

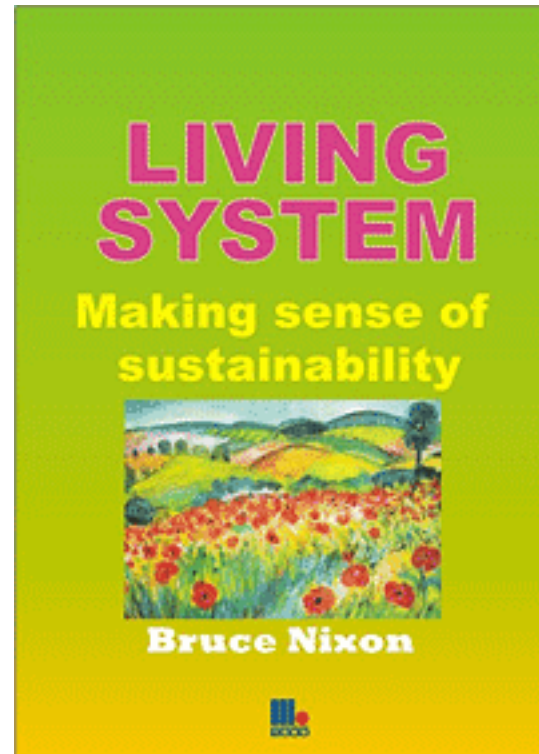
# LIVING SYSTEM: Making Sense of Sustainability

**Bruce Nixon**

*LIVING SYSTEM is a radical new book about sustainability in the broadest sense - climate change, the inability of the Earth to meet human needs if we carry on as now, **and equally important**, global social and economic justice and an end to violence. These aspects are inseparably linked. As we see in Africa and elsewhere, *the poor are the first to suffer.**

There are forewords by **Dame Anita Roddick, UK**, and **Margaret Wheatley, USA**, ***“It’s Just Our Turn To Help The World”*** and **many endorsements** – see below.

*The big challenge is to get the book out into the world. Please help by "spreading the word". We have some wonderful endorsements -- see below -- and reviews. Ask your library or university library to get a copy for you; get it into your local school. Help get it onto the shelves of the big book chains and your independent local bookshop - thus giving them your vital support - and suggest they get extra copies to put on their shelves. It has a striking and attractive cover. You can order it from Waterstone's, Borders, or Blackwell's in the UK, or from Amazon.co.uk in USA. If you order from Amazon or Tesco on line, please put in a reader's comment and rate it for me. However, you may wish to take into account that their discounts undermine both high street book sellers and publishers. You can order direct from my publisher [www.mb2000.com/acatalog/Busdevt\\_Strategy.html#a121](http://www.mb2000.com/acatalog/Busdevt_Strategy.html#a121) who may be able to offer a discount.*



## ABOUT THE BOOK

*The book takes a broad, whole system look at the situation at the beginning of 21st Century. The system gets in the way of our changing things for the better. This is why progress in tackling the urgent issues of climate change and poverty is so slow. We need to understand*

and address the system rather than create a wild succession of short-term fixes that don't work. Inequalities in wealth and power have grown enormously, rather than lessened, since the seventies. Efforts to help poor countries have largely failed.

***Our situation requires bold, radical ideas. This is what the book provides. It speaks plainly.*** Many "ordinary people" instinctively reject a consumption driven society in which progress is measured by increasing GDP. The book articulates and substantiates their doubts, challenges conventional wisdom, turns it upside down, (e.g. the vast debt-money and perverse taxation systems) and proposes a new agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It offers a fresh vision of how things could be given the resources and know-how we have today.

***It gets to the root of things - seeing the world as a living system.*** This is the uniquely useful perspective of the book. *A living system*, if not respected, hits back harshly. That is what is happening. Climate change, degradation of the soil, water and oil shortage and the loss of species are warnings. People react unpredictably too! That is one of the lessons of Iraq. War, domination and technological solutions alone are not workable strategies - though technology can play a part.

***It is a radical, big picture book. It challenges conventional thinking*** about economics, progress and how to bring about change. ***It takes a radical, look at politics and big business.*** It challenges the current economic system, including commonly accepted free market doctrines – mono thinking and monoculture - and the values underlying it. Respect for diversity and cultures we do not understand is needed. The book exposes unconscious forces that drive leaders - the "beast within" us all - denial, ego and groupthink. It examines the failures of current attempts to bring about change. Old, top down ways that ignore people on the ground are not working. It proposes better ways. It uncovers the part unconscious racism plays in foreign policy and globalisation. Wars on terror and Iraq are wasteful, terrible distractions from the real crises we face. This is why we have lost confidence in political and corporate leaders. A better balance of male/female energies may save us from ourselves.

***It's a people's book*** – easy to read, hopeful and inspiring. There is a chapter on crazy idealists and heroes who have changed and are changing the world – ordinary, extraordinary pioneers. Whilst sometimes shocking, it is not a gloomy book. It is constructive, optimistic, full of good news. It aims to wake up people to the urgency of the challenge and mobilise everyone's passion and energy to take their power to change things. There is a lot of positive news about successful models from all over the world. It is full of pictures - pictures often speak louder than words.

***It is both strategic and down to earth*** with practical strategic proposals ranging from global to local and what you and I and anyone can do.

***There is a lot in the book about so-called "third world" countries and a whole chapter on Jamaica, a country I know well.*** Aid does not work in the long term - yes, it is necessary in the emergency of now - but we need to stop being greedy, imperialistic, imposing our solutions. We need more to remove obstacles and support countries in finding their own unique solutions.

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## ENDORSEMENTS

*Exciting, thought provoking, dynamic, irritating, inspiring, passionate and occasionally enraged, Bruce Nixon forces us to re-evaluate our lives. His philosophy, that of core sustainability, just might hold the key to greater happiness for us all.*

**Kevin McCloud, journalist, television presenter and WWF ambassador.**

*An excellent read – personal, immediate and accessible based on much of the author’s own multi-faceted life experience. The book is universal in its scope and aimed at each of us, our personal choices and their application in every day life. We are all hopefully essential, integral and integrated components of “living systems”. The book is about living within Gaia’s constraints and always remembering that an ounce of practice is worth a ton of theory!*

**Diana Schumacher, Environmentalist.**

*This is both a very wise and a very human book. Its greatest strength is that it weaves together the radical changes needed at the global level with the changes each of us can make today in our own lives and shows how both are part of the same living system. It is passionately pro enterprise and passionately against the abuse of corporate power. It truly shows how we can move towards an “economics that works for people and the planet”. I endorse it in the strongest possible terms.*

**Stewart Wallis, Executive Director, nef (the new economics foundation)**

*The contest between forces of life and forces of anti-life is the epic struggle of our times. The rule of abstract notions of economic growth and globalisation is destroying life on earth. In "Living System" Bruce Nixon takes us back to the basics of the processes that threaten life and processes that maintain and nurture life.*

**Dr Vandana Shiva, Leading Environmentalist and Director of the Navdanya Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, India [www.navdanya.org](http://www.navdanya.org)**

*This powerful book highlights the choice we face; if a minority of powerful nations continue to enforce an economic system under pinned by centralised technologies and vulnerable supply lines, they will need to protect it with a huge world wide police force at enormous expense and risk to all our civil liberties. On the other hand, if we all begin a shift to decentralised world economy based on equitable and efficient use of energy, renewable energy sources, and re-localised supply systems, we can create communities that no terrorist organisation can easily threaten and, perhaps more importantly, which threaten no one else.*

**Paul Allen, Development Director, Centre for Alternative Technology**

*This is not just another explanation of the problems of the world. Its ambition is to make links, provide context and, above all, promote thought and a response. If you want to be an active citizen, give it a try; it might just change the way you think about the world.*

**Benedict Southworth, Director WDM, campaigning for justice for the world's poor**

*I really hope you will read this book. Treat it as a journey, on which you travel with Bruce Nixon to excavate and examine the foundations of our society and its ecological systems. Become angry over the injustice of poverty, alarmed at the destruction of our natural world, aware of the*

*dilemmas that face us all and hopeful at the new renaissance that is unfolding. It is rare to find a book that is both illuminating and accessible. Read it and go on your own journey.*

**Barry Coates, Executive Director, Oxfam New Zealand.**

*If you want to shift your focus from a culture of control to a culture of participation then this powerful book will prove to be your best and invaluable companion. This is a good guide to sustainability - do not only read it but act upon it.*

**Satish Kumar, founder of the Small School and Director of Programmes at Schumacher College, Editor of Resurgence, Devon, England.**

*In our increasingly busy lives we should welcome anything that helps to introduce a breath of fresh air, but Bruce Nixon's book does more than this. This book demands readers take responsibility for their decisions and life choices but, in return, it highlights the potential for new outcomes that could be achieved to benefit us all. It is a challenging read for those who will engage with the issues, but it also offers fresh optimism to those who recognise the opportunities of the positive future it outlines for the planet, if we dare to take the path.*

**Dr Susan Kay-Williams, Chief Executive, Garden Organic, formerly Henry Doubleday Research Association.**

*No matter where you live - from northern industrial societies to the developing south - we are heading into a climate change crisis that will threaten food security, the management of water and sustainable energy. The globalisation agenda of big corporations just accelerates the problem. We have to have a different starting point for surviving and living differently. Bruce Nixon explores this crisis and offers a different set of choices about where we can start from and what we must do. Everyone of us needs to address the challenges he explores and begin to make the changes needed to survive....while we have time to do so.*

**Alan Simpson, Member of Parliament, Nottingham South, nominee for ITN Ecohero Award**

*Bruce Nixon writes with insight, intelligence and grace, showing us that we can and must discover and act on our shared vision for a healthy, sustainable world. We all stand at the edge of the unknown, having never confronted such pace of change and growing harm to the air we breathe, the water we drink and the societies we build. We can choose to nurture instead of destroy. We can choose to tolerate our differences instead of aggress against them. We can*

*choose to come together instead of pull apart. Bruce's ideas and understandings encourage positive possibilities and that, to me, is a sign of hope and love. It is my pleasure to encourage everyone who cares to read this book.*

**Sandra Janoff, Ph.D., Co-Director, Future Search Network, Wynnewood, PA, USA**

*This book's strength is its optimism. It is not afraid to set out all the problems we face, bringing in witnesses where appropriate, and it would be easy to despair at the mountains to be climbed, but it also draws together example of initiatives that are going in the right direction, examples of people standing up to the problems and deciding to do something different. All the examples of initiatives that are changing people's lives should persuade readers that the world does not have to be like this. An inspiring book"*

**Stephen Joseph OBE - Executive Director Transport 2000: Putting people and the environment first - the campaign for sustainable transport.**

*Bruce Nixon has compiled much interesting material both to point out the problems of today's world and to indicate where we might go from here. The challenges are vast, and only a quantum jump in problem solving will now do.*

**Herbert Girardet, author, consultant and filmmaker on sustainability and sustainable cities.**

*It's no longer a question of whether we recognise the threat of climate change, its what we now do about it – collectively and individually. Just as the Environmental Audit Select Committee is set up to investigating how well sustainable development policy is integrated into government policy, so this book challenges individuals to scrutinise their own stance and their own action. The challenge of climate change is here and doing nothing is not an option. Its about what we can do.*

**Joan Walley, MP (Lab), Parliamentary Environmental Audit Select Committee**

*I warmly welcome the integrity of Living Systems. The behaviour of companies of all sizes have fundamentally changed in response to globalisation, yet at a deep spiritual level, we need to appreciate fully that we are in the universe, the universe is within us and that the universe and us are connected.*

**Dr. Neslyn Watson-Druée, MBE, FRCN, D Univ, FCGI, pioneer honoured for her work in promoting diversity in nursing**

*'Ordinary people change the world' says Bruce Nixon in this challenging book. Take that seriously: be challenged: read this book.*

**Ron Bailey, Campaign Organiser, Local Works, Campaigning for a Local Communities Bill to empower people to improve their local communities [www.localworks.org](http://www.localworks.org)**

*A challenging and insightful book which not only brings out the problems faced by the world but also provides a positive view of where we could be if we take the right action today. Hopefully this book will inspire its readers to take such action.*

**Norman Baker, MP, Chair of the All-Party Environment Group**

*This book is very easy to browse through. Anyone who reads it will be enlightened by its contents and feel encouraged to make that extra effort towards changing our wasteful and materialistic culture into a sustainable one. Many examples in the book show how just one person can make a huge difference in changing the thinking of our wasteful and materialistic culture into a sustainable one. 'A pebble dropped into a pool will cause the water to ripple outwards, so too can each person through their actions contribute to this growing movement of ecologically minded human beings.*

**Robin Joffre, mother, grandmother, sister, friend and concerned citizen of the earth, Montreal.**

## **DETAILS**

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Other books by Bruce Nixon: *Making a Difference - strategies and tools for transforming your organisation*, 1998, UK and USA and 2001, soft back UK and *Global Forces - a guide for enlightened leaders - what companies and individuals can do*, 2000, updated March 2003, valued by business people, professionals, academics and students.

## **FOREWORDS BY ANITA RODDICK AND MARGARET WHEATLEY**

### **Dame Anita Roddick's Foreword to LIVING SYSTEM: Making Sense of Sustainability**

**This book is about sustainability in the broadest sense** – the environment, the ecological system on which all life depends, global social and economic justice and the need for respect for all difference amongst human beings and in nature. It calls for a change in values and consciousness that will not only save the planet, but put an end to violence. It calls for an end to mono thinking, monoculture and the habits of domination, imperialism and attempting to colonise thought as well as cultures and nations.

**What is unique about the book** is that it advocates understanding and addressing *the underlying system and the values beneath it* as the best way forward if we are to realise our hopes for a fair and sustainable World. The system Bruce describes is a living system embracing all human beings and the Earth they live in.

**Living systems always react if not respected.** We are part of a living system – each of us here for but an instant in time. So we owe it to our children and descendants to be good stewards and act wisely. This is what leaders must learn or they are a danger. Once you understand it you see it everywhere, every day. This is what we have been confronted with particularly from the beginning of the 21st Century. The tragedies and catastrophes are warnings – 9/11 and its successors, global terrorism, violence, climate change and destruction of the ecosystem. We need to learn from them or there will be much worse to come. Poverty, lack of respect, injustice,



poverty, greed and domination are at the root of it. Current beliefs in “Western” leadership have only made things worse – more poverty and violence – not less. We have to face the truth. We delude ourselves with slogans, blatantly misleading words.

**Bruce describes the key elements of the system.** These are an uncritical belief in global sourcing and “science”, domination of nature, domination by global and regional institutions by business, which also undermines “democracy”, racist foreign policies, untruthfulness and denial, destabilising financial markets, the money debt system, perverse taxation, massive tax evasion and distortion of the purpose of business and responsibilities of directors.

**Underlying the system** is the dominant value of putting money and power before meeting human needs, unconscious racism and an imbalance of male and female energies.

Bruce puts forward a **new agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century** to address these issues including a renewable Charter for big companies and citizen’s basic income.

**Whilst radical, it is also realistic** and respectful of other views. It ranges from strategic issues and proposals to down to earth practical steps anyone can take. It takes a historical and spiritual perspective attempting to learn from History. It is very balanced in tone and content recognising the positive contributions, the up side and the down or dark side; challenging *and* positive, hopeful, encouraging and appreciating. Bruce believes in seeing the good in people, putting attention on good models, what works and finding common ground – rather than verbal or physical violence which has been increasingly used by the “West” on a massive scale.

**There are amazing revelations** in the research he draws on eg war and foreign policy and his study of politics in our parliament - the “*Mother of Parliamentary Democracy*”.

Of particular interest are the ideas about **sustainable buildings and cities** and the notion that they belong to people, who need to be involved in the co-creation of important buildings and town and cityscapes. Our environment is essential to mental and emotional health and communities that work for people of all ages and incomes. There are some valuable positive examples.

Bruce believes we are all **mirrors of each other** and if we are to change things for the better we need to look first inside ourselves – including acknowledging *the beast within us all*. We need to be truthful, show respect and build partnership based on trust and good relationships.

He believes we have **much to learn from wise women**, who may save us from ourselves.

–Dame Anita Roddick, England

**Margaret Wheatley’s Foreword to  
LIVING SYSTEM: Making Sense of Sustainability**

## **It's Just Our Turn To Help The World**

Margaret Wheatley, Ed.D, Utah, USA. ©2006

Several years ago, I read of a Buddhist teacher who offered his encouragement to a group that was filled with despair over the state of the world. His advice was simple, profound and placed things in historical context: "It's just our turn to help the world." What I love about this statement is that it reminds us of other times and other people who stepped forward to help create the changes that were necessary. We do live in an extraordinary era when, for the first time, humans have altered the planet's ecology and created consequences, which are just beginning to materialize in frightening ways. But throughout human existence, there have always been people willing to step forward to struggle valiantly in the hope that they might reverse the downward course of events. Some succeeded, some did not. But as we face our own time, we need to remember that we stand on very firm and solid shoulders.

In my own work with local communities around the planet, I've learned to define leadership quite differently than the norm. *A leader is anyone willing to help*, anyone who sees something that needs to change and takes the first steps to influence that situation. It might be a parent who intervenes in her child's school; or a group in a rural village in Africa who decides to put in a well for fresh water; or a worker who refuses to allow mistreatment of others in his workplace; or an individual who rallies his or her neighbors to stop local polluters. Everywhere in the world, no matter the economic or social circumstances, I see people stepping forward to make a small difference. They are impelled to act in spite of themselves; they often describe their actions as "I couldn't *not* do it." Others see what they do and label them as courageous, but those who step forward never feel courageous. They just did what felt like the right thing to do.

Because a leader is anyone willing to help, we can celebrate the fact that the world has an abundance of leaders. Some people ask, "where have all the good leaders gone?" But when we worry that there's a deficit of leaders, we're just looking in the wrong place. We need to look locally. And we need to look at ourselves. Where have we been willing to step forward for the issues that we care about?

Every great change initiative in the world begins with the actions of just a few people. Even those that win the Nobel Peace Prize. I've looked at the history of several of these prize-winning efforts, and one phrase always pops up as the founders describe how they began. Their laudable efforts began not with plans and official permission, but when "some friends and I started talking." I recently listened to Wangari Matai, winner of the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize for her work in planting over 30 million trees in Kenya and east Africa. Her first efforts were with a few local women, and they planted seven trees, five of which died. But they learned from that experience, spread the learning to their villages, then to other networks, and ten years later, 30 million trees flourish. Villages now have clean water and local firewood, creating improved health and community vitality. And it all began "when some friends and I started talking."

Bruce has compiled many similar wonderful stories in this provocative and stirring book. Individuals have an idea, or experience a tragedy, or want to resolve an injustice, and they

step forward to help. Instead of being overwhelmed and withdrawing, as many of us do these days, here are people who decided to act locally. They didn't know at the beginning where it would end up. They didn't spend a great deal of time planning and getting official support. They began, they learned from their mistakes, they kept going. They followed the energy of yes rather than accepting defeat. This is how the world always changes. And this is how we must act now to respond to the frightening issues of these times, to reverse our direction, to restore hope to the future.

I carry with me a vision of what would be possible if more and more of us were willing to help, if we simply said "no" to what disturbs us, if we took a stand, if we refused to be cowed or silenced. My heroes are the Ukrainians. They set a standard in their 'Orange Revolution' in late 2004 that has now inspired citizens in many different countries as far flung as Ecuador and Nepal. They refused to give in or to stop protesting until they got what they needed. Why couldn't we do the same? What will be our response to the destructive behaviors, the injustices and the suicidal decisions and beliefs that Bruce so well-details in this book? Are we willing to help?

### **I Want to Be a Ukrainian**

*Meg Wheatley ©2005*

When I come of age,  
When I get over being a teen-ager  
When I take my life seriously  
When I grow up

I want to be a Ukrainian.

When I come of age  
I want to stand happily in the cold  
for days beyond number,  
no longer numb to what I need.

I want to hear my voice  
rise loud and clear above  
the icy fog, claiming myself.

*It was day fifteen of the protest, and a woman standing next to her car was being interviewed. Her car had a rooster sitting on top of it. She said "We've woken up and we're not leaving till this rotten government is out." It is not recorded if the rooster crowed.*

When I get over being a teen-ager  
when I no longer complain or accuse  
when I stop blaming everybody else  
when I take responsibility

I will have become a Ukrainian

*The Yushchenko supporters carried bright orange banners which they waved vigorously on slim poles. Soon after the protests began, the government sent in thugs hoping to create violence. They also carried banners, but theirs were hung on heavy clubs that could double as weapons.*

When I take my life seriously  
when I look directly at what's going on  
when I know that the future doesn't change itself  
that I must act

I will be a Ukrainian.

*"Protest that endures," Wendell Berry said, "is moved by a hope far more modest than that of public success: namely, the hope of preserving qualities in one's own heart and spirit that would be destroyed by acquiescence.*

When I grow up and am known as a Ukrainian  
I will move easily onto the streets  
confident, insistent, happy to preserve the qualities  
of my own heart and spirit.

In my maturity, I will be glad to teach you  
the cost of acquiescence  
the price of silence  
the peril of retreat.

*"Hope," said Václav Havel, "is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out."*

I will teach you all that I have learned  
the strength of fearlessness  
the peace of conviction  
the strange source of hope

and I will die well, having been a Ukrainian.

***Margaret Wheatley writes, teaches, and speaks about radically new practices and ideas for organizing in chaotic times.***