Driving the system change needed to end loss and damage from climate change

Executive Summary

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What is the problem?

Human activities have pushed our Earth beyond its safe operating space. Seven of nine planetary boundaries have now been exceeded.[1] At the same time, 35 percent of the global population face social shortfalls in areas such as food, water, housing, work, peace, and political voice.[2,3] The richest 20 percent of countries —home to just 15 percent of the global population— contribute more than 40 percent of annual ecological overshoot.[4] Whereas, the poorest 40 percent of countries —home to 42 percent of the global population— experience more than 60 percent of social shortfalls.[5] Ecological overshoot and social shortfalls were created through particular configurations of imperialism, colonialism, racism, and capitalism over the last few centuries.[6,7,8,9] Unequal exchange between the Global North and Global South is perpetuated by unfair trade,[10] debt,[11,12] and tax[13] rules. Inequality is growing[14] and democracy[15,16,17] is shrinking as wealth[18] and power is concentrated among authoritarian leaders,[19,20] extractive multinational corporations and oligarchs (i.e. ultra-wealthy and politically powerful people).[21]

What is the solution?

Systems change is needed to end ecological overshoot of the planetary boundaries while addressing social shortfalls. This requires transformation that addresses the root causes and drivers of ecological overshoot and social shortfalls, and democratising power throughout systems. Key transformations must include:

- **Moving beyond economic growth:** "Green growth" is not possible.[22,23] We must focus on reducing consumption while shifting to regenerative and distributive economic activity within and between nations.[24,25] Indigenous concepts suggest relationality[26,27] and reciprocity[28] as core values that should underpin all economic activities. Emerging growth-critical economic frameworks include degrowth[29] and Doughnut Economics.[30]
- **Working less and recognising the true value of care:** Reducing working time is necessary to decouple work from growth,[31] reduce consumption,[32,33] and free up time for people to live healthier,[34] more sustainable lives.[35] Recognising the true value of care will help address gender inequality.[36]
- **Ending the hegemony of Global North science, knowledge, and expertise:** Ending epistemological violence[37] against Indigenous and other knowledge holders is critical to ensure that leadership, knowledges, wisdom, and experiences that can end ecological overshoot and social shortfalls are not marginalised at the very moment they are needed most.[38,39,40]
- **Restoring our reciprocal relationship with more-than-humans:** Global North models of conservation have failed to prevent ecological overshoot while displacing Indigenous Peoples who have safeguarded biodiversity for millennia.[41] We must(re-)turn to stewardship and kinship to restore our reciprocal relationship with more-than-humans (e.g. animals, plants, fungi, forests, glaciers, rivers, the atmosphere)[42,43,44] recognise that human and more-than-human wellbeing are inseparable,[45,46] and reject the idea that humans have dominion over so called "nature".[47]

- **Reconsidering reparations:** We need to think of reparations differently,[48] not as a punishment, but as an acknowledgement of shared responsibility, and as an opportunity to dismantle systems that benefit just a handful of people.[49] Reparatory justice can reallocate resources and capabilities to build just and equitable systems that can end ecological overshoot and address social shortfalls for all.[50]
- **Thinking seven generations ahead:** Indigenous principles such as the Haudenosaunee Peoples' Seventh Generation value and the principle of intergenerational equity[51] urge current generations to live in a manner that future generations can still meet their needs, enjoy human rights, and thrive.[52,53] This suggests that no decision should be taken without first considering how it might affect the ecologically safety and social justice of future generations.

Positive tipping points, non-violent mass mobilisation of 3.5 percent of the population, and achieving a collective vision for the future, can all play important roles in driving systems change.

- **Positive tipping points:** By identifying, triggering and accelerating social tipping points in human societies, positive tipping points[54] can interact to form self-reinforcing cascades of change[55] to bring us closer to systems change. Only 20-25 percent[56] of a population is typically required to reach a positive tipping point.[57]
- **The 3.5 percent rule:** Non-violent protests are twice as likely to succeed as armed conflict, with those engaging a threshold of 3.5 percent of the population having almost never failed to bring about change.[58,59,60,61,62] Most successes have been achieved with less than 3.5 percent of the population participating.[63] Large-scale participation is usually only a surface-level indication of the full scale of public support.[64]
- **A collective vision for the future:** Decolonisation,[65] critical consciousness,[66] appreciating the agency that individuals possess to bring about change,[67,68,69] and citizens' assemblies,[70] can help create a shared vision for tangible alternative futures that are habitable, just, and equitable.[71] A collective vision can drive systems change by enabling people to appreciate what life under a new system might feel like.[72]
- **Coalitions of the willing:** Groups of willing States, regions, cities, unions, companies, and individuals can move faster than multilateralism, test practical solutions, and drive positive tipping points, creating a "race to the top".[73]

What are our key recommendations?

- The burden of systems change must be borne equitably, in line with historic responsibility, self-determination, Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC), and the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC), the polluter pays, do no harm, and intergenerational equity.
- The Global North must organise a planned shrinkage of its material economy to free up ecological space for the Global South to meet the needs of its citizens.[74] Degrowth and Doughnut Economics can help achieve this.
- It is not viable for the Global South to follow Northern development paths without increasing ecological overshoot and social shortfalls. The Global South should resist growth-based capitalist development models without compromising on the right to development.[75]

- Abolishing debt-based currency[76] and shareholder primacy,[77] caps on resource use,[78] and banning advertising[79,80] and behavioural economic models that encourage consumerism[81] can all help economies move beyond growth.
- The (re-)turn to stewardship and kinship must be supported by returning land to Indigenous Peoples, granting rights to more-than-humans,[82] and recognising ecocide as a serious crime.[83]
- The Global North should not regard degrowth nor reparations as a punishment.[84] There are significant benefits to Global North citizens from these actions across health,[85] security,[86] and international cooperation.[87]
- As a minimum first step towards reparatory justice, the Global North must agree to make the global economy fundamentally fairer for the Global South[88], including by reforming trade frameworks through the lens of ecological limits and distributive justice,[89] and agreeing to fit for purpose UN Debt Convention and UN Tax Convention.[90]
- Education[91,92] and political systems must centre intergenerational thinking to ensure decision making considers the ecological safety and social justice space of future generations.[93]
- Systems change requires a prolonged campaign of strategic non-violent mass mobilisation. This necessitates breaking down systems change into manageable chunks, having a clear set of demands for each reform, coordinating mobilisation globally, ensuring the sustainability of mobilisation,[94] and maintaining the wellbeing of participants.[95]

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