

The World Future Council (WFC) Policy Action Plan, June 2012

Saving our Shared Future
Best Policies to Regenerate our World

“Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking, so that humanity stops threatening its life-support system. We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and in the process heal our own – indeed, to embrace the whole creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder.”

– Wangari Maathai, WFC Honorary Councillor, Nobel Peace Price Lecture 2004¹

Our unique challenge

We are the guardians of all future generations of life on earth. The consequences of our decisions have greater and longer-term consequences than ever before. The interlinked crises now endangering our shared future are accelerating. They now threaten all our achievements, plans and hopes.

Healthy ecosystems provide us with life support systems such as food, water, oxygen, medicinal plants, renewable resources, livelihoods and spiritual comfort, but biodiversity is declining precipitously. Our forests that provide livelihoods for 1.6 billion of the poorest, are being rapidly decimated. Our topsoil – the foundation of civilisation – is being eroded irreversibly. The fine-tuned eco-systems of oceans, rivers and lakes that humanity has depended on for millennia are being dismembered by overfishing and pollution. Billions of our fellow-humans are deprived of basic life support systems. Nuclear weapons remain an existential threat, with about 2,000 still on high-alert launch-ready status. Growing climate chaos threatens to make our planet increasingly uninhabitable over the coming decades. In the last fifty years ocean acidity has increased over 30%, while the Arctic summer ice cover has decreased by more than 50%.

Accounting for the costs

Trillions of dollars of costs externalised at the expense of nature and of future generations now have to be accounted for. Much of what is today calculated as economic “assets” and “wealth” will disappear once these costs are internalised. Economic “growth” is fast becoming *uneconomic* growth, increasingly spent on damage repair and prevention. In a world of growing scarcities, violent conflicts will multiply, as will economic and environmental refugees. As always the impact

¹ http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2004/maathai-lecture-text.html

will be the hardest on the most vulnerable people and countries. Yet, this time, nobody will be unaffected.

There are growing signs that the damage wrought by human action is now reaching irreversible tipping-points, over-whelming the resilience and repair capacities of our natural environment. As the Scientific Nobel Laureates Appeal warned us almost twenty years ago: *“Current practices ... may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner that we know.”*²

The way ahead

We at the World Future Council believe humanity *is* capable of rising to this challenge if we act now. One immediate answer lies in binding legislation, identifying the best and most effective laws and policies from around the world, adapting them, and implementing them rapidly across the planet.

History proves that there is no faster way to make change happen than through binding legislation. Laws are both the harbingers and fruits of the change of heart, mind and conduct we need today to save our planet and ourselves. As Aristotle said, ‘*Law is order and good law is good order*’. With the best laws and right policy incentives we can mobilise human inventiveness and entrepreneurship to safeguard human development and a healthy planet. Building public support for a coherent policy response, and assisting policy-makers in implementing it is today’s imperative! It is not ‘yet another’ competing project. Rather, this is the indispensable meta-initiative to ensure that all other efforts to promote human development, human rights and peace and security are not squandered, for they all depend on preserving a habitable planet.

New hierarchies of risk and danger force us to re-think our decisions, actions and institutions. Therefore, we in the World Future Council have joined together – from different continents, walks of life, backgrounds and generations – to build an alliance around what we have identified as an emergency policy agenda. This constitutes the imperative and integrated minimum set of ‘best policies’ that can provide the positive tipping-points to secure our shared future. In a crisis, *“it is not enough to do your best. You have to do what is necessary,”* as Winston Churchill famously reminded us. This set of policies is both the necessary minimum and the proven best. To do less would mean consciously bequeathing to our children a world of radically diminished options and resources.

² Scientific Nobel Laureates’ Appeal 1993

THE GLOBAL POLICY ACTION PLAN

The following tipping-point policies represent a combination of tried and tested laws and policies that have been successful in one or more countries, and optimal policy solutions identified through our extensive research. Their purpose is not to promote one specific solution but to identify inter-linked reforms which progressively and rapidly enable us to change direction and move back from the brink.

A. PROTECTING OUR SHARED FUTURE

- ❖ High Commissioners/Ombudspersons for Future Generations to be elected by the United Nations and national parliaments to integrate a long-term perspective in policy-making and represent the rights of future generations in political decision-making. Precedents exist in Canada, Hungary, Israel, Wales etc.
- ❖ Governments to agree an amendment to the statutes of the International Criminal Court to criminalise acts that cause irreversible damage to our natural environment.
- ❖ Nuclear weapons, to be outlawed in national legislation (as in New Zealand). The nuclear-weapons-possessing States to fulfil their obligation to commence negotiations on a Nuclear Weapons Convention to ban and eliminate all nuclear weapons in a phased, verifiable and irreversible manner. The Arctic and the Middle East to be declared Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zones.
- ❖ The \$1.6 trillion p.a. military spending to be shifted gradually through a global treaty to fund environmental, food and water security and the protection of the common heritage of humankind (oceans, atmosphere and outer space).
- ❖ The State Pension Fund Divestment Law (Norway) banning harmful investments, thus ensuring that our savings do not threaten us, to become the basis of a global treaty.

B. REGENERATING OUR PLANET

- ❖ A Comprehensive Global Transition to Renewable Energies to be initiated, assisted by the following best policies:
 1. Feed-In Tariffs, which are already successfully implemented in over 60 countries worldwide.
 2. Solar Home Systems and solar building codes requiring collectors on all new or renovated buildings, as in Spain (Solar Mandate 2006), Portugal and California.
 3. The “New Money” proposal based on IMF Special Drawing Rights (SDRs)³ which can provide immediate funding for a rapid shift to renewable energies in developing countries (including Bio-fuels when they do not threaten food security).

³ Proposal developed by the World Future Council see:

http://www.worldfuturecouncil.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Future_Finance/Breaking_the_Funding_Deadlock___April_2012.pdf

4. Full energy cost accounting to include the costs of burning non-renewable fuels with alternative uses, while under-utilising the renewable energy potential.⁴
 5. Fossil fuel and nuclear subsidies to be phased out.
- ❖ Securing Food and Water: Policies that ensure access to safe food and water to all to be adopted, based on the award-winning best policies of: The Belo Horizonte (Brazil) Food Security Programme, the Tuscany (Italy) Seed Protection and Cuban Urban Agriculture laws,⁵ the Right to Water policies of Ecuador and Bolivia, and the Water Users Associations rules of Mexico, Tunisia and China.
 - ❖ Preserving our depleted biodiversity, forests and oceans by adopting legislation based on the award-winning ‘best policies’ from Costa Rica (1998), Australia, Rwanda, the Gambia, and USA,⁶ and the US 1985 Conservation Reserve Programme to reverse soil erosion. The UN Strategic Biodiversity Action Plan 2011–2020 to be implemented.
 - ❖ The “Top Runner” policy, (Japan), mandating ongoing resource-saving product improvements by banning the least efficient products, to become legally binding.
 - ❖ The “Cradle to Cradle” principle of ecologically intelligent design and production to become the legal norm, in order to incentivise the transition to circular economies.
 - ❖ Global common goods to be placed in trusts, coordinated by a revived UN Trusteeship Council, setting sustainable usage caps and distributing “commons income” usage fees as a basic citizen’s income.

C. MAKING MONEY AGAIN OUR SERVANT

- ❖ Only financial instruments facilitating real wealth creation to be recognised as legally enforceable contracts. Betting on future prices to again be qualified as gambling and thus not as legally enforceable.
- ❖ Taxes to be gradually (10% p.a.) shifted from labour to resources (‘Green Tax Shift’).⁷
- ❖ B (Benefit) Corporations to be legalised to facilitate broader business mandates, as in Vermont, USA.
- ❖ New Debt-Free Money Creation by Central Banks to be legalised to speed up the creation of “green jobs”.

⁴ The WFC’s initial study estimates this natural capital loss to exceed US \$ 3 trillion p.a.

⁵ http://www.worldfuturecouncil.org/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/Future_Policy_Award_brochure.pdf

⁶ http://www.worldfuturecouncil.org/sustainable_ecosystems.html

⁷ Sweden introduced green taxes in 1991–2 on energy, carbon, sulphur and nitrogen oxide. Since 1995, these taxes are linked to the Swedish consumer price index, and thus automatically increased. The Swedish economy grew from 1990 to 2007 by 48% while the CO₂ emissions decreased by 9% (Green Budget news No. 29, 11/2011, p. 11). The Canadian Liberal Party proposal from 2008 was for a single carbon tax of C\$ 40 per tonne, with tax credits for low-income earners. A similar tax has been implemented in British Columbia (C\$30 per tonne).

D. GOVERNANCE AND EDUCATION

- ❖ An ecological literacy test to be introduced for candidates for public office, economists and business school graduates.
- ❖ Candidates for public office to be given public funding and the right to equal media access, once they can demonstrate public support. Private funding to be dis-allowed to reduce corruption.
- ❖ Valuing and accounting for natural capital and ecosystem services to be given equal weight to GDP in government decision-making
- ❖ Equal educational opportunities and legal access for women, as well as equal access to contraceptive services, ensuring that every child born is wanted, to be legally mandated.

We *Can* Regenerate our World – Together

We are often told that we cannot change our world – or human nature. Yet both are changed all the time. New norms, technologies and lifestyles spread across continents. Public attitudes shift. Culture is not static, but adapts and evolves continually, as does human consciousness.

We are also told that the reforms required to safeguard our shared future are too costly. This is wrong. Whatever a society can do, it can also finance. Only political and public will is needed. New money can be created without causing inflation if it is used to fund new production, and to reduce the unaffordable waste of unemployment.

The current global (dis)order, with its rules and regulations, training and qualification systems, and its foreign, security, development, transport, economic and innovation policies, is based on premises that are rapidly disappearing. We now need to re-connect with our earth and our shared future – and we can do so, step by step, and policy by policy, as laid out in the Global Policy Action Plan.

It is essential, possible and affordable to undertake these changes now. We propose a five-year worldwide public education campaign to rapidly raise global awareness about the stark realities and choices we face, and to mobilise support for the key policy changes required, reaching both the global public and the key policy-makers (at a cost estimated at less than US \$100 million).

Over the past five years since its establishment, the World Future Council has worked hand in hand with parliamentarians, national and international policy-makers, as well as scholars and civic groups to successfully identify, debate, legislate and implement breakthrough policies to speed the transition to a fair and sustainable shared future. Today, we urgently need to amplify and accelerate this effort globally. We welcome partnerships with all of you, in governments, inter-governmental organisations, civil society, academia, media, and youth groups, to work jointly with

us to secure the implementation of the Global Policy Action Plan to save our shared future and regenerate our world.

“In the course of history, there comes a time when humanity is called to shift to a new level of consciousness, to reach a higher moral ground. A time when we have to shed our fear and give hope to each other. That time is now.”

– Wangari Maathai – Nobel Peace Prize Lecture, 2004

About us:

The World Future Council brings the interests of future generations to the centre of policy-making. Its 50 eminent members from around the globe have already successfully promoted change. The Council addresses challenges to our common future and provides decision makers with effective policy solutions. The World Future Council is registered as a charitable foundation in Hamburg, Germany.

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