

GREENPEACE  
ALTERNATIVE  
FUTURES



# GROWING THE ALTERNATIVES

**SOCIETIES FOR A FUTURE BEYOND GDP**

**CHAPTER ONE**

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# INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

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The world today faces multiple crises that pose an existential threat to the future of human civilization. The modern industrialised world depends on the over-exploitation of nature, which is destroying the Earth's ecosystems, triggering catastrophic climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. These are related problems with devastating consequences that have been building for decades. This is due to the collective failure of governments and businesses to act with sufficient urgency to counter the status quo of a system based on infinite growth, and dependent on fossil fuels, extraction, overproduction, overconsumption and waste.



Millions of people in the global South are living on the margins and experience crises as part of their daily reality. Since 2020, crises such as the COVID pandemic and the war in Ukraine have made these pressures much worse, and have also taken centre stage in the global North.

Many people have sunk into poverty, lost their jobs and been displaced, forced to look for economic opportunities elsewhere. The urgent and coordinated responses to COVID had various results. Yet while the richest 1% have profited immensely from the pandemic, with big energy companies and large corporations racking up billions, whether in windfall profits from the energy crisis or from speculating on commodities, it is ordinary people who are paying the price through the cost of living crisis. Meanwhile, governments have run up huge debts, and economic recovery in many places will be difficult. The responses to these crises are political choices, not inevitable results. In many places these choices have included significant cuts to social policies in areas such as health, social care and education, and increased debt in the not too distant future.

The richest 1% have profited immensely from the pandemic

This ongoing **polycrisis** is also a turning point in history. This may be the best chance to repair our relationship with the Earth – and save ourselves. The decisions we take, or fail to take, will define our future pathway. Unfettered capitalism has brought us to the brink of environmental and social collapse, exposing the flaws in the current socio economic system. This cannot be resolved without addressing the root causes of **ever-increasing inequality** between the vast wealth of a small minority and the financial hardship experienced by the majority of people on the planet.

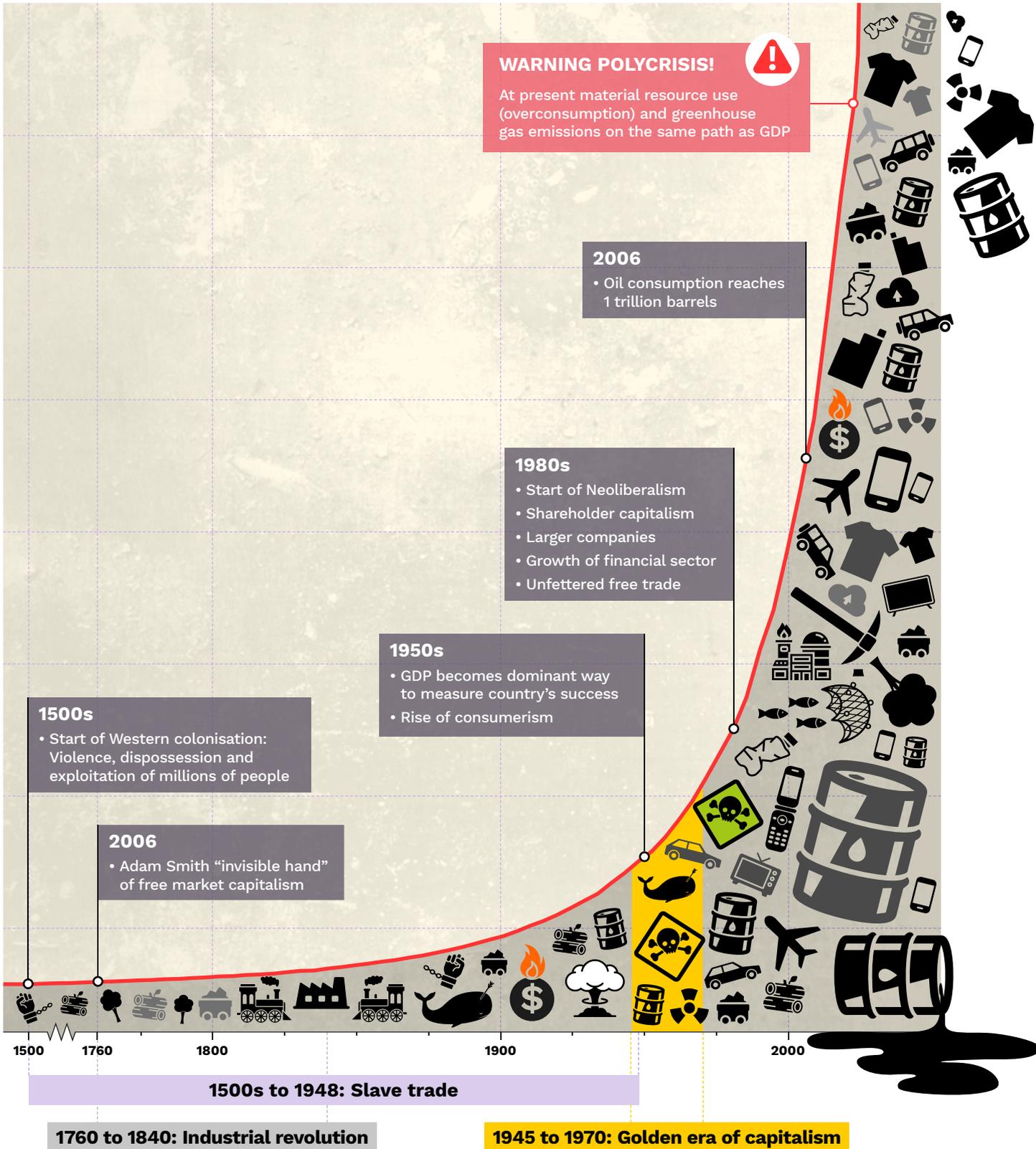
Today's predominant system has its roots in the conquest and colonisation of America, Africa, Asia and Oceania that began 500 years ago, spurred on by the Scientific Revolution<sup>1</sup> which led to a new – utilitarian – view of nature,

and the idea of progress and supremacy over others. This became the driver of European imperialism and made practices of plunder, resource extraction and exploitation the predominant modes of governance across much of the planet. Over the past century and a half, the co-option of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection and particularly the idea of the "survival of the fittest" – that certain people become powerful in society because they are innately better – was also used to justify imperialism, racism, eugenics and social inequality.<sup>2</sup> And more recently, the 1976 publication of "The Selfish Gene" by Richard Dawkins became a moral and ideological justification that selfishness and individualistic mindsets simply follow "nature" (which has since been **widely discredited**), anticipating the neoliberal era and globalisation which began during the 1980s at the hands of Reagan and Thatcher, who famously declared that **"there's no such thing as society"**.

Driven by profiteering, neoliberalism persists today, thinly veiled as "development" and "progress". Extractive industries systematically ignore planetary boundaries, leading to ecological collapse, climate crisis, biodiversity loss and many other ecological disasters. They have negative effects on traditional economies and rely on the widespread exploitation of workers and even slavery in some countries, such as Brazil, or the fishing industry in Thailand. The expansion of these industries has led to the forced displacement of communities, threats and violence towards Indigenous groups and abuse of power, leading to disinheritance and impoverishment.

This exploitation and the financial systems that are driving it has mainly served to increase profits at the top, which in turn increases the power of the wealthy elites to **define and control the rules of the system**, and ensures that its momentum is maintained by never-ending growth.

**FIGURE 1: 500 YEARS OF COLONIALISM, EXPLOITATION, EXTRACTION, PROFIT AND GROWTH**



**FIGURE 1: LEGEND**

 <b>Legal slavery</b>	 <b>Aviation</b>
 <b>Biomass</b>	 <b>TVs &amp; Flat screen TVs</b>
 <b>Coal</b>	 <b>Mobile phones &amp; smartphones</b>
 <b>Steam train</b>	 <b>Cloud storage</b>
 <b>Factories</b>	 <b>Deforestation</b>
 <b>Financial crash</b>	 <b>Whaling</b>
 <b>World War II, nuclear age</b>	 <b>Industrial fishing</b>
 <b>Nuclear energy</b>	 <b>Mining</b>
 <b>Hazardous chemicals</b>	 <b>Fast fashion</b>
 <b>Industrial agriculture</b>	 <b>Plastic</b>
 <b>Oil &amp; gas</b>	 <b>Disposable vapes</b>
 <b>Cars &amp; SUVs</b>	 <b>Supply chain factories global South</b>



© Marco Garcia / Greenpeace

**Wildfire destruction in Maui**



© Lion Yang / Greenpeace

**Coral bleaching in Taiwan**



© Pram / Greenpeace

**Floods in Pulang Pisau, Central Kalimantan**



© Matthias Lüscher / Greenpeace

**Climate seniors at Swiss glacier**

The way that we measure this growth - the **GDP (Gross Domestic Product)**<sup>3</sup> of every country in the world - embeds the mindset of profit, inequality, exploitation, and consumerism in our globalised society. It also makes all nonpaid household and voluntary work invisible as well as hiding the negative effects on nature. The idea of infinite growth can be traced back to 18th century economist **Adam Smith**, who proposed that profits must be reinvested in order to produce more profits, which need to be reinvested to produce even more profit.

**This gave birth to the infinite growth paradigm and the famous invisible hand**, the idea that by increasing private profit, entrepreneurs were also increasing collective wealth and contributing to the overall prosperity of society, and validated the notion that greed and becoming rich was good for the collective.

But although GDP and **growth-based economics** is really a recent phenomenon, its dominance is pervasive and has taken on a 'structural' quality in current societies, the so-called **'growth lock-in'**.

**FIGURE 2: THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM BEHIND THE CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY CRISIS**

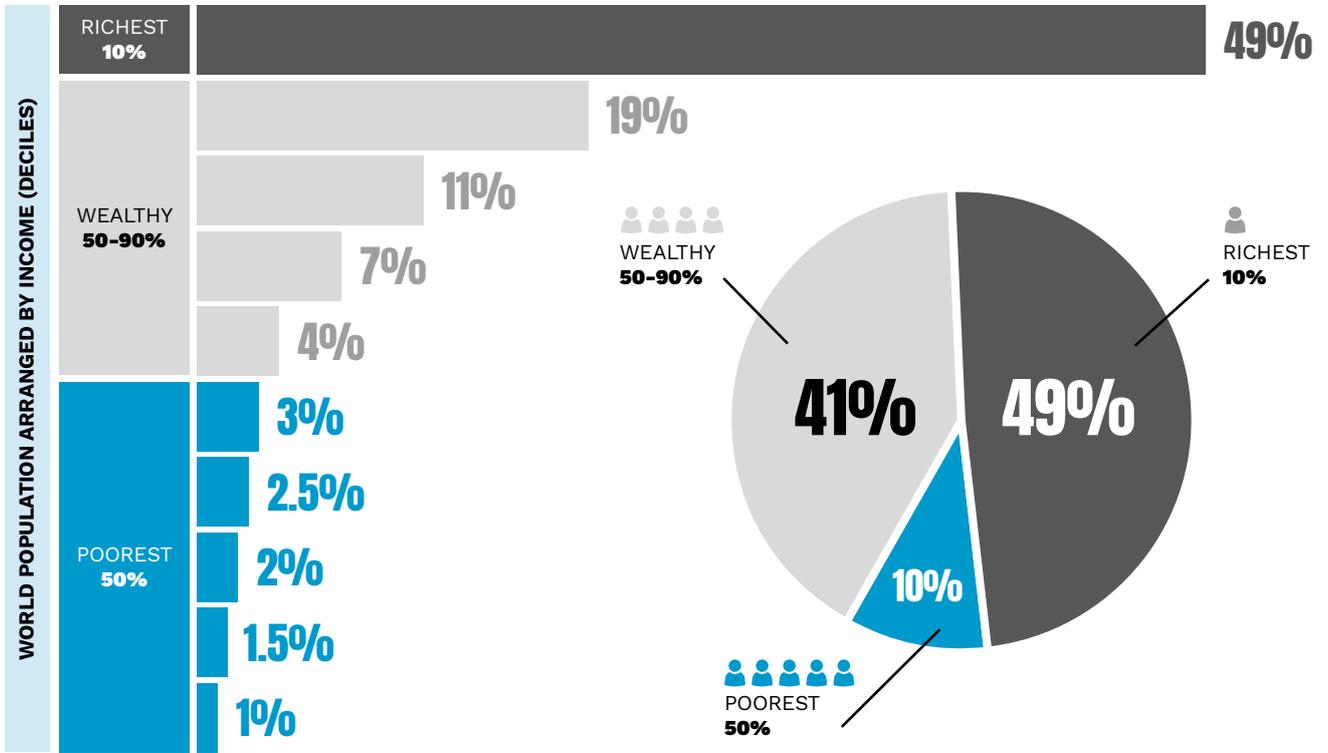
The **TRICKLE DOWN THEORY** justifies the accumulation of enormous amounts of money by wealthy elites, because it 'trickles down' to the rest of us.

The **REALITY** is that money & resources are "sucked up" from the majority in the global South, to wealthy elites in the global North.

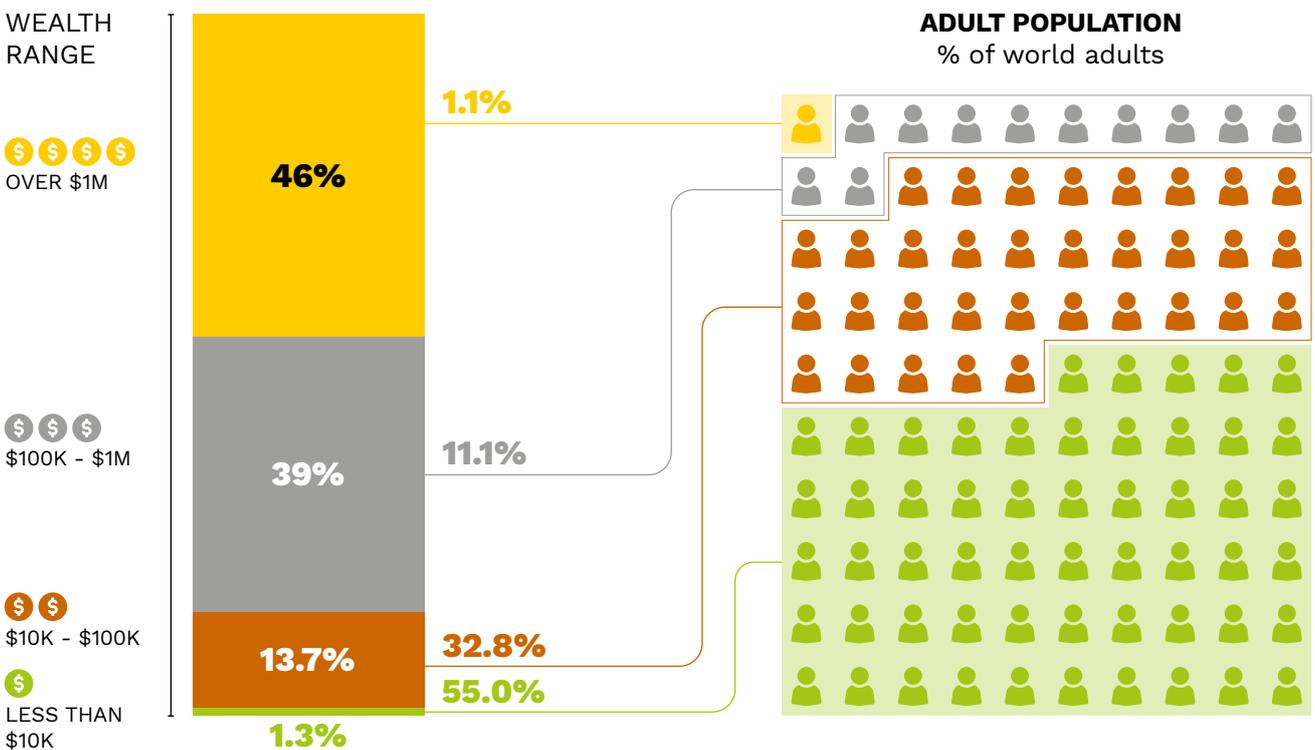


**The design of our financial system guarantees the transfer of income and wealth to global elites.**

**FIGURE 3: LIFESTYLE CONSUMPTION EMISSIONS**



**FIGURE 4: GLOBAL INCOME INEQUALITY**



### BOX 1: FROM MONEY, TO CREDIT TO CAPITALISM

To go beyond GDP we need to understand and challenge the beliefs and mechanisms that lie behind the current system of exponential growth. For example, the use of credit reflects a belief that in the future there will be more money for individual and corporate profit, without considering the natural 'wealth' and social fabric that might be damaged to obtain this: new systems need to reset this balance.

The power of money is its ability to create universal trust and its convertibility. However, the need for profit under capitalism depends on exploitation, and is facilitated by other conditions: growth, credit and reinvestment. Growth is an invention of

modern economics. For most of history the economy stayed much the same size. The growth we have witnessed in the last couple of centuries could only have occurred thanks to a new system based on **credit** which is unconnected to real assets such as land or gold, leading to credit bubbles and inflation in the property and stock markets. Money has its limitations and can only be exchanged for things that are tangible and exist in the present. Modern economics and capitalism changed this by creating a psychological construction that assumes the future will be more abundant than the present, opening up the opportunity to build and consume based on future income – and for speculators to profit from fluctuations in the market.

We urgently need to reset the system, learn from the indigenous communities already practicing alternatives and to contribute to shaping and creating many diverse alternative futures. Humanity needs to take this unique opportunity to move towards alternative socio-economic models that prioritise the needs of people, their communities and the planet rather than trying to put a bandaid on a broken system.

We should also remember that much of the positive progress humanity has made on many fronts including access to education, women's rights, the abolition of legalised slavery, improvements in public health, and more, is as a result of people's movements demanding justice, rights and equality. Our work today is built on the shoulders of the people behind these movements – past and present – such as the suffragettes, workers, abolitionists and civil rights activists, environmentalists, and not least the many Indigenous peoples who are already practising alternatives and fighting for their rights, who have shown that there is a path to change the system.

**To achieve and build a green, sustainable and just future,** we must tackle the biodiversity and climate crises with more determination, urgency, collaboration, connectedness and support for those in the front lines, than the way we tackled the global health emergency. It's even more vital to prevent the motivation for profit exploiting vulnerability, as seen following the wildfire disaster on the island of Maui.<sup>4</sup> We need to protect ourselves, our families, and our communities, to rebuild our collective society on fairer, safer, greener and more resilient foundations, which also protect our ecosystems and the global climate. It is time to move away from a socio economic model based on the logic of dominance and control over others and nature, with a focus on profit and infinite growth, dependent on consumerism and extractive industries like fossil fuels, mining and logging.

Unlike the current globalised economic system, where one size is expected to fit all, we need to challenge the idea that there is only one form of development and that all countries must follow the same Western capitalist model that has massively accelerated the destruction of the ecosystem, and led to poverty, inequality and violence in our societies. Instead there are multiple possibilities, a **Pluriverse** of worlds and peoples coexisting within a whole Earth system. We must create the space for new thinking around alternative ideas to promote development that is based on the collective wellbeing of both humans and nature - with the sense that community needs to be at the core (as in the Nguni Bantu term and concept “**ubuntu**” loosely translated to mean “I am because we are”), which challenges the prioritisation of individualism by the neoliberal system.

While there is room for the many systems and practices which allow us to explore what it means to be human in a Pluriverse, some common principles enable this to happen, including the wellbeing of people and nature, granting rights to nature and the Earth, elevating the economy of care above the need for profit, and ensuring true democracy through civic participation. The potential for these systems and practices is systematically undermined by the imperative of growth and profit for the

wealthy few, while the majority live in a world of scarcity. Putting the wellbeing of life in all its diversity first can bring many benefits for wider society, not only economically, but first and foremost to help us navigate through the climate and biodiversity crisis to a point where future generations can survive and thrive within ecological boundaries.

To elevate the voices of people working towards these Alternative Futures, Greenpeace International invited academics, organisations and activists to make a contribution. Their responses follow below, within three sections: “An alternative political and economic landscape,” “Market facing alternatives”, and “System change from the ground up”. The pieces from external authors reflect the views and perspectives of the contributors, and not the views of Greenpeace International. At the start of each section we provide introductory text to help contextualise the essays. In addition, there are also articles written by us, Greenpeace International, including on Real participatory democracy, the Slow Circular Economy and Cooperatives, and several of the pieces in the section “System change from the ground up”. All the contributions reflect a diversity of viewpoints and examples, in the true spirit of Alternative Futures - because there is no single solution to the polycrisis we are in.



© Jurnasyanto Sukarno / Greenpeace. Indigenous peoples' community perform a welcome dance ceremony for Forest Defender Camp participants in Sira village, Saifi district, South Sorong Regency, Southern West Papua. Greenpeace Indonesia holds a Forest Defender Camp to train Papuan Indigenous youths from various areas in Papua island to protect the Papuan forest.

# OUR PRINCIPLES & PROPOSALS

Greenpeace’s **Alternative Futures programme** has set out to **reimagine** an **alternative future** where we are inspired to work together on **solutions to the climate and biodiversity crises**, so that everyone can live a healthy and dignified life. As part of a long and ongoing listening journey with experts, activists and scholars across the world, we have set out **9 principles and 27 proposals** which envision the landscape for an alternative future.

PRINCIPLES

PROPOSALS

**AN ECONOMY AND SOCIETY THAT PRIORITISES**



**People and planet above profit and growth**

- Food sovereignty
- Economies that respect the Earth
- Reallocation of government budgets
- People and planet over debt



**Equitable distribution of wealth and power**

- Financial systems for the majority
- Fair income and allowances
- Tax system that makes polluters pay
- Democratic production and ownership



**Wellbeing at the core**

- Beyond GDP with focus on wellbeing
- Restorative economic activities
- Work less and better



**Inclusion, justice and diversity**

- Economy of care
- Empower Indigenous communities
- Empower and support women
- Bottom up pluralism



**Resilience and communities**

- Relocalisation of economy
- The commons
- Slow Circular Economy
- Energy Sovereignty
- Community-centric resilience

**AND GOVERNMENTS THAT PROMOTE**



**Transparency and trust in information**

- Access to knowledge
- Information free from commercial bias



**Real participatory democracy**

- No big money in politics
- Civic participation
- New legal frameworks



**Cooperation and mutual aid and benefit**

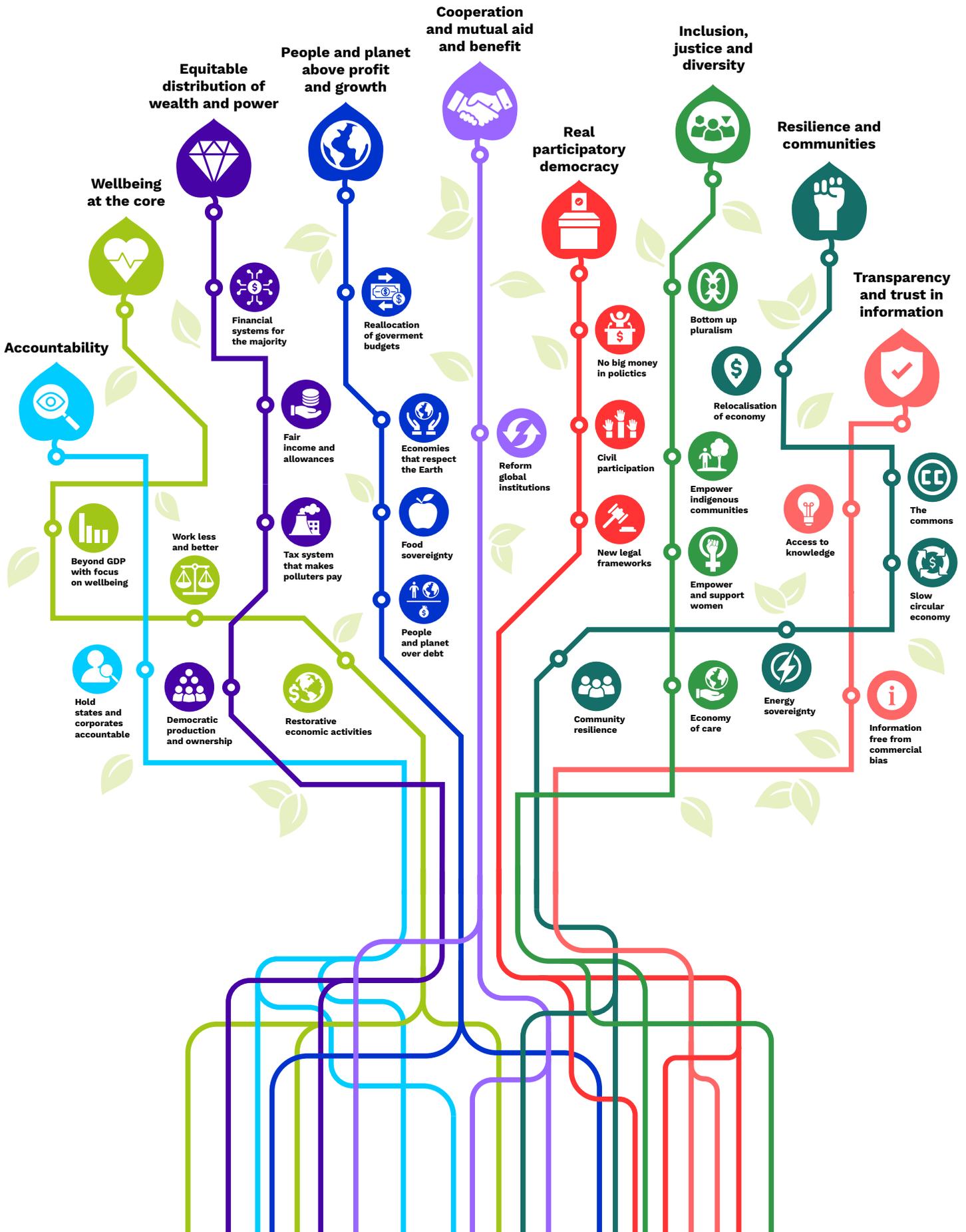
- Reform global institutions



**Accountability**

- Hold states and corporates accountable

**FIGURE 5: OUR PRINCIPLES AND PROPOSALS**



# 01

## AN ALTERNATIVE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE



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In this section, we draw on the existing scholarship on new ways to shape the macro political and economic situation, to imagine the sustainable and just futures we know are possible, and examine how they could function.

We begin with a contribution from Annegeke Jansen and Rutger Hoekstra from the University of Leiden, providing an overview of the dominance of the **GDP** metric itself in our global economic system, why it is a problem and what an alternative – or alternatives – could look like. Then, the **Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll)** sets out how alternatives around the idea of a Wellbeing Economy are being put into practice at a national level, with a coalition of pioneering governments putting Wellbeing economics into action and inspiring others.

The **NAWI** Afrifem Macroeconomic Collective brings a feminist perspective to the impact that the current neoliberal and neocolonial globalised system has on Africa, and why Africa itself needs to go beyond growth – to challenge the corporate-driven trajectory that the continent is on.

A perspective on **the commons** from David Bollier shows the long tradition of multiple alternative systems and ways of organising around our commons, which exist today and have always been a vital part of human society. As well as harming the balance and life-support of the Earth's systems, growth begets growth; accumulation for the purpose of profit and power undermines the existence of any other form of human organisation which does not submit to the growth imperative. Instead we need to build and support institutions and systems that promote the values of care, cooperation and fairness that make us human.

Finally, to overturn the existing system of power and patronage, we need alternative political visions that return power to the people. The next section examines what **real participatory democracy** looks like through the example of Porto Alegre in Brazil, a city which successfully piloted and administered the world's first system of participatory budgeting, empowering citizens to take responsibility for the municipal financial decisions that dominate their lives.

The examples in this section show how putting wellbeing, communities, justice and diversity – rather than financial accumulation – at the core of society can transform our ways of life and open up a route to a better future.

# BEYOND GDP: A MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK FOR WHAT REALLY MATTERS

By Annegeke Jansen and Rutger Hoekstra, Leiden University



Annegeke Jansen (left) and Rutger Hoekstra (right)



Wellbeing at the core



Beyond GDP with focus on wellbeing

Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a measure of economic output, only became the dominant way of measuring the success of a country in the 1950s with the first systems of national accounts. It was only in the late 1950s and early 1960s that growth became a goal in itself.<sup>5</sup> This measure of economic activity is calculated frequently, widely, and consistently and is often used as an indicator of living standards. In the last 60 years, GDP and its yearly growth have become a key policy objective, and economic thinking started to dominate many aspects of society.<sup>6</sup> **But it was never intended to be used in this way;** Simon Kuznets, who first developed the **modern concept of GDP** for a US Congress report in 1934, also warned against the use of GDP as a measure of welfare.

Historically, GDP and wellbeing have been very closely correlated. In low-income regions, rises in GDP have been connected with increased wellbeing, though establishing causation is of course more complex. However, empirical evidence has shown that beyond a certain threshold the level of a country's GDP does not lead to an increase in the wellbeing of its people. GDP isn't able to measure the wellbeing of people, nor does it say anything about the way that welfare is divided and how this might develop towards the future.

It also doesn't account for the costs that were incurred to create this growth, which might involve ecological destruction and human rights violations. In order to address 21st-century challenges like environmental degradation, poverty and growing inequalities it is imperative that we develop new measures of welfare. We need to move "Beyond-GDP".

The Beyond-GDP movement has steadily grown in momentum since the 1970s, with many think tanks, statisticians, international institutes and Nobel Laureates creating alternative metrics to measure success in ways that don't prioritise economic growth.

The **WISE Horizons project**, a collaboration between Leiden University and seven other institutes funded by the European Union, seeks to accelerate systemic change beyond the dominant economic paradigm towards one that prioritises wellbeing, inclusion, and sustainability (WISE). The project works on the creation of a synthesis of all Beyond-GDP metrics and has developed a database on Beyond-GDP data.<sup>7</sup>



Universiteit  
Leiden



There are various methodologies used to measure wellbeing, from economic measures that adjust GDP, to measures of opportunity and health outcomes, for example:



**GENUINE  
PROGRESS  
INDICATOR  
(GPI)**

The **Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI)** tracks personal consumption expenditure and includes factors such as household and care-based labour, something GDP fails to account for. The GPI also subtracts an estimated cost of climate change and environmental damage, and the cost of inequality in the given society, to provide a final calculation.



**LIFE  
EVALUATION  
INDEX  
(LEI)**

Several wellbeing metrics are based on self-reported data, empowering people to act as the preeminent experts on their own circumstances. These include the **Life Evaluation Index (LEI)**, part of the World Happiness report, which measures how people from all over the world rate their current and expected future lives using survey data.



**HUMAN  
DEVELOPMENT  
INDEX  
(HDI)**

Some wellbeing metrics are based on more conventionally observable averages and health outcomes, such as the UN's **Human Development Index (HDI)**. The HDI considers three dimensions: health, education and standard of living. Health outcomes are measured by life expectancy at birth, education is measured by either mean or expected years of schooling, and standard of living is estimated by GNI per capita. The HDI is based on the thought of Nobel Prize winning economist and philosopher Amartya Sen, and aims to capture not only the present circumstances of people around the world, but also the opportunities and life chances available to them.



**ECOLOGICAL  
FOOTPRINT  
INDEX  
(EFI)**

Sustainability metrics aim to track wellbeing with a broader view of how it impacts, or is impacted by, environmental concerns. The very well-known **Ecological Footprint index (EFI)** for example compares a country's land area with consumption of materials and resources, to identify when a nation's consumption exceeds its biocapacity.



**ENVIRONMENTALLY  
SUSTAINABLE  
NATIONAL INCOME  
(ESNI)**

Other sustainability focused metrics include **Environmentally Sustainable National Income (ESNI)**, which calculates the maximum level of national production whereby, "with the available technology in the year of calculation, vital environmental functions remain available "forever;" reflecting the production level that does not threaten future generations.



© Greenpeace / Eva Petschull. Greenpeace activists together with members of other NGOs from South America prepare to protest peacefully by forming a human banner at the beach of Chorillos in Lima, Peru, while the United Nation Climate Change conference (COP20) takes place in the same city.

## HARMONISATION, NOT HOMOGENISATION

The fact that there are a plethora of possible alternative metrics points to a problem inherent in the Beyond-GDP movement: there are so many ways to measure wellbeing that no single measure has come close to overtaking GDP as the world's primary indicator of progress. Researcher and expert in Beyond-GDP metrics Rutger Hoekstra cautions against the allure of developing new metrics in the WeALL briefing paper "Measuring the Wellbeing Economy,"<sup>8</sup> recommending that policymakers and researchers "do not create additional Beyond-GDP indexes or dashboards! Given today's data availability, it is all too easy to create a new index or dashboard. Please resist the urge to do so. Simply adopt existing measures, or even better, support harmonisation efforts."<sup>9</sup>

How can we overturn the hegemony of GDP without adopting a single, powerful counter-metric?

This effort brings with it a thorny problem: how can we overturn the hegemony of GDP without adopting a single, powerful counter-metric? Harmonisation and synthesis of existing metrics is a good thing, homogenisation is unquestionably not. If we want to move beyond GDP to truly measure progress in economies and societies around the world, we must accept that no one metric will replace GDP worldwide. The imposition of a single metric is what got us to where we are today. The pursuit of the wrong metric – near unchecked economic growth at the expense of social and environmental goods – has wrought destruction, not only because it wasn't the best metric, but because it has been applied universally. Likewise, the universal application of any other metric could replicate similar problems. **Comprehensive Wealth**, for example, fails to account for the possibility of climate collapse. Similarly, too strong a focus on (albeit critically important) disparities in gender equality risks eclipsing other dimensions



© Jilson Tiu / Greenpeace. Protests were launched in different countries as the World Economic Forum convened in the mountain resort of Davos, Switzerland. A global week of action was organized by the Fight Inequality Alliance to highlight the growing gap between the rich and the poor. In the Philippines, national movements, people's organizations, non-government and civil society groups held an assembly and concert at an impoverished community in Intramuros at the heart of the country's capital, Manila. The venue was handpicked by the organizers for the proximity of extreme poverty to influential institutions such as the Comelec, the labour department, Manila Cathedral, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, Manila Hotel, the National Press Club and the Intramuros Golf Club.

of inclusion such as disability and race. Hoekstra makes clear that harmonisation efforts are necessary, to allow us to learn from the vast wealth of work that's been done on this issue, and build on this work effectively.

To truly break this cycle of environmental and social devastation, the way forward is through a measurement framework that includes a variety of indicators of wellbeing, inclusion and sustainability. Within this framework, there must be a balance between the advantages of broadly applicable measurements and the flexibility to account for a plurality of societies and values. This includes allowing for local circumstances, traditions, knowledge and practices inherited from previous generations and the need for true democracy so that people participate in the determination of their circumstances, instead of being on the receiving end of policies which don't consider their needs.

A new framework might include wellbeing metrics based on the examples listed above, including indicators such as health, education, and life satisfaction. Agency is also relevant in this context, as also highlighted by the UN in

their 'Valuing what counts' report (2022). A sense of agency and the capacity to contribute influences not only current wellbeing but also inclusion, as this allows for the consideration of historical and cultural practices. More generally, it's important to encompass inclusion indicators that provide a broad assessment of the distribution of wellbeing, which are not limited to income inequality. Last, the framework should include a variety of indicators for future wellbeing, including indicators of biodiversity and other planetary boundaries, to maintain our resilience and environmental wealth for future generations.

In conclusion, the focus on economic growth has led to an anachronism that prioritises planet-depleting activities and inequalities while overlooking wellbeing. "Beyond-GDP" metrics are crucial in addressing multi-dimensional and interconnected 21st-century challenges like environmental degradation, growing inequality, and technological change. To create a sustainable and just future for all, we must move beyond GDP and develop a measurement framework for wellbeing, inclusion, and sustainability.

# ARE WE READY TO TALK 'BEYOND GROWTH' IN AFRICA? SOME PAN-AFRICAN FEMINIST REFLECTIONS



This article is a summary piece drawn from a longer paper of a similar title written by Fatimah Kelleher as part of the Nawi Afrifem Macroeconomic Collective



Fatimah Kelleher



**Inclusion,  
justice and  
diversity**



**Empower  
and support  
women**



**People and  
planet above  
profit and growth**



**Food  
sovereignty**



**People and  
planet over  
debt**

## INTRODUCTION

“Beyond growth” thinking has recently been gaining momentum in the mainstream,<sup>10</sup> hinged to an imagining – with a growing body of policy recommendations – of what societies could and should look like when economic growth as a force for capitalist surplus accumulation is abandoned in favour of outcomes that centre human and planetary wellbeing. Going beyond the use of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the primary indicator of that growth is central to the challenge, fully aligned with a commitment to equitable redistribution of resources. Within this, the call for degrowth speaks more directly to the global North’s over-exploitation of the Earth’s planetary boundaries, leading to climate and ecological breakdown; it is undisputed that the overshoot of seven of these nine boundaries<sup>11</sup> lies squarely at the door of the global North.<sup>12</sup> But degrowth itself continues to face pushback, in some cases due to mistaken assumptions that all countries are being asked to stop growing, not just the global North countries that are effectively destroying the planet.<sup>13</sup> Degrowth proponents are often clear that their call does not apply to the global South, where growth is still needed.<sup>14</sup>

And African countries are indeed among those that still need to grow economically. The continent has suffered decades of arrested

development under market-led neoliberal capitalist prescriptions from the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) that curtailed an initially promising growth trajectory in the early days of post-independence.<sup>15</sup> The unequal geo-political and economic relationships with former colonial nations and new imperial powers such as the US that followed, embedded a cycle of debt and neo coloniality within our economic systems.

The continent has suffered decades of arrested development under market-led neoliberal capitalist prescriptions from the World Bank.

But Africa’s post independence history is also marked by decades of frontline resistance to the oppressions inherent within that trajectory. Progressive, anti-capitalist visions that challenge but offer alternatives to global northern development paradigms exploiting people and planet are already an integral part of civil and feminist movements on the continent that have been calling-out and disrupting harmful extractivism and corporate capture across the continent for decades.<sup>16</sup> From communities resisting deforestation and unbridled mining,

to farmers fighting the criminalisation of their right to bank indigenous seeds that preserve biodiversity, these frontline battles are myriad.<sup>17</sup> It is predominantly women who are at the coalface of environmental breakdown and climate catastrophe, and women taking leading or pivotal roles within these battles.

Recognising these synergies, where can – if at all viable – a discourse of going “beyond growth” begin to emerge for Africa, when a paradigm of limitless growth (and GDP defined growth at that) remains so firmly a part of the unquestioned economic policy orthodoxy on the continent and globally?

## BEYOND GROWTH / POST-GROWTH, AND THE DEBATE OVER DEGROWTH – WHY SHOULD AFRICA BE PAYING ATTENTION TO ANY OF THIS?

The question of how we design our economies to deliver societies that centre human and planetary wellbeing has been asked more loudly than ever in recent times. Among these, feminist call-outs are some of the most visionary.<sup>18</sup>

The African feminist statement for a post-COVID recovery was one of the first to emerge in September 2020.<sup>19</sup> Widely endorsed by feminist thinkers and activists across the continent the statement was unequivocal in its call for solutions that will reimagine African

economies. These ideals of an African feminist future that challenged the primacy of growth within Africa have been illuminated by African feminists for years and since the 2008 financial crisis in particular.<sup>20</sup> There has never been a more critical need for alternative economic pathways that reject not just the myopia but also the inherent injustices within growthism.<sup>21</sup> Visions of a beyond growth / post growth Africa have therefore already started to flourish within African feminist thought.



© Omar Bayo Fall / Greenpeace. With almost one thousand women fish processors, community leaders and Civil Society Organisations representatives from all over the country, Greenpeace Africa celebrates World Fisheries Day and holds a press conference in Dakar, to demand of the Senegalese government to stop the fishmeal industries and to stop granting new fishing licences, and instead to support women processors and fishing communities, to protect the ocean and to ensure people's food security. Banner reads (English translation from French) “Stop fish meal factories”.

Its call for solutions that will reimagine African economies.

Such positioning not only challenges growth in itself, but the coloniality that has characterised the capitalist accumulation, appropriation of resources and labour by the global North from the global South at the heart of Northern development.<sup>22</sup> And this leads to the question of how African countries will also need to re-envision and restructure their relationships with global Northern countries that have exploited them historically and in the present. Heightened levels of “climate consciousness” are leading to more global Northern countries committing to “greener energies” intensifying the quest for transition minerals,<sup>23</sup> with implications for Africa and its peoples (including more extraction and likely geopolitical destabilisation) that will need to be recognised and prepared for.

Degrowth has highlighted the continued imperial appropriation of the South by the

North, and also challenges the premise of Green Growth and the continued extraction implicit within it.<sup>24</sup> Exposing the double-standards of Northern Green Growth is essential for Africa, especially when this is dependent on transition mineral extraction, “green alternatives” such as biofuels (that also capture land and decimate livelihoods, flora and fauna), and the continuation of orthodox policy approaches in agriculture such as commercialised cash and monocropping that lead to decreased biodiversity<sup>25</sup> but also capture land and labour on unjust terms.<sup>26</sup>

For Africa, several questions become pertinent here: the first is the relationship that African countries will have with regions like the EU, depending on whether they pursue Green Growth or degrowth. Will the former continue the neo-coloniality that already exists but under new forms of extraction? Will the latter create space for Africa to de-link from neo-colonialism as northern extraction and appropriation recedes, and can African countries adequately respond to that transition given the current geopolitically driven economic dependencies in place?

## FRONTLINE AND COALFACE, AS ALWAYS: THE WOMEN’S AND FEMINIST MOVEMENTS LIVING AND BREATHING THE REALITIES OF THESE DISCOURSES

This brings us back to beyond growth / post-growth, and the lived realities already at play on the continent. Can African countries envision and deliver economies that offer new paradigms of development that commit to the wellbeing of the continent’s people and protection of nature and resources, even as they inevitably need to extract and benefit from these to meet the growth still pending for the continent? Can African countries add to the value of these extracted resources while equitably redistributing the growth that accrues, so that the people and countries reap their social and economic gains?

“The neo-liberal economic failures of African governments have been acutely experienced by women and children... This means it is African women who are the most dispossessed in the colonial scramble for Africa, and the large-scale resource extraction which characterises contemporary African economies... The failure of “growing” extractive African economies to translate economic growth into social and environmental gains is rooted in the privileging of the profit-driven agendas of multinational corporations at the expense of indigenous peoples.”

- Boipelo Bonokwane<sup>27</sup>



© Cheryl-Samantha Owen / Greenpeace. Farmer Prisca Mayende in Naigai, Bungoma County. Farmers in Kenya are effectively applying ecological farming practices that are increasing their ability to build resilience to and cope with climate change.

Amidst the thinking, the theorising and policy debates that surround questions of growth and ideals of economic and societal “progress” on the continent, the lives of everyday Africans continue to absorb and shape the realities and possible futures. Forever on the frontlines and at the coalface of the issues, communities continue to offer us the roadmaps for what could be.

### The right to just Say No!

The right to just Say No! is one example and a prominent part of the mosaic of resistance and living alternatives for decades. Recent efforts for reparative justice have seen women resisting African Development Bank projects across West Africa – heavily characterised by state-sanctioned corporate capture – that have devastated livelihoods with forced displacements and loss of farmland and access to commonly held resources, not to mention a gradual loss of indigenous knowledge as communities are suddenly dislocated from their natural environment.<sup>28</sup>

These movements are calling for African governments to start to embed the ideals of beyond growth thinking within policy choices in order to challenge the current corporate-driven trajectories the continent is on. They offer a

clear opposition to a capitalist, patriarchal and imperialist development model that destroys communities. In these spaces of resistance we find women defenders of forests, natural resources, agroecological farming methods and an overall defence of nature.<sup>29</sup> They also challenge African governments to think about what kind of a footprint they want to leave in the wake of the continent’s coming growth; one that continues the violently extractive, destructive and unjust current economic model, or one that aims to mitigate the inevitable impacts of growth wherever possible, laying the foundations for societies where protection of the natural environment and economies that centre human wellbeing are fully integrated with one another. One sector where these battles will be most starkly fought is agriculture. Despite projections that its contribution to the continent’s overall economic growth will contract throughout the current decade<sup>30</sup> agriculture remains a pivotal signifier of the developmental values that African governments will ultimately choose. Challenges to food security and the right to food sovereignty are bound-up within these choices. Organisations like the African Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA) – a network of collectives and organisations committed to agroecological solutions and the preservation of biodiversity – have consistently highlighted how the dominant commercialised agro-industrial model embedded within the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) has failed in its promise to deliver food security.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, agroecological farming collectives across the continent continue to offer clear alternatives. *Nous Sommes La Solution* (We are the Solution) is one of the more prominent examples of this, a network of rural movements across the Sahel united by a vision of food sovereignty grounded in women-led, peasant-based agroecology.<sup>32</sup> Beyond supporting and promoting agroecological development across communities, they also work actively to influence agricultural policy choices that will invest in agroecological models at national level and legislation to ensure ongoing biodiversity.



© Clément Tardif / Greenpeace. Local children in Yahonde village, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has been affected by the operations of logging companies.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Africa must be ready to engage with the values inherent within beyond growth thinking, even as the continent grows. At its simplest, beyond growth thinking is part of the rubric of alternative futures thinking, of which feminist economic alternatives and realities have been a major contributor. African feminist thought and African women's activism has been demonstrating that beyond growth / post growth thinking and policy making is not something that should happen only after a country has reached a particular level of GDP and deems itself sufficiently "developed". Indeed, African movements that resist Africa's current economic models of development – many led and held by women's and feminist movements – are not only engaged in beyond growth thinking but their struggles contribute to the framework and provide the very fabric of that thinking.

Engaging with beyond growth thinking is not a question of *if* Africa grows, but *how* Africa grows, and *for what end*. Limitless growth as an end in itself has been shown to be destructive to the planet while also offering no solution to the structural inequalities and oppressions that persist everywhere. Africa must dare to dream better than that. In turn, such visioning will determine better means of measuring the continent's economic and societal progress. GDP losing its current omnipotent role in our understanding of economic success is just one aspect of the shift that needs to take place and which – hopefully – a beyond growth approach may help to deliver.

# WELLBEING ECONOMY GOVERNMENTS (WEGO)

By Michael Weatherhead, Wellbeing Economy Alliance



Michael Weatherhead.  
Photo credit: Wellbeing  
Economy Alliance 2022



Wellbeing  
at the core



Restorative  
economic activities

The Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership (**WEGo**) is a collaboration of national and regional governments interested in sharing expertise and transferrable policy practices to advance their shared ambition of building Wellbeing Economies.

The idea for the group was first thought about in the mid-2010s, and with much behind the scenes relationship building, came to the fore at Scotland's Inclusive Growth conference held at the University of Glasgow on 20th of October 2017. Heads of Governments, Ministers and officials came together to discuss the potential benefits of such a group.

Following further discussions, the group was formally launched at the OECD's World Forum in Incheon, South Korea, in 2018. This included participation of senior officials from the governments of Scotland, Iceland and New Zealand along with Professor Joseph Stiglitz, Chair of the OECD's High-Level Group on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress.

The Wellbeing Economy Alliance (**WEAll**) was involved in the creation of WEGo, and since then the group has operated independently, with the Scottish Government providing Secretariat support for the group. It has also grown from its three founding members now to include Wales and Finland, with Canada closely involved.



© Greenpeace. During the opening of the COP26, 200 women gathered at Mt Yasur, an active volcano on the island of Tanna in Vanuatu. The women hold signs, calling for climate justice in the Pacific.

A decision was taken early on that for the purposes of ownership and sustainability, the secretariat for WEGo should not sit with WEAll or another external body or institution but be housed within one of the governments. The Scottish Government stepped forward and the team that supports WEGo is situated within the office of the Chief Economic Advisor. Thus, WEGo is independent of WEAll, though WEAll still has close ties to the Secretariat, supporting its planning work and connecting it to other actors in the space as well as making introductions to potential new member governments.

## MOTIVATION FOR THE INITIATIVE

WEGo was founded on the recognition that ‘development’ in the 21st century entails delivering human and ecological wellbeing, and that an alternative narrative around economy, power and cooperation was needed at the international level.

From the perspective of WEAll, we saw the inspiration such a coalition of governments focused on economics in service to people and the planet could offer the world. The idea was that by providing a group of exemplar governments pursuing economics in service of life rather than perpetual growth, other governments would be inspired to either join and/or pursue a different type of economics and economic policy making.

From the perspective of the first governments to form the partnership, and those that have joined since, the group provides a safe space to share, discuss and advance their thinking and economic policy making across a range of spheres from performance frameworks, to budgeting, to poverty, tourism and many other economic areas, often ones in which the member governments have a shared interest.

The primary stakeholders engaged to date with WEGo have been civil servants spread across a range of government ministries from treasuries to Prime Minister’s offices to health and social care departments. These senior civil servants have benefitted from the opportunity to learn from the experiences of other governments committed to a Wellbeing Economy approach and from external experts - such as key academics who have presented to the group, and the OECD WISE centre given their work in this area, in a collaborative and trusted environment.

Ultimately, the legislation, policies, behaviours and discourse that this group supports will be in service of their nation’s populations and the natural world.

For the global movement that is WEAll, the benefit has been that such an intergovernmental partnership engaged in the topic of Wellbeing gives credibility and energy to the efforts of others in the wider alliance.

### The objectives of

### WEGo are three-fold:



**To collaborate** in pursuit of innovative policy approaches to create wellbeing economies – sharing what works and what does not, to inform policy making for change.



**To progress** toward the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in line with Goal 17, fostering partnership and cooperation to identify approaches to delivering wellbeing.



**To address** the pressing economic, social, and environmental challenges of our time.



© Nilmar Lage / Greenpeace. Since 2006, Families associated with the Central of the Manicoré River Agroextractive Associations (CAARIM) have sought to create the Manicoré River Sustainable Development Reserve (RDS) – a protected area that would not only enact, by law, the conservation of that region, but would also allow them to continue managing the area’s resources in a sustainable manner, such as fish, fruits, wood and the beautiful chestnut trees. The river expedition “Amazon We Need”, held in June 2022, is a way to discuss new economic development models for the region, based on forest potential, the knowledge of traditional and Indigenous populations, and promoting scientific research.

## LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The work to date has been about encouraging the governments to think broadly in terms of their approach to policy and not especially deeply. With quality of life / national performance / future generations frameworks<sup>33</sup> now in place for all the participating member governments, the task now is to support the governments to think deeply – exploring the root causes of the societal and ecological crises, and (critically) to think ahead – thinking beyond short-term fixes to longer-term systemic changes.

Governments have a huge role to play in delivering wellbeing economies – and WEGo is a recognition that there is much to learn from sharing experiences and exchanging ideas. But, this approach requires us to go beyond designing policies and systems that prioritise the environmental, social and economic wellbeing of people and communities. It needs buy-in from all facets of society. It is vital that we raise awareness of the benefits of wellbeing

economies to a broader range of stakeholders so that the change that we are seeking comes to fruition. In Scotland, there is a focus on the role of business in a Wellbeing Economy and the Iceland [Wellbeing Economy Forum](#) (2023) highlighted the contribution of health also for this agenda with WHO [launching](#) a programme of work.

Of course, one must remember that exciting work has taken place in governments outside of the WEGo partnership. Examples include Costa Rica,<sup>34</sup> which has historically been a leader in reforestation and improved social outcomes, with a constitution that specifies that every person has the right to a healthy and ecologically balanced environment. Also Bhutan, who pioneered Gross National Happiness<sup>35</sup> as an alternative to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) back in the 1970s. And recently, the Balearic Islands have recently passed a law for the Wellbeing of Present and Future Generations.<sup>36</sup>

# THE COMMONS AS ISLANDS OF SHARED PURPOSE AND PROVISIONING

By David Bollier



David Bollier, Schumacher  
Center for a New Economics  
Photo credit: Damien Maloney 2021



Resilience and  
communities



The  
commons

“Respectable” opinion continues to believe that the market and state are the only consequential systems for getting stuff done. Conventional politics focuses on the ideological spectrum of “left” to “right” – often, a simple binary – that crudely revolves around how much authority the “private sector” (capitalist markets) ought to have relative to the “public sector” (the state). States and markets are seen as the only two meaningful vectors of power.

While the two are often cast as adversaries, in the larger sense they function as deeply allied, symbiotic partners. Both are committed to a shared vision of “progress” and capitalist modernity and “development.” They are united in seeking economic growth and technological innovation, driven by a calculative rationality for maximising one’s self-interest in market exchange. This is the catechism of standard economics.

This vision has a deeper grounding in erroneous assumptions about humanity itself – that we are utterly separate and superior to nature; that our minds are separate and superior to our embodied feelings; and that we are autonomous individuals disconnected from the Earth and social collectives. Not surprising, the institutions that perpetuate this worldview – the market/state system, as I call it – champion the globalisation of commerce, consumerism, corporatism, and the centralised control of nation-states.

We are not likely to escape this world of capitalist modernity any time soon. Never

before in world history have billions of people been organised under the extremely individualistic, materialist mindset of industrial capitalism – augmented by a complicit global digital culture and modern nation-states. But any systemic, long-term change on the structural problems of our time – most notably, climate action – will require us to modify or transcend the mindset sketched here.

The good news is that the paradigm of the commons, in cooperation with allied system-change movements, offers a credible, practical escape route. The commons is at once a philosophical, political, and social alternative that goes beyond conventional left/right ideology and state-focused political movements. The commons as a paradigm enables us to critique contemporary capitalism and state power, while offering a new vocabulary and perspective for building a different, post-capitalist world.

This may sound grandiose, but it helps to realise that the norms of capitalist culture – radical individualism, voracious consumerism, fiercely extractive, abusive relations with nature – are, when seen in the long sweep of history, bizarre. Their defiant rejection of existential, ecological realities is becoming painfully evident.



## THE INSTINCT ‘TO COMMON’

By contrast, the human impulse ‘to common’ is timeless and instinctual. Our ability to cooperate and share – to devise collective rules, to negotiate differences, to uphold community coherence in the face of free-riders and vandals – is as old as the human species itself. Evolutionary scientists will tell you that cooperative strategies are a primary reason why human beings have survived for millennia. Commoning is how we humans developed tools and agriculture, religion and art, and language and culture. Commoning – speaking from a historical, civilizational perspective – is our species’ default system of governance.

So the commons is not a new thing; it’s an ancient thing. And it’s not a Western idea (even if the West is now rediscovering it). The commons is a universal social form – or perhaps more fundamentally, an attribute of living systems. Life itself arises through symbiotic relationships and deep interdependencies, as ecosystems and the **Gaia theory** demonstrate. Commoning has important things to say about personal development, social psychology, cultural values and social practices. It speaks to our spiritual need for wholeness which is lacking in the consumer lifestyles predominantly found in the global North. The realities of our kinships with other living entities, our aliveness and interdependencies, and our bonds with past and future generations resonate deeply with the majority of humankind.

I have great confidence in the future of the commons for another reason. The diversity of countless actual commons, and the power they exhibit right now in addressing real needs, shows that they are a living reality right now.

There is a huge universe of bottom-up commoning initiatives flourishing around the world (see The commons in practice, in Chapter 3). The problem is that these projects, while pervasive, are culturally invisible. The language and concepts for naming what they do, and for understanding

how they work, are quite limited. The discourse of standard economics – in the service of capitalism – has eclipsed them.



© Victor Bravo / Greenpeace. Free Land Camp 2023, in Brasília, Brazil. The Free Land Camp (ATL) reaches its 19th edition, taking place once again in Brasília, Brazil. In 2023, indigenous people bring the theme “The indigenous future is today. Without demarcation there is no democracy! The indigenous movement calls for the resumption of the policy of demarcating original territories, which was stopped during the previous government.”

Nonetheless, millions of people are engaged in commoning because it’s a way for them to meet their needs and enhance their security. Instead of relying on politically fickle and corrupt states, they look to direct, self-organised provisioning and governance. Instead of looking to international bodies and corporations – which themselves are often failing or serving elite interests – people are relying on commoning to grow their own food, provide mutual aid to each other, build housing, safeguard water, and manage urban spaces. People use digital commons to assemble their own information repositories and creative works... and develop software platforms to benefit users and the general public, and not just investors. Commoners are devising alternative finance and money systems – providing care to the elderly, sick, and children through mutual aid networks – and taking responsibility for many everyday needs that markets ignore (because there is no “consumer demand”).



© Greenpeace / Vinit Gupta. Kusum Lata (centre), a low-wage labourer in India's capital city is one among nearly 450 women from the Power The Pedal community who are trying to reclaim their rightful space on the streets. India's cities are increasingly catering to the needs of the small minority - the car users. The need is to make cities more accessible to all, which will pave the way for communities to move sustainably, reducing air pollution and fighting climate change.

The general aim of any commons is to share or mutualize the benefits of collectively managed wealth. People who become commoners reject the idea of becoming private entrepreneurs or capitalists because they know what extractivist business strategies often entail: the exploitation of people, ecological destruction, political polarisation, social instability. Commoners realise that the Invisible Hand won't take care of the common good. Nor will nation-states, who are so often beholden to capitalist investors and corporations. Commoners must themselves pioneer a new version of common good, at the cellular level of society, through their commoning.

I must add that commons are systems that we choose ourselves. They don't rely on "cooperation" coerced by the state or market. The state may offer support to commons, and businesses may have limited forms of exchange with them. But outsider control or interference is resisted because it will destroy a commons. A critical attribute of any commons is therefore its social and political

autonomy. Participants must have the individual freedoms to enter into community agreements, to assume responsibilities, and to reap the benefit of their cooperation.

And all of this must be done in a spirit of inclusion, not exclusion. Of course, commoners who take responsibility for work must have first claims on what is produced or stewarded. But having said that, most commons strive to respect the dignity and needs of everyone regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age, or religion. They are also mindful of the legacy of our ancestors and the needs of our children and future generations.

The global South is an obvious and apt place to embrace the commons if only because such traditions are often robust, nourished by cultural memory, even in the face of colonial "development" imposed by international trade and finance institutions. It is not surprising that the practices developed by Indigenous peoples over millennia and by traditional communities as stewards of land, water, forests, and

other natural systems, have been so stable and ecologically regenerative. Consider the Venezuelan federation of cooperatives, Cecosesola (see Chapter 2, Cooperatives), which has developed its own nonmarket, do-it-together partnerships to grow food, provide medical care, offer funeral services, and much more. It won the Right Livelihood

Award in 2022 for its achievements. While it may be harder in some respects for Europeans and North Americans to use commoning to withdraw from the circuits of the neoliberal market/state and thereby emancipate themselves, it is entirely possible, as my book *Patterns of Commoning and Free, Fair and Alive* document show.<sup>37</sup>

## THE PROMISE OF THE COMMONS

I hope you can sense why I think the commons might have some practical and inspirational value today. We live in an interregnum. The old order has not yet passed away but the new one is not ready to be born. This means that there are rare openings in The System that can be exploited; there are opportunities to innovate. The latent possibilities are available anywhere that people wish to move beyond conventional capitalist narratives of “development” and “progress.”

As a philosophical paradigm and narrative framing, the commons has a lot of potential because it covers a lot of territory. It has deep grounding in biological, geophysical, and evolutionary sciences, which show the symbiotic, interdependent nature of life (Lynn Margulis, James Lovelock), the role of cooperation in evolution (E.O. Wilson, David Sloan Wilson), and the links between human culture and the more-than-human world (Robin Wall Kimmerer, Merlin Sheldrake, Wahinkpe Topa, Darcia Narvaez). These overlapping histories of the commons – political, legal, societal and spiritual – can help us understand how far we have strayed. They show that the violence and dispossession of coloniality, land grabs, genocides of Indigenous peoples, and Western development models – as well as the “domestic colonialism” imposed by investors and corporations in the West as they marketize common wealth to enrich themselves – are undermining the heart of what it means to be human.

While it’s essential to have a penetrating critique of market capitalism, state power, and modernity, it’s also important that we don’t get bogged down in critique alone. There must be room for creatively transcending the status quo.

The commons is helpful in asserting a fresh, forward-looking archetypes for effective political action and cultural change. It steps outside the circle of market/state orthodoxy to declare new terms of aspiration. It offers strategic priorities for protecting shared wealth.



© Jani Sipilä / Greenpeace. Jussa Seurujärvi, Sámi reindeer herder from Muddusjärvi, Inari municipality, holds a banner reading in Finnish language “No Arctic railway”. Inari municipality is part of Sápmi, the cultural region traditionally inhabited by the Sami people. The Indigenous Sámi communities in Northern Finland have practiced traditional reindeer-herding for generations where the reindeer depend on old-growth forests and lichen for winter forage. They now face a new threat: a mega-railroad project that is being planned to connect Finland, and its natural resources, to the Arctic Ocean, facilitating the opening of mines on the Sámi Homeland as well as serving the growth of the forest industry.

# WHAT DOES REAL PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY LOOK LIKE?

Greenpeace International contribution

**GREENPEACE**



Real  
participatory  
democracy



Civil  
participation



New legal  
frameworks



People and  
planet above  
profit and  
growth



Reallocation  
of government  
budgets

**“In the 20th century, public life revolved around governments. In the 21st century, it will center on citizens.”**

- **Matt Leighninger**, *The Next Form of Democracy, How Expert Rule is Giving Way to Shared Governance – and why Politics Will Never be the Same*

Environmental destruction is inextricably linked with democratic degradation - as corporations exert more influence over politicians and institutions, they also control our decision making processes, and bend the outcomes to their will. Civic participation initiatives aim to reverse this trend, returning power to the hands of the people by giving them control over how financial systems are constructed and how public money is spent. Some of the most persuasive models of how we can reclaim true democratic potential come from models of governance developed and enacted by workers in the global South.

Citizens were empowered to make collective decisions to distribute the city's budget.

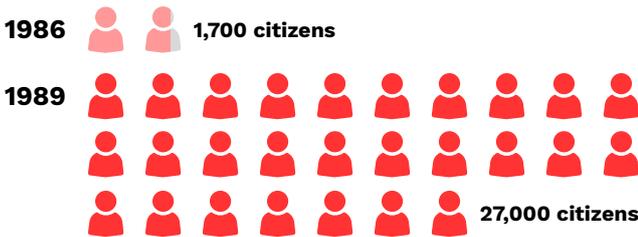
In the 1980s, in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre, the left wing Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, hereafter 'PT') introduced an initiative known as participatory budgeting. Citizens were empowered to make collective decisions to distribute the city's budget, determining how much money should be 'weighted' to different areas of governance and infrastructure. Through a programme of meetings (neighbourhood assemblies, thematic assemblies, and meetings of delegates to coordinate the initiative's outcomes citywide), citizens participate in "semi-structured meetings" to assign priorities for public funding.

## AN INARGUABLE SUCCESS

Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre notably directed funding away from so-called ‘prestige’ projects and towards basic investment in infrastructure at the local level, “prioritising social justice over short term economic gain.”<sup>38</sup> Researchers have noted that the process directly resulted in a significant uptick in living conditions for Porto Alegre’s poorest citizens:



 From 1988–1997, sewer and water connections increased from **75 percent** of total households to **98 percent**



 New public housing units, sheltering **1,700 citizens** in 1986, sheltered **27,000** in 1989



 The number of schools has more than **quadrupled** since 1986



 The health and education budget increased from **13 percent** in 1985 to almost **40 percent** in 1996.<sup>39</sup>

The participatory budgeting model proved extremely successful: where bourgeois democratic representation can often reinscribe existing inequalities, in Porto Alegre: “Women, ethnic minorities, low income and low education participants were overrepresented when compared with the city’s population and consequently funding shifted to the poorest parts of the city where it was most needed. It brought those usually excluded from the political process into the heart of decision making, significantly increasing the power and influence of civil society and improving local people’s lives through the more effective allocation of resources.”<sup>40</sup>

Once established, Porto Alegre’s participatory budgeting process proved popular and resilient enough to withstand the electoral defeat of the PT in 2004, the new administration found themselves without the political capital to dismantle such a popular and successful programme. This transfer of power did bring challenges however: while the programme persisted, participation was lower and there were accusations of clientelism. Funding for the process continued to decline over the ensuing decades, and the programme was finally suspended in 2017.<sup>41</sup>

Participatory budgeting as a concept doesn’t start and end with Porto Alegre. The Brazilian sociologist Gianpaolo Baiocchi, perhaps the most prolific scholar of Porto Alegre’s democratic innovation, returned to the subject in 2016 to catalogue, alongside Ernesto Ganuza, how the ideas behind participatory budgeting travelled as far as Córdoba, Chicago and New York, albeit often in less radical, “diluted” forms.<sup>42</sup>

“If talk of participation once evoked the ‘Port Huron Statement’ and politically radical groups like Students for a Democratic Society,” Baiocchi and Ganuza warn, “today we are more likely to hear it from the White House, British Petroleum, or the World Bank.” Much like the circular economy, radical, counter-hegemonic methods that originate in the global South are ripe to be co-opted by power to join the likes of greenwashing, pinkwashing and “corporate social responsibility,” to provide cover for



© Diego Baravelli / Greenpeace. Training about solar panels for residents. Extractive and fishing communities in the Bailique archipelago (Amapá, Brazil) received solar energy based freezers from Greenpeace Brazil.

less than democratic processes. NGOs and civil society must lead the way by demanding truly radical participatory processes that upend inequalities rather than reinscribe or obscure them. We can also lead by example: by operating cooperative and participatory funding and governance models ourselves, we show that true democracy is the way to a more equitable future.

The Porto Alegre case is not the only model for how participatory politics can transform societies and their surroundings for the better. In India, the term “eco-Swaraj” (aka “Radical Ecological Democracy”) is used to describe collective acts of self governance that work towards sustainable alternatives, and resist predatory development projects. The term builds on Gandhi’s concept of Hind Swaraj,

a political-philosophical ideal of autonomy and self-rule, born out of India’s struggle for independence from the British Empire, but originally stems from ancient Indian notions and practices of people being involved in decision-making in local assemblies known as swaraj, simplistically translated as self-rule.

“One of the fundamental tenets of eco-Swaraj is radical democracy, which means power at the level of ordinary people,” says environmentalist Ashish Kothari. “It’s not about a government laying down policies. It’s really about everybody. Every person in a village builds the capacity to be centrally part of decision making.”<sup>43</sup> (See the Proto Village example in Chapter 2, Slow Circular Economy and Towards Swaraj/self rule – reviving the Ramekhra River in Bihar, India, Chapter 3).



© Jurnasyanto Sukarno / Greenpeace. Rosita Tecuari Chairwoman of Papuan Indigenous Women's Organization (ORPA) Namblong carries a letter to Provincial Office of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning in Jayapura Papua, to revoke the permit of PT Permata Nusa Mandiri (PNM) concession.

## WHAT ELSE COULD CIVIC PARTICIPATION DO?

Beyond the capacity to improve people's immediate circumstances, there's reason to believe that increased participation in civic and political governance could help slow or reverse ongoing climate trends. Research has found that between 60% and 81% of people surveyed across Europe are fairly or very worried about climate change and its effects, and a majority of people in North America are personally concerned about the impact that climate change will have on their lives.<sup>44</sup> Unsurprisingly, this trend is even more stark in the global South, with 88% of people surveyed in Angola, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Jordan, Kenya, Morocco and Tunisia reporting that climate change is affecting their everyday life, and 61% of the same cohort reporting that "climate change and environmental damage have affected their income or source of livelihood."<sup>45</sup> This political will is not being turned into action by our institutions. Meanwhile even individuals who are concerned about climate change may have no choice but to prioritise their own financial growth to support their families if this promises them immediate relief from financial difficulties. Alternatively, the models mentioned above have the potential to not only lead to prosperity but also to bring about collective community benefits that offer instant alleviation from ongoing challenges, while also ensuring long-term gains as a result of greater

support for initiatives that benefit both the climate and the community.

Although the maxim that the best environmental decisions are made through widespread collective participation is affirmed in international environmental law, people continue to suffer through the actions of unaccountable corporations, and politicians in the global North feel empowered to row back on climate pledges.<sup>46</sup> These positions are of course unsustainable. One of the great successes of the Porto Alegre case was the creation of a system that was "more porous to citizens' demands."<sup>47</sup> If this porosity is the aim, too many of our institutions have become watertight. Equality and climate justice require not just a facade of democracy, but the real thing.

The movement for participatory democracy continues in Brazil, with the new administration of President-elect Lula launching one of its main initiatives, the Participatory Pluriannual Plan (PPA Participativo) which facilitates public participation in the development of goals and objectives for the next four years, and includes a digital platform. This is a crucial step towards fulfilling Lula's campaign promise to implement a participatory budget at the national level for the first time.<sup>48</sup>

# SUMMARY

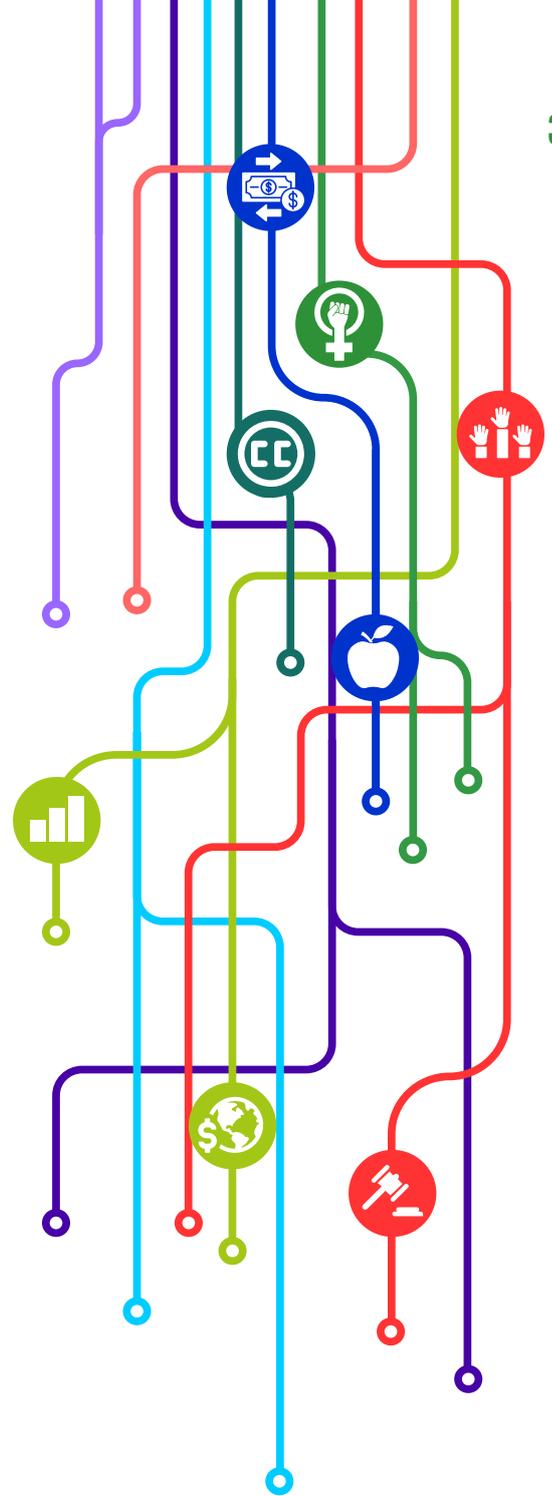
This is the first chapter of a three-part series on ***Growing the Alternatives: Societies for a Future Beyond GDP***.

The landscape of alternatives for how humanity could organise politically and economically to increase the wellbeing of both people and nature is an exciting space that brims with both possibility and the tangible evidence of communities living and thriving.

## WHAT'S NEXT

Having looked at the theories underpinning these alternatives and their imperative, in Chapter 2 we address the degree to which these solutions and alternatives have to contend with the marketplace, an arena where much of the destruction that is wrought on people and planet occurs. Models such as the Slow Circular Economy, the Economy for the Common Good and Cooperatives are explored, including a look at an outstanding example of a cooperative, Cecosesola in Venezuela. This is an integrated network providing goods and services including health, transportation and agro-industrial production. It brings together more than 20,000 associates from these sectors and day to day activities are managed by about 1,300 associated workers through participation that is open to everyone, without hierarchical positions. In their own words, “day by day we strive to transcend the individualism and egotism we carry within us by rotating tasks and continually reflecting on our behaviour”.

It sounds utopian, does it actually work? Be sure to find out in **Chapter 2: Market Facing Alternatives**.



## BIOGRAPHIES

### **Annegeke Jansen and Rutger Hoekstra, Leiden University, WISE Horizons**

Annegeke Jansen is a PhD Candidate at the Institute of Environmental Sciences at Leiden University. She participates in the 'WISE Horizons' project, in which she works on a synthesis of Beyond-GDP metrics and the determinants and historical developments related to wellbeing.

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Fatimah Kelleher is a feminist political economist, strategic and technical adviser, researcher and activist with over 20 years of experience working globally. She is an Associate of the Nawi Afrifem Macroeconomics Collective and focuses much of her work on African feminist macroeconomics covering trade, agriculture, labour, care, tax, and debt, with additional expertise in the in education and health fields. Fatimah has published and edited widely with feminist organisations, the UN, the Commonwealth, multiple online platforms and in journals such as *Feminist Africa* and *Gender and Development*. Fatimah is on the Boards of the International Association for Feminist Economists (IAFFE), and the Centre for Economic and Social Rights (CESR).

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Michael is a Co-Founder of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll). He now splits his time between Glasgow and the Lake District – both excellent locations for his wellbeing – having previously been based in London, South Africa and Spain where he was managing and international director of the consulting arm of the New Economics Foundation (NEF) for over a decade. He holds post-grad qualifications in economics and organisational development and uses that knowledge to blend rigorous analysis with innovative learning spaces to advance Wellbeing Economy solutions. In his role as Development Lead for WEAll, he leads the relationships with new and existing supporters of WEAll as well as developing and overseeing new programme areas.

### **David Bollier, Schumacher Center for a New Economics**

David Bollier is an American activist and scholar of the commons who directs the Reinventing the Commons Program at the Schumacher Center for a New Economics. He is the author of *Free, Fair and Alive* and *The Commoner's Catalog for Changemaking*, among other books; he blogs at [Bollier.org](http://Bollier.org); and he hosts the monthly podcast, *Frontiers of Commoning*.

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# FIGURES

## FIGURE 1. 500 YEARS OF COLONIALISM, EXPLOITATION, EXTRACTION, PROFIT AND GROWTH

### GDP (Gross Domestic Product):

Our World in Data, World GDP over the last two millennia: Total output of the world economy. This data is adjusted for inflation and differences in the cost of living between countries. Linear graph, section from 1500 onwards is selected. <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/world-gdpover-the-last-two-millennia?time=earliest..2015>

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1500's Spain and Portugal to new colonies in Caribbean & southern US, 1920s England brought 1st slaves to English America. Britannica, Transatlantic SlaveTrade; <https://www.britannica.com/money/topic/transatlantic-slave-trade>

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World Economic Forum <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/01/after-the-rise-of-the-west-and-asia-we-need-a-better-form-of-capitalism/>

### Shareholder capitalism, 1980s:

The two most critical figures of the shareholder movement were perhaps Roberto Goizueta, the CEO of Coca-Cola from 1981 until his death in 1997, and Jack Welch, the CEO of General Electric from 1981 to 2001. A speech that Welch gave at the Pierre Hotel in New York several months after his appointment is seen by many as the true dawn of the era of shareholder value. Though he didn't use that term explicitly, the speech marked a clear shift to a profits-first focus. Roger L Martin (2010), The age of customer capitalism, Harvard Business Review; <https://hbr.org/2010/01/the-age-of-customer-capitalism#:~:text=Modern%20capitalism%20can%20be%20broken,value%20capitalism%2C%20began%20in%201976>

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Chart shows how the global material footprint (MF, equal to global raw material extraction) and global CO2 emissions from fossil-fuel combustion and industrial processes (CO2 FFI) changed compared with global GDP. Wiedmann, T., Lenzen, M., Keyßer, L.T. et al. Scientists' warning on affluence. Nat Commun 11, 3107 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-16941-y> <https://rdcu.be/dmxFT>

## FIGURE 2: THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM BEHIND THE CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY CRISIS

Graphic inspired by: Trickle down theory graphic from:

<https://positivemoney.org/about/>  
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Plunder in the Post-Colonial Era: Quantifying Drain from the Global South Through Unequal Exchange, 1960–2018; “Over the whole period, drain from the South totalled \$62 trillion (constant 2011 dollars), or \$152 trillion when accounting for lost growth.” <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13563467.2021.1899153?journalCode=cnp20>

## FIGURE 3: LIFESTYLE CONSUMPTION EMISSIONS

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## FIGURE 4: GLOBAL INCOME INEQUALITY

Adapted from Visual Capitalist (2021), This Simple Chart Reveals the Distribution Of Global Wealth, By Anshool Deshmukh, September 20, 2021; <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/distribution-of-global-wealth-chart/>

## FIGURE 5: OUR PRINCIPLES AND PROPOSALS

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## FIGURE 6: THE WISE HORIZON METRICS

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# GROWING THE ALTERNATIVES

**SOCIETIES FOR A FUTURE BEYOND GDP**



© Bence Jardany. Civil society groups organised a non-violent event on the iconic Heroes' Square in Budapest. Thousands of people stood for the freedom of civil society and the freedom of thought, by forming a spectacular human banner.

To find out more about Greenpeace International's Alternative Futures programme, see: [greenpeace.org/alternativefutures](https://greenpeace.org/alternativefutures)

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