

It's time we changed the system

This updated version provided the basis for a workshop and a shorter conference paper for the Greenleaf Servant Leadership UK Conference 31st October to 1st November 2007. It was also the basis for a workshop at Kingston University's Sustainability in Practice (SiP) International Conference from Global to Local, 6-7 September. This updated version provides a basis for articles, talks and workshops.

Collectively, we face the biggest crisis in recent human history.

It is a wonderful world. For many of us in developed countries, things have never been better. However there always is an upside and a downside. The world faces the biggest crisis in recent history – possibly abrupt and irreversible climate change. Recent floods in England have brought it home to us. In an economy heavily dependent on fossil fuels, there are already signs of emerging fuel and food shortages and rising prices. Every day there is more news about the potentially devastating effects of climate change. People, especially poor people, and business will be affected everywhere.

The Stern Review, commissioned by the UK government, sets out devastating consequences and warns that the global economic cost of climate change to business and governments could eventually reach 20% of world GDP if nothing is done. The latest IPCC report paints an even more frightening picture.

The scientific consensus is that the environmental crisis is a man-made, largely caused by CO₂ and methane. Even if, as some argue, it's mainly down to solar activity, we still face a crisis.

However, it's much more **complex** than climate change.

The two big issues are:

- a) The effects of continuing economic growth on the planet
- b) Poverty.

Ecological harm and poverty are inseparably linked.

A cynic might say we, in the "West," are only waking up as climate change starts to threaten us, no longer just other people! Climate change is a symptom of a malaise that is broader and deeper. We need a moral and spiritual re-awakening. As Meg Wheatley says, "*It's our turn to help the world*" (Nixon, B, 2006, Foreword).

- 1) ***We are consuming and destroying the planet's resources at a rapidly growing rate that is unsustainable.*** Human beings are consuming 400 years worth of ancient solar energy in the form of fossil fuels every year (Lynas, M, 2007). Putting it bluntly, it's greed, taking more than our fair share. London's "footprint" is huge: London requires 125 times its surface area to provide its needs. If everyone consumed like Londoners, we would need three planets, five at the Los Angeles rate of consumption! Yet most countries aspire to this unsustainable "Western" way of life.

We face degradation of the earth, increasing pollution, and growing shortages of fossil fuels, food, agricultural land and water, already leading to conflicts. We need to abandon the idea that we are the masters, everything is there for us to exploit and other peoples and species are relatively unimportant. The West has exported much of its manufacturing with all the pollution problems, to poorer, developing countries less able to operate sustainably. 25 percent of China's greenhouse gas emissions are produced making goods exported to the West (Tyndale Centre).

Human beings are part of an intricate, interconnected relationship between Planet Earth and all living things upon it. If we want a sustainable future, we need to treasure and protect this ecological diversity of which we are a part. Satish Kumar (Kumar, S, 2004), like Gandhi, says the whole of nature is holy; all life has intrinsic value. Everything is inter-connected and we are who we are in relationship to others. We need to respect different peoples, cultures and religions –

and abandon violence in every form – thought, word and deed – including violence towards other animals and the planet of which we are a part.

The process of global sourcing and industrialising food production, apart from producing huge amounts of CO2 through food miles, damages the provision of good, fresh food on which human life and health depends. Food production needs to be largely local. People are becoming separated from the sources of food and from cooking. We are also endangering food security which requires diversity and an understanding of local soil and climate conditions. We are destroying indigenous ancient knowledge about ecology, cultivation, nutrition and healing. We are making food more, not less, expensive. In UK we are steadily destroying our farming and local food production. Thirty-seven percent of our food is now imported compared with 27% in 1995. The effects on farmers everywhere are devastating. Meanwhile we throw away one third of the food we buy and suffer a major obesity problem because of poor diet.

Not only are we degrading the earth. We are degrading our built environment. By putting power and profit before people, we are creating more and more ugliness. Business without soul creates ugliness. Older buildings of a more human scale, often built by craftsmen using natural and local materials, are being replaced by monster developments, symbolic of the false values of many big corporations and government. Sustainable cities, towns, villages and workplaces are beautiful – people thrive in beautiful places and their spirits suffer in ugliness.

We have enjoyed an era of unprecedented economic development, ease and prosperity as a result of the exponential growth in oil production of from around 1831, and later, natural gas until about 1970. Growth is expected to go steeply negative from 2009 (Duncan,R, 2005-6).The Association for the Study of Peak Oil (ASPO) says “regular” oil peaked in 2005 and oil and gas combined will peak in 2015. George Monbiot says no one really knows when oil production will peak – gas will come later and coal much later – whether it is now, ten or thirty years hence, but “*we could find ourselves facing both catastrophic climate change and an unprecedented global depression*” (Monbiot, G, 2007, p209). Not only are we running out of oil and natural gas and, in the long term, coal. We are running out of most major materials used in modern manufacturing. In a world economy based on fossil fuel and non-renewable resources, there has to be a complete change in the way we live. If we do not adapt soon enough, there will be widespread unemployment and the possibility of collapse.

- 2) ***Sustainability must include global economic and social justice.*** As we learn from the media and travel more, we become more aware of how fortunate we are and that it is very different for the majority of people in the world, who are relatively or very poor. If we want a secure and peaceful world, in which people and business can flourish, it means tackling extreme poverty. We know the facts: millions live in poverty and face starvation; they are afflicted with disease much of which could easily be prevented or cured. Millions of children die. If they survive, their lives are stunted by lack of education and opportunity. Many live in fear and insecurity generated by violence.

There can be no peace or security without global economic justice and respect for difference. The big powers are in denial about their violence, militarism and the extent and effects of their huge military economies. They created nuclear weapons, leading to proliferation and the threat of nuclear annihilation. Unfair, colonialist foreign policies create hostility and contribute to growing international “terrorism.” Other countries see clearly the contradictions between our postures and actions. State violence, imposing our way, looking for a quick dollar and bullying are not the answers to these problems. Bush and Osama bin Laden mirror each other.

We need a total change of awareness and consciousness.

“Problems cannot be solved at the same level of consciousness that created them.” Albert Einstein.

Growth isn’t working as a means of reducing poverty. Vandana Shiva (Shiva, V, 2005) calls it *mono-thinking* and *mono-culture* – the idea that one size fits all – an unproven approach that flies in the face of economic history (Ha-Joon Chang, 2007). It is rapidly fuelling climate change, global warming and degradation of the soil and ecological system. Rapid economic growth is inefficient and

far too slow in reducing poverty. Between 1990 and 2001, for every \$100 of growth in the World's per person income, only \$0.60 contributed to reducing poverty below the \$1- a - day level (New Economics Foundation report, June, 2007). In the UK, growth benefits the richest 10 percent of the population 10 times as much as the poorest 10 percent. In India, well over 100,000 farmers have committed suicide since 1993, largely as a result of debt and failed GM crops. Peasant livelihoods are being ruined in many countries by the activities of large global corporations (La Via Campesina). The rush to produce bio-fuels (dubbed agro-fuels by campaigners) will be a disaster for people and the environment. Globalisation is certainly not working for the 73 percent of Indians dependant on agriculture or the 280m poor living in India's 600,000 villages (Jeevika) or the slums of Mumbai. Often, the process of rapid economic development deprives poor people of the land they depend on for their living.

Instead of reducing poverty effectively, rapid economic development is making a growing elite of super rich people vastly richer, raising the incomes of middle classes and wealthier nations. We see this most graphically in Mumbai where, despite rapidly growing prosperity, 55% of the population live in slums. It is creating problems everywhere, most of all in poor countries and poor areas of rich countries, like northern England. Certainly some countries, like Singapore have been lifted out of poverty, but in many cases, like our own, **not through free trade**. (Ha-Joon Chang, 2007). They enjoyed protection whilst developing their own economies. Adam Smith (1776) is misquoted by advocates of unrestrained free-market capitalism.

Although Britain is the 4th or 5th largest economy, this success comes at a cost. It is partly based on London's attractiveness as a place for billionaires to live and make money and the City's financial expertise including tax avoidance and evasion, off shore tax havens and money laundering. City bonuses recently reached £19bn and sums like £7000 are spent on a single bottle of champagne at nightclubs. Brits spent £11bn on champagne in 2007. The already wealthy are best able to benefit from this expertise and ingenuity in getting richer. Taxes are "perverse" in the sense that rich people pay least proportionately and can pay for the best advice on avoidance. Disproportionate wealth contributes to the problem of unaffordable housing in London and similar problems in the countryside.

Average total pay for a UK chief executive is now £2,875,000, more than 11 times the increase in average earnings and nearly 20 times the rate of inflation as measured by the consumer price index. The ratio between bosses' rewards and employees' pay has risen to 98:1, up from 93:1 a year ago - meaning the pay of a chief executive is almost 100 times more than that of a typical employee. Ten years ago the pay differential was 39 times that of the average worker. Meanwhile a third of low income people in UK skip meals for a whole day. Women bosses are left behind. (Guardian 29-08-07). In the USA, CEOs were paid an average of 458 times more than production workers in 2000, up from 104 times in 1991. The degree of wealth concentration of the world's 475 billionaires is now worth the combined income of the bottom half of humanity*.

There is a sharp contrast between the pension schemes of top directors and employees many of whom face uncertainty. 26 top directors will retire on annual incomes between £500,000 and £1m plus; over 100 more can look forward to retiring on at least £200,000 a year and 80 FTSE firms retain final salary schemes for all or some of their directors whilst axing them for staff (Labour Research Department).

The happiest countries tend to have more equal income distribution. Like the USA, UK ranks low amongst countries with advanced economies on many measures of wellbeing and happiness: prison population, crime, child poverty, teenage pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, literacy, political alienation and upward social mobility. Social mobility in Britain is worse than in other advanced countries and declining – educational attainment is strongly related to family income (London School of Economics and Sutton Trust).

There is an escalating gap between rich and poor in UK and between North and South. The wealth gap is the widest in 40 years. There is a polarisation between the wealthy in southern suburbs and the poor elsewhere (Joseph Rowntree Foundation). In the seventies, incomes were getting more equal; now the reverse is happening. There is growing poverty in the countryside; rural services are declining; the rural population is ageing, as the young people cannot afford to stay there and migrate

to cities. We now produce only 60% of our food (Commission for Rural Communities). Fresh food production needs to be local and we are destroying its source and individual shop keepers.

Sourcing for “lowest cost” externalises and does not count social, health and environmental costs. It destroys communities, creates “clone towns” and affects wellbeing. Low prices are an illusion when we, the taxpayers pay for “cleaning up” and most people’s wellbeing suffers.

We are all responsible - individuals, organisations and governments.

We are drifting. The disastrous Iraq war has diverted attention and vast resources from addressing the biggest issues we face, namely the environment and poverty. We need to stop being in denial or behaving as if we are powerless to make any difference.

Reversing climate change We need to rapidly cut rising global CO2 emissions, largely resulting from using fossil fuels, to a sustainable world average of 3 tonnes per person. Methane emissions, mainly coming from cattle and refuse dumps, and emissions from high-flying aircraft, especially damaging, and ships are also rising. Wealthy people and countries pollute most; poor countries and people are worst affected. People in UK and EU account for 12.5 tonnes (average) greenhouse gases per capita per year and rising; US and Canada some 20; China 4; India 2 and sub Saharan Africa less than 1 ton. (Goodall, C, 2007). USA, with 5 percent of the world population, emits 25 percent of world greenhouse gases, their vehicles 6 percent of the total.

EU and UK, by 2050, need to get down to 3 tonnes, an 80 percent reduction on 1990 levels - 2 tonnes or a 90% reduction now looks safer. UK’s Climate Change Bill plans a 60 percent reduction, which many experts regard both as inadequate and unlikely to be met, given current plans. Rich countries bear the heaviest responsibility; we have the technological capability and the means. The “West,” seen by other nations to have created the problems, needs to show the way, set an example and help poorer nations develop their own ways out of poverty and into sustainability.

What are the main sources of current emissions? Figures are confusingly inconsistent as these two examples show but they give a useful general picture.

Emissions by category			
AEA Energy & Environment UK 2004:		Green Energy Works 2003:	
Residential	15.6%	Domestic	29%
Road transport	21.3%	Road transport	23%
Energy industries	36.9%	Industry and commerce	46%
Other industries	17.7%	Land use change	2%
Other	8.5%		
* These figures do not include land use changes and forestry. Both exclude aviation, shipping and off shore.			

Urban areas are responsible for 75 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions and the world population is moving from country to city. UK supermarkets may contribute 20 percent of UK emissions (Garnet, T, 2003). The transport sector now contributes 26 per cent of UK carbon emissions. Looking at all modes of transport, the study Oxford University’s Centre for the Environment showed that rapidly rising air travel accounted for 70 percent of the sector’s climate change impact - 13 per cent of UK’s total impact, while cars were responsible for 25 per cent and public transport for 3.5 per cent. The highest emitters were mostly men who earned more than £40,000 a year - they were responsible for 19.2 tonnes of CO2 from flights alone. Global shipping accounts for 4 per cent of CO2 emissions and aviation 2 per cent (UK 6.3 per cent), rising 3-4 per cent annually. The mix of gases injected into the icy atmosphere from high flying aircraft are two to four times more damaging than from other sources, especially at night (Christian Science Monitor 10th Feb 2005). Farmed animals produce 18 percent of world greenhouse gases, more than transport’s 13.3 percent, and 37% of methane and are a major contributor to water scarcity. Epidemics amongst farm animals and poultry are having devastating effects on farming. A diet rich in meat is unsustainable.

Homes – it is now quite easy to build “zero-carbon” homes for little more than a standard house. But George Monbiot reckons it would take 1,700 years to replace our housing stock at the current rate of building, even if that was desirable! The big issue is the existing stock of what he calls our “leaky homes”. This is where the government needs to play a major role providing research subsidies, financial support, incentives and properly enforced standards and regulations.

Individuals are directly responsible for 44 percent of CO2 emissions – indirectly far more. Our houses consume about 25 percent of UK electricity.

Ultimately the fairest solution may be a personal CO2 or footprint limit for every person on the planet. The technology to implement this already exists.

We all need to take action

The momentum is gathering. Many large business are responding and new, small and medium enterprises are starting to provide sustainable technology and housing. Many cities and towns are taking bold initiatives. To be fair, the Government’s Climate Change Bill, aiming to reduce emissions by 60 percent based on 1990 levels, now 80 percent, though it needs beefing up, is a model for other nations.

But people, business and government are doing too little, too slowly to avoid catastrophe. In particular, the whole motor industry, with few exceptions. Now, the French and Indians are working together to produce a car driven by compressed air which should be available by the end of the year.

Collectively, individuals can make a difference but strong government action is essential. For example if the UK government banned conventional light bulbs, as Australia has done, it would save up to 730,000 tonnes of CO2 per year; halting airport growth over the next five years would prevent the equivalent of 16.3 million tonnes of annual emissions (Kingsnorth, P).

Government is seen as moving too slowly. Their relatively cautious targets, not backed up with adequate funding, consistent policies and rigorous enforcement and reviews of progress, are unlikely to be met. Their measures exclude important sources of emissions like aviation and shipping.

There is a fundamental split in government thinking – on the one hand the talk is good but on the other it insists on unsustainable economic growth or business as usual. For example, it is committed to nearly tripling air passengers by 2030; opening a second runway at Heathrow which will double flights; a £13bn roads programme; and spending 1,500 times more on widening the M1 than is spent on domestic renewable energy generation. Planes produce 10 times as much CO2 as trains but there is no tax on aircraft fuel. Road transport is responsible for about 23 percent of CO2 emissions, yet Government has been timid about penalising drivers of gas guzzlers and rewarding those who drive eco friendly vehicles. It has been slow to invest in railways, tramways and cycle lanes which could take people off congested roads. Rail fares are continuously increased above the rate of inflation, making them the most expensive in Europe, whilst the real cost of driving gets cheaper. Whilst centralised power stations waste two-thirds of the energy they generate, Combined Heat and Power (CHP) and distributed power generation could make costly and uncertain investments in carbon capture and storage and unsafe nuclear power unnecessary (Joss Garman, Greenpeace campaigner and founder of Plane Stupid). A variety of renewable energy sources could meet our needs without the costly and uncertain technologies such as nuclear power or carbon capture and storage favoured by Government – again the bias towards big, simple solutions (Ecologist, November, 2007).

UK government needs to do much more - a bold, coherent strategy that is joined up. International aviation and shipping emissions must be included in targets. Government must set mandatory carbon neutral standards for new homes and offices. It needs to take bold measures to reward the sustainable, penalise the unsustainable, make sustainability affordable for everyone, nurture nascent green technology, help make “going green” profitable and give local communities much more responsibility and more say. Enabling measures are needed to remove obstacles. It has ample scope to make an impact and set a good example – the way it operates its buildings, its investments in infrastructure, sourcing decisions and the influence it can bring to bear on suppliers. The individual example of ministers and civil servants, such as how they travel is vitally important.

Governments and political parties want to gain or stay in power and not alienate powerful vested interests. Without understanding the full implications, political leaders sometimes jump at big, easy solutions like bio-diesel or nuclear power. They want to avoid actions that may harm the economies or competitive advantage of their nations, alienate big business, deter investment or affect employment. Corporations face similar difficulties.

Hence, governments need to bring about an international level playing field, global and regional frameworks, so that nations and corporations can act responsibly without severely disadvantaging themselves (SIMPOL). As Jonathan Porritt says, this could be a new role for the World Trade Organisation, instead of fuelling unsustainable growth (Resurgence Sept/Oct 2007). The EU needs to make a start and set tough mandatory standards for motor vehicle manufacturers and press for global agreements.

Everyone has to take personal responsibility and use their purchasing and “people” power. It is no good waiting for or blaming others – like government or business. Both will respond to a groundswell of opinion, consumer demand, purchasing power, lobbying and the political pressure of citizens.

Why are we, our governments and corporations so slow to respond to this crisis, when effective action is urgently needed?

When we face an emergency comparable to WW2, why do we continue to produce and drive heavily polluting cars, fly as usual? Why do years of successive summits and concerts, Live Aid and now Live Earth, produce so little action?

It's partly that we have never had it so good. We simply do not want to change the way we live. We do not want to even admit that there is a crisis. We are in denial. Putting our own vested interests before global welfare, denial and resistance to change are part of being human. It is hard to admit that a mindset in which so much has been invested is not working.

It's the system!

The root of the crisis is an unsustainable economic system and its underlying values. It puts corporations and economic growth before people and planet.

Most people have good intentions and care about less fortunate people and the world our children and grandchildren will grow up in. But businesses cannot respond sufficiently and survive in the current system. We need **whole system** thinking. It is little use trying to change things by addressing *symptoms*. Problem solving rarely works except in the context of the whole system, as the history of New Labour may be said to demonstrate. Instead, we need to try to see the “whole system” and address the key *underlying* issues.

We are caught up in an unsustainable system driven by powerful elites, large corporations, militarism and a military economy and global institutions not sufficiently representative of all countries. The World Bank, World Trade Organisation and IMF are dominated by governments too much influenced by big business interests and uncritical belief in global sourcing and globalisation as the way to alleviate poverty and GDP as the measure of progress.

The current global system was developed by politicians and economists committed to a free-market system (unlike their predecessors, such as John Maynard Keynes, Kenneth Galbraith and, today, Jeffery Sachs).

Consumerism was created in the forties alongside easy credit and built-in obsolescence, to keep US factories producing. It is a major obstacle to sustainable enterprise and sustainable living. Have we been duped? Are we “slaves” to a system working largely for the benefit of corporations and wealthy elites?

Underlying the system is an imbalance of male and female energies and beliefs about what it is to be a leader and how to bring about change. The prevailing values of top leaders tend to favour heroic, top down leadership and decisiveness; put money and power before human needs. They will “do what is right.” There is a tendency to believe that ends justify means and towards violence, in word or

deed. Feminine energy tends to be more about nurturing life, caring relationships and consensual ways of resolving problems.

We are part of a **living system**, which cannot be controlled like a machine. Living systems are unpredictable and hit back hard if not respected, as climate change and “*the war on terror*” are showing us. We need to transform the way we live and how we try to solve our problems. We need more humility and a spiritual perspective (Gandhi, M and Kumar, S).

A key part of the present system is debt, the debt money system, out of control financial markets, perverse taxation and massive tax avoidance that puts up the burden of personal taxation. Only 3% percent of money is issued by government or central banks. The remaining 97% is debt money created by banks, which thus make large profits. Borrowing and the need to repay debt and interest, it is argued, fuels consumption, needlessly puts up the cost of public infrastructure investment, creates a large burden of debt and hardship – both for poor people and poor countries – For example, Jamaica spends over 60 percent of its GDP servicing debt. For the first time, it is predicted that Britain’s personal debt, £1.35trn, will exceed UK’s £1.131 GDP (Grant Thornton). Financial markets cause instability for businesses, create a focus on the short term, share values and short-term profitability and thus diverting attention away from the long term and stewardship.

Taxes are “perverse” in the sense that they do not sufficiently encourage “good” things such as enterprise and sustainability and discourage the “bad” such as creating pollution and unsustainable practices; rich people pay least proportionately and can afford expensive advice and help with a complicated and inaccessible system; taxes bear down on poorer people.

We keep talking about these issues but do not take action. James Robertson puts forward comprehensive proposals for evolving a new political economy and its institutions (Robertson, J, 1998 and James Robertson – *working for a sane alternative*). These include reform of the money system and taxation, including sustainable taxation and tax based on the use of common resources. Common resources include un-extracted fossil-fuel energy, the electro-magnetic spectrum, the environment’s capacity to absorb waste and pollution, water for extraction and use for transport, airport landing slots, carbon, increases in property values because of enormous increases in land values (Land Value Taxes LVTs and Land Labour Campaign) as a result of public investments such as the Jubilee Line in London. An example of a “tax” based on common resources was the £22.5bn raised for UK taxpayers by the auction of licences to use the radio spectrum for third generation mobile phones. Such taxes could fund investment in renewable energy, energy saving, transport, schools, hospitals, affordable housing and a basic citizen’s income and pension that could replace current complicated, expensive to administer and ineffectual measures to alleviate poverty. Similarly, taxing global commons could fund global initiatives for sustainable development, alleviation of poverty and peace-keeping (Robertson, J, 2005, *The Future of Money*; Vickers, T, 2007).

Here are his practical proposals: Firstly, change the debt money system under which most of our money supply now consists of bank account money created as profit making loans by commercial banks. This is particularly relevant at a time when crippling indebtedness is starting to have major effects on the world economy. Secondly, change an unsustainable tax system that perversely taxes useful activities like work and fails to tax excessive use of environmental and other common resources. The third leg of the tripod in addition to money supply and taxation is a big change in public spending - to include a base Citizens Income for people to use in their own interests. This would release people from the dependency associated with state handouts. It would be sourced from some of the tax raised from the use of common resources, and would replace some of the money now spent on big government agencies and big business corporations to provide public services and public investment for citizens expected to stay dependent.

Because most of us have a stake in this system, we need to look at it with an open mind. Also, to avoid damaging legitimate interests, extensive consultation is required, and the changes need to be carefully considered, moderate and gradual, starting with those that would make most difference and do least harm.

We need to change the system. If we are to avert disaster and create a sustainable future for everyone, we need a sustainable global economic system and new global institutions that focus on

the key priorities: - meeting human needs: protecting the planet; tackling poverty, disease and violence worldwide; giving everyone the chance to enjoy meaningful work and healthy and fulfilling lives. These aspirations are expressed in the UN Millennium Goals. There is a growing consensus that to achieve them, **fair**, not **free, trade** is needed, giving each country, with support from richer ones, the freedom to develop its own unique way.

It may seem a daunting but human beings created the system and we can change it. People change the world.

Gandhi's thinking can help us in the 21st Century.

Arguably, he was the most successful and influential change agent of the 20th Century. He got the British out of India and has influenced some of the greatest leaders of our time! He called his campaign "All rise" meaning everyone benefits; everyone takes responsibility. He understood the need to find out what it was like for ordinary people and created a growing groundswell before embarking on change. His key principles were truth and non-violence. If only our politicians, journalists and business leaders would try them! It takes courage. **Truth** means diligently seeking and speaking the truth. He called his life an experiment with truth. Would that Bush and Blair had committed themselves to truth.

There should be zero tolerance for official lying, untruth and denial.

Gideon Polya

Non-violence applies to all life on the planet, non-violence in thought, word and deed. For him it meant resisting oppression non-violently through love. He understood that ends do not justify means: it is no use trying to end violence with violence. Today, especially 60 years after Hiroshima, we need non-violence as a worldview – non-violence in bringing about change; dealing with international conflicts; non-violence towards nature and women.

The World Council of Elders is a step in this direction.

Gandhi would say that industrialised agriculture and inhuman conditions in factories are violence. He would regard nuclear energy as violence towards nature.

He was also a strong advocate of modest consumption, local food and the primacy of localisation, especially devolving power to local communities to determine their futures. (Gandhi, M K, 1938; Nixon, B, 2007). For a fuller account go to www.bruce-nixon.com/newwritings .

What we need to do.

"The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for anyone's greed." **Mahatma Gandhi**

Principles for sustainability:

- ***Reduce***
- ***Reuse***
- ***Recycle***
- ***Repair***

Individuals need to transform the way we work and live. It means consuming less; minimising use of non-renewable and non-biodegradable resources; avoiding toxic substances and products that cannot be recycled. That rules out UPVC and nuclear power both of which use toxic processes and produce non-biodegradable waste. Of course, we need to be flexible and make balanced decisions (Friends of the Earth and Centre for Alternative Technology provide advice).

For business, a prudent "going green" strategy is a good way to make money. Businesses that respond to the challenge and growing customer awareness can enhance profitability and competitive position. But the passion to succeed comes from going green for ethical reasons.

A model for sustainable businesses is Interface, a worldwide company producing floor coverings, fabrics for airliner seats, speciality chemicals and interior architectural products. Interface's principle is *"do well by doing good,"* says, septuagenarian, Ray Anderson, Chairman and founder of Interface. Companies like this are a minority but their number is growing, often from small beginnings. Sustainability is at the heart of Interface. Interface aims for a "zero footprint" and is more than half way there. It has helped create a host of sustainable companies in its supply chain. Go to Interface's website to find out what they have done. An important initiative is WWF's Climate Savers programme which is creating industry leaders who can demonstrate that environmental policy change is good for business (WWF).

In bringing about innovations, small companies are often in the lead. A brilliant example is Sherwood Energy Village, created on a former colliery site, providing a site for industry, housing, recreation and education. It exemplifies energy efficiency, promotion of renewable energy and biodiversity in all its developments. Another is Remarkable who make all kinds of office supplies out of recycled materials and have grown from strength to strength.

A good national model is Sweden which aims to be nuclear free by 2010 and oil-free by 2020 (Ecologist, March 2007pp 42-45). New Zealand's prime minister, Helen Clark plans to make government bodies carbon neutral. Germany offers the *Passivhaus* that requires only the heat from sunlight coming through the windows and the bodies of people in the house.

In USA states and cities are signing up to Kyoto targets, regardless of Bush's reluctance to accept the inevitable. California leading the way in tackling climate change in the US. The state - the sixth largest economy in the world - signed a law last year, which set a target of cutting its greenhouse gas emissions by 25% by 2020.

"Successful movements aren't built on guilt, they are built on passion," **State Governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger.**

He believes the environmental movement is approaching a "tipping point" where it will enter the mainstream, galvanising business and individuals.

How does radical change come about in complex systems?

We are part of a complex interacting system. How do complex systems change?

Transformation comes about in a multitude of ways. To find our way in a complex, uncertain world, we need the collective intelligence of everyone in organisations and communities. If global institutions are to succeed, they need to adopt the same principle and be inclusive. The *heroic leader*, alone, or a small elite group, cannot possibly know what needs to be done. Transformation requires everyone to take leadership. Meg Wheatley defines leaders as "anyone willing to help" (Berkana Institute). To facilitate this process requires a different kind of leadership that both inspires and enables.

Change begins with information, a new understanding, increased awareness, realisation of an urgent need. Compassion from seeing how other people are affected moves us. It can provide an "aha". A change of consciousness leads to decisions and action fuelled by passion. Then the inherent creativity and inventiveness of human beings comes into play. There is a tipping point; an "epidemic" begins. Transformation comes about through evolution *and* revolution. It emerges, as we are beginning to see, through the small actions of millions of "ordinary" people. An example is the movement to ban plastic bags, a symbol of the throwaway society. It comes about through relationships and conversations. Transformation *also* comes about through totally new ways of thinking (Albert Einstein), chance discoveries, (Charles Darwin, Sir Alexander Fleming), and inventions of geniuses, (Sir Timothy John Berners-Lee, inventor of the world wide web). Extraordinary, visionary leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King junior, Nelson Mandela and Winston Churchill, give expression to the hopes of millions and change the course of history.

This may be seen as a somewhat optimistic view. Human behaviour is complicated. Lessons from changing organisations may be relevant. But changing society is much more challenging. People say one thing and do another as polls reveal. Consumer behaviour is influenced by the desire to flaunt one's wealth and make a statement about who one is. So people may put photovoltaic panels or turbines on their roofs, sited where they can be seen, to display their affluence. Yet they

may continue to live an unsustainable life style in most other respects – consuming, flying and driving as usual. On the whole, it is poorer people who actually live most sustainably! They simply consume less.

Then there is the **“cool factor”**. According to some recent research, young women actually prefer young men who flout the green mantras. How can we make being green “cool,” or get people above that superficiality, is the big question?

There is much debate about how to do this: *carrot* or *stick* or communications as they were used in WW2 or maybe all three? Clearly governments will have to intervene by much more effective means if there is to be sufficient change soon enough when affluence and aspirations are rising rapidly all over the world. (BBC Radio 4, Analysis 19-7-2007). But the best way to motivate people is probably to present a vision of a much more attractive way of living.

Can we really create a spiritual renewal?

It would be a tragedy if things had to get very much worse before we acted with sufficient urgency.

In case you become discouraged by the seeming impossibility of radical changes, it helps to remember that **everyone** changes the world and that

“Whatever you do may seem insignificant, but it is most important that you do it.” Mahatma Gandhi.

I also find this quotation encouraging.

“Everything that is done in the world is done by hope.” Martin Luther King

How can an individual help bring about a sustainable system?

The need for systemic change will be recognised as it becomes more apparent that efforts to solve the major problems are not working.

The right way to do things is not to persuade people you’re right but to challenge them to think it through for themselves. Noam Chomsky

There are five spheres in which we need to work: in **ourselves**, the source from which change begins; our **family and home**; our **community**; our **workplace**; the **world**.

“Be the change you want to see in the world.” Mahatma Gandhi.

1. **First, be the change** Start by deciding who you are; what really matters to you, your values, purpose and beliefs. Why are you on this earth? Feel your embarrassment about being thought soft. Trust your instincts. Follow your energy and do what you feel passionate about. Be clear about what is most important to you and prioritise. Own up to your deficiencies and take responsibility for them. It all takes courage.
2. **Be a leader of transformation** in your workplace and your community. This means being an agent of change.
3. **Finally, we all need to be global citizens!** Lobby big business, national government, regional and global institutions. Play a constructive part in your community. Press for local, national and global change. It is our responsibility is to be fully aware and informed, continuously.

“Activism is my rent for living on the planet.” Alice Walker

Getting sustainability it into the heart of your workplace and society – an approach that works

Here is an approach that works. It applies to your workplace or community however large including changing the world. Base your approach on what you know about how complex systems change. Change comes about in emergent as well as structured, planned and designed ways. It comes about informally through relationships and conversations.

- **Prepare the ground for change.** Change will come about when the time is right, when there is widespread recognition of the need and a groundswell has begun. You can help bring this about.
- **Have a philosophy of seeing the opportunities in the big issues** – opportunity for a better life, business opportunity and opportunity to learn. Spread a philosophy of seeing the opportunities. The most successful people and enterprises are adept at seeing and grasping opportunities.
- **Build trusting relationships.** See the best in everyone. Make friendships; get alongside the CEO; build partnership and alliances; have conversations; learn and inform your self – be sceptical, open hearted and open to contrary views. Be a trustworthy mentor. By listening to people, you will support and empower them.
- **Network, connect** with people. This opens you up to synchronicity, the benign, unpredictable forces in the universe that will support you and give you what you most need. Start conversations. Connect people with one another. Be an enabler. This helps them to make things happen.
- **Work with the energy for change**, with like-minded, “crusading forces” in the organisation but also with resistance; respect and listen to the “restraining forces.”
- **Co-create.** Adopt a whole system approach to change. Get the whole system into the room. Bring together key stakeholders, the full diversity of the system or your part of it. Help people articulate dreams and hopes. Help them identify and address the key issues that are getting in the way. Through engaging diversity, the most appropriate strategies for change will emerge and successful implementation is more likely.
- **Develop leaders of leaders** who know how to enable. Help people articulate their dreams, and be clear about purpose and outcomes.
- **Take inspiration from positive models.** Every day there is exciting news about new initiatives. Study what works and enlarge it; find good models inside and outside your organisation. Interface, the international carpet company, and Sherwood Eco Village have already been mentioned example. Another example – the steps Eurostar is taking to go green (Rail, 2007).
- **Review progress regularly.** Help people, evaluate and learn from what is working and not working, key issues in the system that need to be addressed and what needs to be done differently. Celebration, giving and receiving appreciation, fuels good energy and supports people in recovering and learning from setbacks and difficulties. Include yourself.
- **Sustain yourself.** Seek balance and prioritise your own wellbeing. Do things with mindfulness. (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1999) Give yourself time for renewal and reflection. Surround yourself with supportive friends *who will tell you the truth* – even if you may not like it.

For articles on processes you can use to facilitate change, go to *New Writings* and *Writings* at www.bruce Nixon.com

Get radical and lobby! Here are some key campaigns you can support to help **change the system**. Google to get their websites:

1. **Agriculture instead of agribusiness.** Local food; food diversity; food health; ending the degradation of planet earth, bio-piracy and abuse of corporate power; people’s right to land and water. (Garden Organic, Soil Association, Vandana Shiva, Jeevika, Janadesh - Retrieving People’s Dignity through Land and Livelihood, La Via Campesina, SARD Initiative - Sustainable agriculture and rural development,).
2. **A radically new and fair framework for global trade.** Ending poverty **and creating a level playing field for sustainable development worldwide.** Reforming unrepresentative global institutions like the World Bank, World Trade Organisation and International Monetary Fund and the unfair, unsustainable trading system they impose. (World Development Movement, New Economics F, Christian Aid, Oxfam, War on Want, Action Aid)
3. **Company law reform;** enabling alternative forms of company ownership; widening the duties of directors to embrace the interests of all stakeholders, the environment, society as a whole (Centre for Tomorrow’s Company, Rabbi Michael Lerner).
4. **Democracy** - reforming democracy, making it work better, decentralizing, unlocking democracy, giving more power to local communities, making parliament more representative; giving greater power to parliament to scrutinize, inquire and prevent the executive withholding information and over-riding the wishes of citizens – eg going to war on a flawed premise,

- nuclear power and nuclear weapons. (Unlock Democracy (formerly Charter 88 and New Politics Network), Electoral Reform Society, Helena Kennedy's Inquiry "*Power to the People*", One World Trust, Pressure Works, Operation Black Vote, Make My Vote Count, WriteToThem)
5. **Localisation**, particularly giving power to local communities; local healthy food production and distribution; restoring high streets and village communities. (New Economics Foundation, Local Works, the Soil Association, Friends of the Earth, Garden Organic, Slow City, Slow Food and Transition Towns)
 6. **New Economics, Money and Taxation:** Reforming the debt money system; perverse and unsustainable taxation and the power of financial markets. (James Robertson – *working for a sane alternative* www.jamesrobertson.com, New Economics Foundation, Tax Justice Network, Tobin Tax, SP Worldwide International Simultaneous Policy Organisation and Christian Council for Monetary Justice).
 7. **Sustainable buildings, cities, communities and transport.** (Herbert Girardet's book *CitiesPeoplePlanet - Liveable Cities for a Sustainable World* and website www.underthesky.org.uk, Transition Towns and Campaign for Better Transport (Transport 2000)).
 8. **Violence - ending violence as a way of resolving conflict** - personal, national and international. Strengthening nuclear non-proliferation, ending nuclear armament, abandoning nuclear power generation and a Peace Council replacing the Security Council (CND, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Oxfam, Oxford Research Group, Peace Pledge Union. RoadPeace aims to end violence on roads).
 9. **Wellbeing - better measures of progress** than GDP and continuing, unsustainable economic growth. (New Economics Foundation, UN Development Programme and Millennium Development Goals).

Predictions

I don't like making predictions. I am sure to be wrong. Scaremongering is not constructive. Human beings are too creative to let total disaster happen. However, if we do not act decisively these consequences are likely, the first five predicted by Stern:

- As he estimated, the global economic cost of climate change to business and governments could eventually reach 20% of world GDP if nothing is done.
- A more than 75% chance of global temperatures rising by 2-3 % over the next 50 years and a 50% chance they will rise by 5%.
- Rising sea levels could leave 200 million people permanently displaced
- Up to 40% wild life species could face extinction
- By 2080 sea levels round Britain are expected to rise 26 to 86 cm; flooding in coastal areas will be 10-20 times more likely; rain will decline by 50% leading to drought though wetter winters.
- A world economy based on fossil fuel and non-renewable resources will be fundamentally changed and, if we do not adapt soon enough, there could be widespread unemployment and possible collapse.
- Soon, everywhere, mounting fuel, energy, water and food shortages and rising prices.
- Increasing social conflict, violence, war and terrorism.
- Rising numbers of refugees fleeing from countries where people are desperate, starving and sick.
- Diseases are likely to spread from other continents.

If we take the necessary action now, we may become a little less affluent, but all of us, the poor majority on the planet, ourselves, our children and our children's children are likely to be a lot happier. Maybe, the universe is trying to teach us a lesson. Maybe too, we need to pay more attention to the lessons of history.

To sum up: what you can do.

1. "*Be the change*" – get your own "house" in order.
2. See the crisis as an opportunity and grasp it.
3. Make your own life sustainable – that includes YOU – save yourself as well as the planet!
4. Follow the mantra - reduce, reuse, recycle, repair.

5. Aim to make your business and home carbon neutral
6. Reduce your “footprint”
7. Buy sustainable goods; choose sustainable, ethical suppliers or help them become so.
8. Be sceptical; be well informed and fully aware. Eg read George Monbiot and look at the New Economics Foundation and use the www.
9. Lobby political and business leaders and influence others.

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For more resources, go to **Writings** at www.bruce-nixon.com

Useful sources of help and information:

- **ACORN** - <http://www.iema.net/acorn> (first steps to an environmental management system)
- **Carbon Trust** - energy and carbon – <http://www.carbontrust.co.uk>
- **Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT)** <http://www.cat.org.uk>
- **Ecologist Magazine** www.theecologist.org
- **Envirowise - waste and water** - <http://www.envirowise.gov.uk/>
- **Friends of the Earth (FOE)** <http://www.foe.co.uk>
- **Getting your house in order**
http://www.imc.co.uk/news/professional_consultancy_article.php?item_id=654&issue=18
(scroll down to the bit on 'getting your house in order').
- **Global Action Plan** - <http://www.globalactionplan.org.uk/>
- **Good Corporation** - wider than just environment, an audit-type assessment -
<http://www.goodcorporation.com/>
- **Resurgence** www.resurgence.org .
- **Sustainable Development Commission** <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk>

Footnotes:

***The US Institute for Policy Studies (IPS)** reports that American CEOs were paid an average of 458 times more than production workers in 2000, up from 104 times in 1991. The degree of wealth concentration of the world's 475 billionaires is now worth the combined income of the bottom half of humanity. Meanwhile, the United Nations Development Program's 1999 *Human Development Report* revealed that the gap between the wealthy and the poor both within and between countries is growing steadily larger. It notes inequities of the current global trading system as one of the key contributors to this trend. Even the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) concurred. In its *Global Trends 2015* report, issued in 2000, the CIA maintained that globalization will create "an even wider gap between regional winners and losers than exists today. [Globalization's] evolution will be rocky, marked by chronic volatility and a widening economic divide...deepening economic stagnation, political instability, and cultural alienation. [It] will foster political, ethnic, ideological, and religious extremism, along with the violence that often accompanies it."

UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 16-11-2007. Greenhouse gas emissions are projected to almost double by 2030. Depending on emissions, temperatures to 2100 could increase by 1.1C to 6.4C. With no policies to curb pollution, the most likely increase is 4C. Sea levels could rise 0.18m to 0.59m by 2100. Heat waves and hurricane strength will increase. Hundreds of millions more will suffer water shortages, up to 30% of species will risk extinction and food production will be hit. The IPCC, which won this year's Nobel peace prize jointly with Al Gore, will confirm it is 90% sure that recent global warming is down to human activity, and warn that the impact of future temperature rise will be severe. It will say action to cut emissions is needed in the coming decades to stop global temperatures rising by as much as 6C by 2100, and that most of the technology needed already exists (David Adam, Guardian, 17-11-2007).

Bruce Nixon is a veteran change agent and author. His latest book "***Living System – Making sense of sustainability***", forewords by **Anita Roddick** and **Meg Wheatley**, is published by Management Books 2000. **Special conference price** of £13.50 per copy (postage and packaging free) instead of the usual £14-99 plus p&p from: tel 01285-771441/2; e-mail: mb2000@btconnect.com; web: www.mb2000.com or bookshops and www.amazon.co.uk

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