framework in 2021, a debt resolution platform for developing countries following the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Most middle-income countries, however, are ineligible, and the mechanism excludes debt from multilateral creditors. In three years, only four countries have sought restructuring through the Common Framework. It further fails to guarantee equal treatment for different creditor classes, which results in a prolonged and complicated process for debtor countries, without providing sufficient debt relief.

The substantial gap in climate and development finance also remains one of the key factors blocking developing countries' recovery and perpetuating this vicious cycle. G20 countries, for example, only generated $89.6 billion for climate action in 2021, falling short of the pledge to mobilize $100 billion per year by 2020 through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Most of the funding came in the form of debt. [6] In contrast, many low- and middle-

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income countries have SDG financing needs of approximately 10-20% of their GDP and face an estimated global financing gap of $500 billion per year. [7] Even new concessional instruments for climate, such as the IMF's Resilience and Sustainability Trust, are limited in scope compared to the needs of developing countries, and add to their debt burdens.

Steps for Long-term and Immediate Relief

High levels of debt servicing also compel fossil fuel-dependent economies to deplete their biodiversity and postpone their energy transition.

A fundamental reform of the international financial architecture, including the creation of a reliable debt resolution framework is necessary to break the vicious cycle. The United Nations (UN) proposes a mechanism open to all countries, which would facilitate debt resolution from all creditor classes in a much timelier manner—preventing "too little, too late" restructurings. [8] Additionally, significant debt relief would be key to achieving sustainability. It would release fiscal space that countries could use for public spending, climate, biodiversity, and development needs, instead of funneling scarce resources to creditors.

A more comprehensive international response would also include a substantial increase in grant-based and concessional finance to accelerate investment in climate adaptation, mitigation and other SDGs. After decades of pressure from climate-vulnerable nations, wealthy countries committed to the creation of a "Loss and Damage" Fund to provide support against the effects of climate change. At COP28 (the 28th UN Climate Change Conference), the decision to operationalize the fund was adopted, and a few wealthy countries offered initial pledges of about $650 million. [9] The Loss and Damage Fund must be built through the democratic participation of developing countries, and with more funding to deliver effective support; the US, for example, has only pledged $17.5 million.

A significant debt relief would be key to achieving global sustainability.

In addition, there are immediate measures that could be taken to ease the fiscal burden of these crises on developing countries' budgets. A new allocation of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) would provide immediate relief to all developing countries, without creating more debt. In August 2021, the IMF issued $650 billion in SDRs to member states to mitigate the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The allocation came with no strings attached and at no cost to taxpayers. Low- and middle-income countries received immediate fiscal relief, which decreased exchange rate risk, improved borrowing terms, and helped countries respond to the economic shock of the pandemic. Political actors and civil society organizations from around the world continue to urge the US Treasury Department to authorize a new allocation.

Further, the IMF should permanently eliminate surcharges—extra fees on borrowing countries, which are projected to cost borrowers about $2 billion per year. By increasing interest rates, which have risen up to 8 per cent for some IMF borrowers, surcharges create an additional burden for middle-income countries that are already struggling to respond to climate disasters and meet basic public needs. [10]

In closing, without prompt intervention, low- and middle-income nations stand on the brink of a lost decade and irreversible climate change impacts, which will see unpredictable global consequences. Countries facing climate change, biodiversity collapse, significant fiscal constraints and a looming debt crisis need a comprehensive global response, including debt relief from all creditor classes, debt cancellation, and the creation of a reliable debt-resolution mechanism. Significantly more grant-based finance from wealthy countries will be necessary to meet climate, biodiversity and other SDG investment priorities. In the near term, a new $650 billion allocation of Special Drawing Rights will create fiscal space, decrease exchange-rate risk, and aid low- and middle-income countries in addressing immediate public needs.

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05. THE BATTLE FOR DEMOCRACY: EMPOWERING CITIZENS AND CITIES

David Koranyi

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As the 21st century unfolds, the battle to preserve and strengthen democratic governance has become a defining struggle of our time. Authoritarian forces are gaining ground, eroding democratic norms, and consolidating power across the world. This pervasive threat to democracy demands a comprehensive and unified global response. By empowering citizen-to-citizen collaboration, leveraging powerful digital toolkits to support citizen engagement, and supporting cities as crucibles for democratic innovation, we can untap immense potential to transform institutions that shape our everyday lives and cultivate a society that is engaged, responsible, and committed to constructing a sustainable future.

At the heart of this endeavour lies the urgent need to empower individuals as active participants in the democratic process. Traditional models of governance, which often relegate citizens to passive observers, must give way to more inclusive and participatory frameworks.

The Imperative for Global Solidarity: Empowering Citizen-to-Citizen Collaboration

In his seminal work *The Empathic Civilization*, Jeremy Rifkin argues that human history has been characterized by an ever-expanding circle of empathy. From the early tribal affiliations to the rise of nation-states, our capacity for empathy and cooperation has been steadily growing. In the 21st century, as we face unprecedented global challenges, it is imperative that we take this expansion of empathy to the next level: a global solidarity movement that transcends borders and enables individuals to support each other in their fight for democratic rights and freedoms.

The power of citizen-to-citizen collaboration lies in its ability to bypass traditional barriers and create direct channels of support and solidarity. In an increasingly interconnected world, the struggles for democracy and human rights in one country are no longer isolated events; they are part of a global narrative that affects us all. By fostering direct connections between individuals and civil society organisations across the globe, we can create a powerful network of mutual support and advocacy. Imagine, for instance, a scenario where a civil society organisation in Poland, fighting against the erosion of democratic institutions, is able to receive direct support from individuals in Brazil who have themselves experienced the challenges of safeguarding democracy. This support could take many forms: sharing knowledge and strategies, providing financial resources, or even engaging in joint advocacy campaigns. Such collaborations not only strengthen individual efforts but also send a powerful message of global solidarity.

There are already inspiring examples of this kind of transnational cooperation. The

Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, which fought for democratic reforms in 2014, received significant support from individuals and organisations around the world. Through social media campaigns, fundraising efforts, and public demonstrations, people from diverse countries showed their solidarity with the Hong Kong protesters, amplifying their message and putting pressure on the relevant authorities.

The battle to preserve and strengthen democratic governance has become a defining struggle of our time.

Similarly, the recent protests in Belarus against the authoritarian regime of Alexander Lukashenko have been bolstered by the support of individuals and civil society groups from other countries. Activists from Poland, Lithuania, and other neighbouring states have provided practical assistance to their Belarusian counterparts, such as helping them secure safe communication channels and providing refuge to those fleeing persecution. These acts of solidarity have been crucial in sustaining the momentum of the democratic opposition in Belarus.
To fully harness the potential of global citizen-to-citizen collaboration, we need to create more platforms and mechanisms that facilitate these connections. This could include online forums where individuals can share their experiences and strategies, peer-to-peer funding platforms that allow direct financial support to democratic movements, and global advocacy networks that coordinate international pressure on governments that violate democratic principles.

Furthermore, we need to foster a culture of global empathy and solidarity, where individuals see themselves not just as citizens of their own countries but as part of a global community committed to defending democracy and human rights. This requires educational initiatives that highlight our common humanity and the interconnectedness of our struggles, as well as media narratives that focus on the positive potential of global cooperation.

In this context, the rise of digital activism offers a powerful tool for mobilising global solidarity. Social media platforms, encrypted messaging apps, and other digital technologies enable individuals to connect across borders, share information, and coordinate action in real time. By leveraging these tools, we can create a global network of citizen diplomats, working together to support democratic movements and counter authoritarian influences.

However, it is also crucial to recognise the challenges and potential pitfalls of this approach. Transnational solidarity efforts must be sensitive to local contexts and avoid imposing external agendas. They should aim to empower local actors and movements rather than overshadowing them. Moreover, we must be vigilant against the misuse of digital platforms by anti-democratic forces, who may seek to manipulate or disrupt these networks of solidarity.

Despite these challenges, the imperative for global citizen-to-citizen collaboration has never been clearer. As authoritarianism rises and democratic institutions come under pressure in many parts of the world, we need a global movement of individuals committed to defending the values of freedom, justice, and human dignity. By building bridges of empathy and solidarity across borders, we can create a powerful force for democratic resilience and renewal.

This is not just a matter of altruism or idealism; it is a recognition of our shared fate as inhabitants of an increasingly interconnected world. The struggles for democracy in Warsaw, Hong Kong, or Minsk are not distant events; they are part of a global battle that affects us all. By standing in solidarity with those on the frontlines of this battle, we not only support their efforts but also contribute to the building of a more just and democratic world for ourselves and future generations.

As Rifkin reminds us, the expansion of empathy has been the driving force of human progress throughout history. In the 21st century, we have the opportunity to take this expansion to a new level, creating a global circle of empathy that encompasses all of humanity.

Transforming Institutions for Active Participation

The modern world presents numerous challenges to the traditional frameworks of democracy, necessitating a reevaluation of the citizen's role within these structures. Jon Alexander's pivotal work *Citizens* (2022) argues for a fundamental shift in perspective: from viewing people as passive consumers of democracy to recognising them as active participants. Alexander posits that this shift is not merely beneficial

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but essential for addressing contemporary challenges such as political polarisation, economic insecurity, and ecological crises. By transforming our institutions to treat individuals as active participants, we encourage a society that is engaged, responsible, and capable of envisioning and constructing a sustainable future. [1]

Alexander's advocacy for transforming institutions to engage citizens directly is a call to fundamentally rethink how democracy operates in the modern era. His vision involves moving beyond a model where citizens are merely subjects of governance to one where they are active participants in the democratic process, something that will require a significant transformation in both structure and function.

The power of citizen-to-citizen collaboration lies in its ability to bypass traditional barriers and create direct channels of support and solidarity.

Firstly, there needs to be a shift towards greater transparency in governmental operations. This could be facilitated through the implementation of open-data policies, where government data is made available to the public in a comprehensible and usable format. This openness not only allows citizens to be more informed about the workings of their government but also holds public officials accountable.

Secondly, increasing the participatory nature of governmental processes is essential. This can be achieved through the use of participatory budgeting, where citizens are given a direct say in how a portion of the public budget is spent. Cities like Porto Alegre in Brazil, Budapest in Hungary, and New York City in the United States have implemented such systems, leading to more equitable public spending and increased citizen satisfaction with governmental processes.

Furthermore, the redesign should include mechanisms for regular and meaningful public consultations on new laws, policies, and regulations. Governments can employ digital platforms to facilitate these consultations, making it easier for citizens to contribute their views and expertise. Such platforms can bridge the gap between the government and various stakeholders, ensuring a broader range of inputs and fostering a sense of ownership among citizens over governmental decisions.

Ultimately, these changes aim to create a more dynamic relationship between citizens and their government, characterised by continuous dialogue and mutual accountability. By empowering individuals to take ownership of public issues, these transformed institutions can cultivate a more engaged and informed citizenry, thereby strengthening the foundation of democracy.
The effectiveness of citizens' assemblies in fostering participatory democracy is demonstrated through various global examples. These assemblies engage citizens directly in the decision-making process, often resulting in significant policy impacts and increased public trust in governmental processes. The Citizens' Convention on Climate in France is a prominent example where 150 citizens were selected through a random but demographically representative process. Over several months, they deliberated on climate issues and proposed legislation that influenced France's national policy on carbon emission reduction. Their recommendations included measures such as reducing the speed limit on highways to decrease emissions and promoting less energy-intensive lifestyles. Similarly, the Irish Citizens' Assembly on abortion played a pivotal role in one of Ireland's most significant social changes in recent years. [2] The assembly's recommendations led to a referendum that eventually overturned the country's strict abortion laws. This process demonstrated how citizen participation could lead to profound legislative and social transformations, reflecting evolving societal values and ethics. In Canada, the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform proposed changes to the provincial electoral system. Although the immediate changes suggested by the assembly were not implemented following a public referendum, the process itself was praised for its inclusiveness and fairness. It engaged ordinary citizens in a complex issue like electoral reform and demonstrated the potential of such assemblies to educate the public and generate informed discussions on policy matters.

These case studies illustrate the potential of participatory democracy to empower citizens and impact policy. They show that when ordinary citizens are given

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resources and opportunities, they can contribute effectively to addressing complex and contentious issues. Such initiatives not only enrich the democratic process but also enhance the legitimacy and responsiveness of political systems.

Enhancing Democratic Resilience through Digital Tools

As noted by Stephen Coleman, the internet facilitates a more engaged citizenry and broader participation in democratic processes by promoting direct and deliberative forms of representation. [3] Technology empowers civic activism by providing new platforms for organisation, expression, and action. Digital forms of communication allow for a more horizontal mode of interaction, contrasting sharply with traditional top-down governance models. Social media platforms, online forums, and e-participation tools enable citizens to voice their opinions, mobilise for collective action, and interact with their representatives more effectively than ever before. Together with encryption technologies and mobile connectivity, they too have enabled activists to coordinate large-scale movements, even in repressive environments, with the rapid dissemination of information now a key factor in public protests and international advocacy campaigns.

However, the digital landscape is not without its challenges. While technology offers tremendous potential for enhancing democratic engagement, it also poses significant risks. Issues of misinformation, digital divides, and online censorship can undermine the internet's potential to support democracy. In fact, authoritarian regimes have

increasingly turned to digital tools to surveil, suppress, and manipulate public opinion. The pervasive nature of digital technology can lead to greater control over the public sphere, where state actors deploy advanced surveillance systems to monitor and quash dissent. [4] Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from both governmental and non-governmental entities to promote digital literacy, ensure access to reliable information, and protect freedom of expression online.

Action Civics exemplifies this theory by actively involving students in real-world problem-solving related to civic issues. By engaging in *Action Civics*, students learn not only about their government and its functions but also how to influence it through advocacy and informed participation. This hands-on approach equips them with the skills necessary to become effective civic actors, thus fulfilling the theory's prediction that practical, engaging education fosters active citizenship. [5] By utilising digital and gamified learning environments, educators can capture the attention of young people and educate them on civic matters in an interactive and engaging manner.

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The integration of digital tools into democratic innovations like citizens' assemblies not only extends their reach but also enhances their efficacy. Digital platforms, for example, played a crucial role in facilitating broader engagement during the French Citizens' Convention on Climate. They enabled the collection and dissemination of diverse opinions and increased transparency in the deliberative process. Such technological integration helps in scaling up the impact of democratic practices, making them more accessible and resonant with the general public.

Incorporating insights from *The Playful Citizen: Civic Engagement in a Mediatized Culture*, [6] we see how these mediatised and gamified approaches can transform passive learning into an active discovery process. These methods not only make learning about civic responsibility more attractive but also more effective, fostering a generation that is better prepared to engage in democratic governance.

Digital platforms are redefining engagement through innovative formats like *Newsgames*. Bogost et al. (2010) and Gómez-García and De la Hera (2023) [7] explore how digital journalism and interactive games have become significant platforms for political engagement, enabling new forms of interaction with such content. Newsgames, a hybrid of news and video games, offers a unique medium through which complex political and social issues can be explored in an accessible, engaging manner. These games place players in scenarios that simulate real-world processes or dilemmas, providing a deeper understanding of the issues at hand and promoting a more nuanced engagement with news.

For example, a newsgame might allow players to navigate the challenges of policy-making in climate change, requiring players to balance various interests and explore policy outcomes that could lead to different environmental scenarios. This form of engagement not only educates players on the complexities and nuances of policy-making and crisis management, but also empowers them by illustrating the impact of individual and collective decisions.

Transnational solidarity efforts must be sensitive to local contexts and avoid imposing external agendas. Empower local actors and movements rather than overshadowing them.

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Cities as Crucibles for Democratic Innovation

As urban centers grow, their role in the global economy and politics becomes increasingly critical, necessitating adaptive and innovative governance frameworks. Cities are often at the forefront of democratic resilience, serving as testing grounds for new forms of governance and civic engagement. The concept of "Human Rights Cities" within the European Union showcases how urban areas can lead in upholding international human rights standards, fostering environments where rights are not only protected but actively promoted. [8]

Cities such as Amsterdam and Barcelona have set benchmarks in governance through the establishment of transparency portals and robust anti-corruption frameworks. These tools are essential to maintaining legal integrity and ensuring

open governance, making governmental processes more accessible to the public and thereby enhancing accountability. Amsterdam's digital transparency initiatives, for example, provide citizens with unprecedented access to municipal decision-making processes, allowing for greater public oversight and participation.

When ordinary citizens are given resources and opportunities, they can contribute effectively to addressing complex and contentious issues.

In Barcelona, the use of technology to facilitate public engagement in urban planning and development processes has enabled a more inclusive approach to city governance. These efforts are complemented by policies aimed at protecting the rights of marginalised communities, ensuring that urban development does not come at the cost of social equity.

Cities do not operate in isolation; they are part of extensive networks that have the power to transform traditional approaches to diplomacy and global cooperation. The Pact of Free Cities, initiated by Budapest along with Prague, Bratislava, and Warsaw and now encompassing more than 40 cities worldwide, exemplifies how urban centers can unite on a platform of shared democratic values. The Pact is a direct response to the nationalist-populist pressures that have threatened democratic institutions in their respective countries. The Pact of Free Cities goes beyond symbolic resistance to authoritarianism; it facilitates tangible collaborations that reinforce democratic governance. These cities engage in knowledge sharing, support civil society initiatives, and advocate for policies that strengthen the rule of law and protect human rights.

This alliance highlights the potential for urban networks to influence global policy. By banding together, cities can amplify their voices in international forums, advocating for policies that address global challenges like climate change, migration, and inequality.

Conclusions

At the core of fortifying democracy is the imperative to transform citizens from passive observers to active participants. This can be achieved by implementing transparent governance practices and creating more opportunities for direct involvement in decision-making processes, such as participatory budgeting and digital town halls. Policymakers should prioritise the development of educational programs that focus on civic education and the importance of active participation. These programs should aim to foster a culture of engagement where every citizen feels as responsible as capable of influencing their political environment.

In an era where digital platforms can drastically amplify voices, it is essential to leverage these tools to strengthen democracy. Governments should support the creation and maintenance of secure digital spaces that facilitate constructive dialogue and enable grassroots movements to flourish. Additionally, global policy frameworks must be developed to protect these spaces from becoming tools of misinformation or suppression. Investing in digital literacy programs can empower citizens to navigate digital media responsibly and engage with issues critically and effectively.

Democratic institutions must be fortified to resist the pressures of authoritarian governance that threaten democratic norms worldwide. This involves not only strengthening the rule of law and judicial independence but also ensuring that all democratic processes—from elections to legislative procedures—are transparent, fair, and accountable. International bodies and democratic countries should provide support and solidarity to nations facing democratic backsliding, offering both diplomatic and material aid to bolster their institutions.

Cities are often at the forefront of democratic innovations and human rights protections. As such, they should work to deepen their networks, facilitating the exchange of ideas and democratic governance practices. International collaborations such as the Pact of Free Cities, can be instrumental in upholding democratic

values and responding collectively to global challenges. More robust support from international institutions to local initiatives to share resources and knowledge could significantly enhance their ability to implement effective and inclusive governance practices.

Finally, the battle for democracy should be recognised as a global struggle that requires a unified response. Establishing global movements for democracy where citizens and civil society organisations can come together to share strategies, support each other, and mobilise international resources could provide the momentum needed to advance democratic ideals and counter rising authoritarian tides.

Addressing these challenges effectively requires a nuanced understanding of local contexts, tailored strategies that respect cultural and political complexities, and the commitment to long-term engagement and support from all stakeholders involved.

David Koranyi

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06.

ANTI-COLONIAL REVOLUTION: THE ONLY WAY OUT OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

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The colonial project inaugurated 500 years ago is at the heart of the profound ecological crisis we face today. In their quest to control the productive capacities of the Americas, Asia and Africa, colonisers destroyed independent industries throughout the Global South. The land, labour and natural resources of the colonised continents were forcibly reorganised around plantations, mines and factories in the service of Northern consumers. The global North grew rich by depleting the South, plundering its production and sentencing it to destitution and underdevelopment.

The sovereign development of the South poses a fundamental threat to capital accumulation in the North. This was experienced first-hand by the revolutionary political movements that, in the mid-20th century, succeeded in ridding themselves of their colonial occupiers in several parts of the Global South. The most oppressed and exploited peoples of the world had not only succeeded in politically liberating themselves from the most powerful imperial forces in history; they also dismantled the colonial economic system, reclaimed their national productive capacities and realigned them around their own development needs. The New International Economic Order, proclaimed in 1974, signalled the defeat of the old imperialist order in the face of goals of national economic sovereignty that also achieved high rates of growth and rapid improvements in human welfare.

However, when the South produces and consumes in its own interest, its labour and resources are not so easily appropriated by foreign capital. And so, the *core* countries would not tolerate this for long: they responded with overwhelming force, overthrowing democratically elected leaders—such as Mossadegh in Iran, Sukarno in Indonesia, Lumumba in the Congo or Allende in Chile—and using the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) as their enforcers. The objective was clear: roll back the national sovereignty of the South, prevent sovereign industrial development and ensure that cheap labour and resources continued to be available for appropriation by the North.

To achieve this, the IMF and WB imposed structural adjustment programmes throughout the Global South, privatising national industries. Power over economic policy was thus transferred from Southern parliaments to bankers and technocrats in Washington and London. Public investment, public employment, public services, subsidies and any other means previously intended to protect domestic producers were brutally slashed.

The Global South, the Lifeblood of Global Capitalism

The Global South fuels global capitalism. It provides 80% of the land and productive resources and 90% of the labour that powers industries around the world. Contrary to what we have been led to believe for centuries, the Global South is not poor: it

has absolutely *massive* productive capacities. However, this wealth does not deliver national development and human welfare in the South itself; rather, it is organised for the purpose of consumption and accumulation in the countries of the *core*. Global capital has ensured that the nations of the South are consigned to subordinate positions in global supply chains dominated by Northern corporations. Consequently, the wages of its workers are squeezed to levels of bare subsistence, if any.

The land, labour and natural resources of the colonised continents were forcibly reorganised around plantations, mines and factories in the service of Northern consumers.

Virtually all of the world's consumer technologies are produced in the Global South, drawing on the labour and resources of *peripheral* countries. The same is true of the garments and fabrics that nurture the fashion brands from Madrid to Milan, or the parts that make up cars and aeroplanes. Not to mention raw materials like coltan, lithium, copper, coffee, tea, bananas, cotton, rubber, cocoa, or timber. The list goes on. And there is an added problem for the South. All thesnete resources—and also their labour—are consistently cheap in comparison to prices in the North. This forces the countries of the South to export vast quantities of their resources to the global North just to retain access to imports.

These South-North net transfers of value are often referred to as "unequal exchange", and amount to more than $10 trillion a year, represented in Northern prices. As if that were not enough, roughly half of all materials consumed in the global North are procured from the South in this manner. In other words, the North continues to prosper at the expense of the South on a staggering scale. The North *consumes* the South and reaps the benefits, while communities in the South suffer the social and ecological costs.

This imperialist world order has been in place for 500 years. The ecological collapse we are now witnessing, as well as the genocide currently being committed in Gaza, are both a symptom and a reminder of the appalling violence of this prevailing order.

If we are to devise strategies to meaningfully address the root causes of the ecological crisis we face, it is critical that we understand the present in the context of world history. A brief review of this historical perspective, as outlined above, leaves no doubt that the current world order is unjust and immoral and that a new anti-colonial revolution is needed to provide real answers to the worsening crises of our time.

The Anthropocene Is Not to Blame

Any sensible observer today knows that we are heading towards disastrous ecological breakdown. The scale of environmental degradation is grave, yet the mainstream analysis of this crisis, and what to do about it, is woefully inadequate. We are quick to point the finger at the Anthropocene, but this is just another way of deluding ourselves: it is not humans per se who are causing this crisis. Ecological collapse is being driven by the capitalist economic system, and capitalism, in turn, is heavily intertwined with colonial dynamics. It is not human beings as *such* who have caused the destruction of their own planet, but their dominant form of economic and political organisation.

The disproportionate impacts of climate change at a global scale illustrate these colonial dynamics perfectly: the countries of the North are responsible for around 90% of the total cumulative emissions exceeding the planetary safety limit—i.e. the emissions that cause climate breakdown. By contrast, Asia, Africa, and Latin America are jointly responsible for only about 10% of total emissions. Moreover, we can say that most of the countries of the Global South have not contributed at all to the crisis, as they have not exceeded their shares of the planetary limit.

However, the vast majority of climate change impacts already affect and will continue to affect the territories and biodiversity of the Global South. Figures reflect the magnitude of this injustice: The South suffers 80-90% of the economic costs and damages caused by climate change, and around 99% of all climate-related deaths.

The future scenario is even more daunting as, under current climate policy, we are heading towards about 3°C of global warming. This means that 2 billion people in the tropics will be exposed to extreme heat and substantially higher mortality risk; that droughts will destabilise agricultural systems and cause several global grain reserves to vanish; and that hundreds of millions of people will be forcibly displaced from their homes.

We must remember that all this is not the effect of humans as such, but of the capitalist system, which is profoundly undemocratic. While at the political level, we can at least occasionally elect candidates, everything to do with the production system or the economy is far removed from even the shallowest illusion of democracy. Production is controlled by big business, commercial banks and the 1% who own the vast majority of investable assets. It is them who determine the dynamics of capital. In other words, they decide what to produce and how to use our collective labour and the resources of our planet.

And the problem is that, for capital, the aim of production is not to satisfy human needs or to achieve social and ecological goals, but to maximise profits. This is precisely why there is too abundant investment in the production of fossil fuels, SUVs, fast fashion, industrial beef, cruise ships and weapons; while there is a massive lack of investment in crucial areas such as renewable energy, public transport and regenerative agriculture. This is a perverse model that encourages investment in the most profitable products, while the less profitable ones suffer from chronic underinvestment even though they are of vital importance to society. A clear example is renewable energies, which are *cheaper* than fossil fuels but have much lower profit margins—because they are less conducive to monopolistic power. This explains why, although the world is already on fire, investment continues to flow into fossil fuels.

The North *consumes* the South and reaps the benefits, while communities in the South suffer the social and ecological costs.

Climate Change as the Outcome of Atmospheric Colonisation

Not only is there a colonial pattern to the climate imbalance described above—the North destroys and pollutes, the South suffers the worst consequences—but, taking it a step further, we can say that climate degradation is in itself a process of atmospheric colonisation. The atmosphere is a common asset on which we all depend for our very survival, and the world's major economies have appropriated it for their own profit. This phenomenon, which responds to colonial ideology, is having increasingly devastating consequences for all life on Earth, but especially for the Global South. When we say that this crisis is an "existential crisis", we mean that it directly threatens the very existence of humanity. Do we need more arguments to make it clear that it must be stopped?

The ruling classes, at least, do not seem to have grasped it yet. In 2015, the world's governments agreed to limit global warming to 1.5°C or "well below" 2°C, while observing the principle of equity. To meet this target, high-income countries with extremely high per capita emissions would have to achieve extremely rapid decarbonisation, something that is not happening at all. At the current rate, even the best-performing high-income countries will take, on average, more than 200 years to bring their emissions to zero.

Tackling the climate crisis is not really complicated, since we know exactly what needs to be done. The problem is that we are not doing it, and that we can never do it under capitalist logic. This is an irrefutable truth, and we must insist on it: the climate crisis cannot and will not be solved within capitalist frameworks.

Exchanges beyond Imperialism

One of the main problems that global South countries face is that they are heavily

We are heading towards about 3°C of global warming. This means that 2 billion people in the tropics will be exposed to extreme heat and substantially higher mortality risk.

dependent on foreign capital. They rely on foreign capital in order to obtain imports from the core. They also rely on foreign capital in order to mobilize production domestically. As long as this arrangement remains in place, Southern countries are under pressure to export their resources and labour to the core, on unequal terms, which drains them of wealth and perpetuates their underdevelopment. Southern countries must break free from this system.

An important step is to reduce unnecessary imports from the core, substituting these where possible with domestic production or through trade with other global South countries—ideally outside of imperialist currencies, such as by using direct swap lines or regional trade currencies. This limits the need for foreign currency. For instance, luxury imports like champagne and sports cars can be reduced. Food imports can usually be substituted with domestic production. And necessary imports such as renewable energy technology can be obtained from e.g., China, on more favourable terms and without using the dollar or euro.

We must remember that states are currency issuers, and this makes national currencies a strategic tool for the countries of the Global South. Instead of relying on foreign capital, states can issue national currencies to mobilise labour and resources, even to immediately recruit and train large numbers of unemployed citizens—guaranteeing them a living wage—, mobilising their workforce to boost universal public services and national development projects. There is no limit to the state's ability to finance projects whose inputs can be paid for in national currency. And there is another piece of good news: as long as it does not exceed the productive capacity of the economy, this can be done without creating inflationary pressure.

More specifically, to avoid scenarios in which public investment runs up against the limits of domestic productive capacity, it is necessary to either increase the productive capacity—which public investment can help to achieve—, or reduce private demand for productive forces. This means cutting the purchasing power of the rich and introducing credit regulations on commercial banks to limit their investments in ecologically destructive sectors. In addition to averting inflation, this would allow us to get rid of particularly harmful and polluting sectors such as the ones we mentioned above: fossil fuels, SUVs, and fast fashion, among others.

In addition to the national currency, the Global South possesses other demonstrably effective tools to invest in sovereign industrial development: economic planning, public investment, public works, agrarian reform, industrial policy and nationalisation. These are all strategies that Southern governments can implement head-on to restore their productive capacities, organise them according to national needs, and work their way up the value chains.

The atmosphere is a common asset on which we all depend for our very survival, and the world's major economies have appropriated it for their own profit.

This is not to say, naturally, that the Global South will become emancipated from imports, but it is possible to reduce the dependence currently choking their economies into exchange rate inequality and foreign debt. Moreover, regional planning can multiply the opportunities offered by this alternative type of trade, free from the major world powers: Latin America may collectively decide, for example, that one country should focus on producing pharmaceutical inputs while another does so with computers, motor vehicles… etc., so that key technologies are available to all countries in the region, without forcing each of them to build up industries "from scratch".

An alternative strategy to curtail imports from the core countries is simply to limit them, to the extent it is possible, to key capital goods that cannot be obtained elsewhere and that can be used in developing sovereign domestic industries. In addition, Southern governments should also aim to move up the value chain by, for example, moving from merely exporting raw materials to processing their resources; or even manufacturing intermediate goods and finished products.

Environmental Strategies and Policy Proposals

As we have argued above, capital is driven by profitability, so we can never rely on it to deliver the so-called energy transition. Only through public planning can we achieve the necessary investment in renewable energy, public transport and other decarbonisation strategies.

The climate crisis cannot and will not be solved within capitalist frameworks.

Public planning is currently the main political solution to the rampant ecological crisis we are suffering because it means redirecting resources that have so far been diverted to serve the interests of capital towards socially and environmentally essential objectives. It is, in a way, a socialist ecological strategy since it involves achieving democratic control of the means of production. We could say that it is also a revolutionary ecological strategy since it involves waging a struggle for the national economic liberation of the Global South.

Economic sovereignty in the South is the only way to end the ecological crisis.

As we discussed at the beginning of this article, this battle has already been fought in other periods of history, and from those precedents, we know that the economic sovereignty of the countries of the South can be achieved gradually: with decisive steps towards a coordinated industrial policy, with regional planning and by improving their multilateral bargaining positions, the *peripheral* countries can gradually disengage themselves from the imperial powers.

The future demands we reach clarity and consensus around this fact: ecological planning cannot be achieved without sovereign control over national productive forces. The sovereignty of the Global South, in other words, is a prerequisite for a true ecological transition.

To guarantee this public planning, this *public production of public goods*, countries have the ability to issue national currency to mobilise the productive forces required for each of these objectives, as mentioned before, but they also count on many other tools to guide the economy around needs rather than profit. Here are the three tools that seem the most useful in achieving such a transformation:

First, the universal adoption of the Fossil Fuels Non-Proliferation Treaty. This treaty overcomes the main limitation of the Paris Agreement by focusing squarely on the goal of reducing the fossil fuel industry through a binding annual schedule. Its objective is to do this in a way that is fair and just: rich countries must lead with rapid reductions, Global South countries must be guaranteed access to sufficient energy to meet their development needs, and those that are dependent on fossil fuel exports for foreign currency must be provided with a safe off-ramp that prevents economic instability.

Second, Global South negotiators must demand a much faster decarbonisation of the global North, consistent with their fair share of the remaining carbon budget.

Finally, the provision of substantial resource transfers to the Global South. This follows the same logic as the previous point: The global North has devoured most of the carbon budget, and thus, it owes compensation to its southern counterparts for the additional mitigation costs that this imposes on them. Our research shows that this is set to reach 192 trillion USD between now and 2050, or about 6.4 trillion USD per year. Conveniently enough, this amount can be provided by a 3.5% yearly wealth tax targeting the richest 10% in the global North.

Conclusions: Solidarity and Sovereignty for the South and from the South

As argued throughout this text, Western economies are entirely dependent on Global South production. About 50% of all materials and goods consumed in the Global North are net appropriations from the South. This cannot be defined as other

Photo_ **Anabella Salem**_ Still life

than a travesty of justice, and we must keep in mind there is only one alternative: for the governments of the Global South to unite and collectively harness the specific forms of power available to them within the world system. Let them use the fact that the North actually needs them, to pressure and compel central states into taking more radical steps towards decarbonisation and climate justice.

Let us also not be *naïve*: Western governments will not voluntarily agree to any of this. It is not reasonable for us to place our hope in the goodwill of states that have never cared about the interests of the South or the welfare of its people. But that is precisely why the Global South must assert its own strength. The struggle for its liberation is the real agent of a global and historic transformation that can save our generation.

Imagine what would happen if the countries of the South had sovereign control over their own productive capacities. They could immediately end the scourge of poverty, deliver nourishing food for all, decent housing, clean water, health care, public transport and universities. However, economic sovereignty also brings with it the ability to plan environmentally, rapidly decarbonise the economy, and regenerate the earth. This is of critical importance: economic sovereignty in the South is the only way to end the ecological crisis.

So how do we get there? Internationally, by demanding multilateral reforms. By abolishing structural adjustment, unpayable debts, the World Bank and the IMF. By establishing a fair and democratic mechanism within the United Nations to manage international finance. And at the national level, with industrial policy, public employment and all the other policies mentioned above, the countries of the South can delink from the imperial core and move towards sovereign development. These are not utopias: they are achievable changes, and they can be accomplished in a matter of years—not decades.

Lastly, South-South solidarity and regional cooperation are absolutely indispensable in this endeavour. Southern states must cooperate to leverage their power as producers of primary commodities, upon which the core economies are totally dependent, to secure more favourable terms of trade.

But they must also brace themselves for the reaction of imperialist powers, which will in no way facilitate this pending “second stage” of decolonisation. Neither can we wait for change to come from the top: we must begin to build political movements that understand and navigate the crossroads we are at.

We can stand by the status quo and watch helplessly as our world burns to the ground, or we can dare to unite and set a new course for human history. For the peoples of the South to reclaim their economic sovereignty is the first step towards that horizon.

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