

# Briefing

## 30 Big Ideas to Change the World

Over a period of 4 years Friends of the Earth Big Ideas Change the World research project investigated 10 big research areas, from the future of cities to innovation to the role of gender equality. It identified 30 Big Ideas for turning around the huge damage we are doing to ecosystems and human welfare in order to ensure good prospects for the next generation. These Big Ideas are described in short below, with links to further reading.

We don't pretend we've identified a perfect route-map for providing all of humanity with wellbeing within environmental limits. But we are confident the ideas for transformational change we have identified – which are in many cases mutually reinforcing and synergistic - would make a significant contribution to reaching that goal.

The transformational changes we are suggesting will not be easily made because by its nature big change is strongly resisted by powerful vested interests. But we owe it to the next generation to pursue transformation and not just minor reforms to currently unsustainable policies. Through history transformation has occurred when men and women of vision have doggedly pursued it against the odds and often at great personal cost. Today's change-makers must take up the baton and run with it if we are to be able to look the next generation in the eyes and say “we did our best”.

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For more than 40 years we've seen that the wellbeing of people and planet go hand in hand – and it's been the inspiration for our campaigns. Together with thousands of people like you we've secured safer food and water, defended wildlife and natural habitats, championed the move to clean energy and acted to keep our climate stable. Be a Friend of the Earth – see things differently.

## The Big Ideas

### How can we get cities driving positive social, environmental and economic change?

#### **1. Help cities to grasp and share power**

To flourish and to contribute to global flourishing, cities and their people need both greater control over their own destinies, and a strong ethical compass. Cities cannot just lobby for such powers to be delegated, instead they also need to work collaboratively and network together to realise their existing capacities. Grassroots groups and communities, as well as businesses, also need city authorities' help to network to build their power, share ideas and learn from each other. The work of the C40 Cities Network, the experiences of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, and the empowerment of slum dwellers in cities such as Delhi suggest how such strategies might transform urban futures.

#### **2. Provide lifelong education for equal participation**

True democracy at any scale requires an educated, questioning and participating public engaged in ongoing dialogue to expose, analyse and solve problems. Public authorities should support lifelong education to ensure that all people, regardless of background and advantage, are able to participate in democracy as equals. This requires recognising that participants have experiences and knowledge to share and are not empty vessels to fill. It also requires recognising that real life issues, such as social and economic justice, human dignity, environmental threats and politics should be central to the agenda. Such transformative education can be seen happening in participatory budgeting, the Occupy protests, community enterprises, and campaigning. An interesting example of education that builds on shared experiences is the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo in Durban, South Africa where the shack dwellers are the professors, teachers and students.

#### **3. Embrace Sharing through harnessing digital technology**

A reinvention and revival of sharing in our cities could enhance equity, rebuild community and dramatically cut resource use. With modern technologies the intersection of urban space and cyber-space provides an unsurpassed platform for a more inclusive and environmentally efficient sharing economy. City authorities should invest in sharing infrastructure and culture, remove barriers, and support and promote civic, communal and charitable sharing. This requires appropriately enabling and regulating commercial sharing platforms. Good sharing can support participatory democracy and build greater empathy and solidarity. We can learn from emerging 'sharing cities' like Seoul and Amsterdam where better sharing is seen as a critical policy goal.

#### **Reading:**

- Agyeman, McLaren and Shaefer-Borrego (2013), Sharing Cities, Friends of the Earth, [http://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/agyeman\\_sharing\\_cities.pdf](http://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/agyeman_sharing_cities.pdf)
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- Sharing Cities Network <http://www.shareable.net/sharing-cities>
- the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo, <http://abahlali.org/university-of-abahlali-basemjondolo/>

See also Big Ideas 10 (Empathy), 13 (Internet Freedom), 22 (Transport) and 27 (New Money).

### **What changes are necessary to prevent over-harvesting of the planet's bioproductivity?**

#### ***4. Collectively develop, promote and deliver guidelines for healthy and sustainable low meat diets***

The apparent miracle of vast food supplies and choice in advanced industrial societies comes at devastating cost to the environment, public health and social justice. A global shift towards an affordable, diverse and healthy diet for all is essential to reduce human's over-harvesting of nature's productivity and protect the life-supporting services nature delivers. This means eating lower on the food chain, with less meat and dairy, and reducing wastage, but would deliver a host of benefits for health, pleasure, convenience, social interaction, taste, equality and ethics. New sustainable diet guidelines – such as those adopted in Sweden and Brazil - must be developed, promoted and delivered in 'democratic experimentation' by government, civil society, city authorities and purpose-led businesses.

#### ***5. Transform land and marine management with multifunctional mosaics for sustainable productivity***

We must treat the ecosystems that provide us with our food like complex organisms, not like machines. Using land and water for more than one purpose – so called multifunctional management of ecosystems - means largely shifting from monoculture management to approaches such as agroecology, agroforestry, permaculture and ecosystem based fisheries management. Such approaches create a mosaic of small areas of food and biomass production integrated with adjoining plots supporting services such as waste and water retention, pollination, carbon storage and soil health. Helpful lessons can be learned from the 'ecocounties' established in China's Shengtai Nongye 'agroecological engineering' programme and from Integrating Aquaculture with Agriculture (IAA) approaches in Africa.

#### **Reading:**

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See also Big Ideas 8 (Sustainable Marketing), 9 (Commons Governance), and 25 (Frugal Innovation)

## **What is a better foundation for people's identity than consumption?**

### **6. *Changing identity: from buying to belonging***

We are more than what we buy. Overconsumption and unsustainability are fueled by our reliance on consumption and consumerism to define and display our personal identities. Democratic authorities (at all scales) should support and invest in social institutions that provide collective and non-consumerist opportunities for identity affirmation: such as community choirs, sports clubs, political associations, and cooperative and community enterprises. Such institutions rebuild and reinforce values of society and cooperation, and generate high levels of sustainable wellbeing. Authorities should also encourage and enable public participation in decision-making by such groups and institutions to counterbalance commercial and consumer interests. The British sport retailer TVS gave a glimmer of hope by on 2016 Black Friday giving away vouchers for people not to shop, following from the year before when it closed, saying "Please use the day to get out and about - Go surfing, Go skating, Go shredding. Just don't go shopping!"

### **7. *Disseminate mindfulness training to restrain consumerism***

Looking at modern adverts, one could be excused from believing that the meaning of life itself resides in shopping. In reality, material goods are fickle rewards and poor at signifying the true worth of an individual. Mindfulness training not only improves self-awareness, resilience, empathy and social skills but helps people find identity and personal, social and even existential meaning in a healthy balance of intrinsic and extrinsic values. Mindfulness training in schools, universities, workplaces and preventive health care could help address over-consumption, over-spending, and over-indebtedness, as found in small-scale projects in the UK. And in doing so it would offer a foundation for political action and leadership to support the broader economic transformations needed for genuine wellbeing and civic participation.

### **8. *Reinventing marketing to promote sustainability***

Marketing has moved on from the simplistic approach of 'make-and-sell' but the dominant paradigm of 'sense-and-respond' still leads to excessive promotion of unnecessary products. Marketing both needs to become sustainable in its practices and take responsibility for promoting sustainability to others. Marketing professionals and stakeholders must embark on a reinvention of marketing, developing and adopting a new paradigm of 'guide-and-co-create'. This means encouraging less consumption and putting social and environmental needs to the fore. Marketing must adopt sustainability standards that protect wellbeing at least as vigorously as it has adopted codes of conduct on products like alcohol.

## **Reading**

- Hurth, Peck, Jackson and Wensing (2015), Reforming Marketing for Sustainability, Friends of the Earth, <https://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/reforming-marketing-sustainability-full-report-76676.pdf>
- Armstrong and Jackson (2015), The mindful consumer, Friends of the Earth, <https://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/mindful-consumer-mindfulness-training-escape-from-consumerism-88038.pdf>

- McLaren, Childs and Shrubsole (2013), Consumption and identity, a review of literature, Friends of the Earth, <http://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/consumption-identity-18135.pdf>

See also Big Ideas 3 (Sharing), 10 (Empathy), 15 (Business), 17 (Measuring Wellbeing) and 25 (Frugal Innovation)

### **How do politics and governance need to change to address global commons issues such as climate change?**

#### **9. *Recognise, designate and govern oceans, forests, climate, biodiversity, genetic resources and soils as shared common goods.***

Governments must recognize, designate and govern the oceans, forests, climate, biodiversity, genetic resources and soils as globally shared resources for the benefit of all. International governance must start from the mutually-beneficial interests of not over-exploiting these things, and build trust, institutions and standards on the basis of these shared interests. Digital interconnection offers new opportunities for participatory governance, management and policing of these global commons. The ‘tragedy’ of the commons is a self-fulfilling economic myth that must be replaced by collaboration – between countries and non-state actors - to realize nature’s bounty, and hand it on to future generations. We can learn here from examples as diverse as Wikipedia and European radio spectrum sharing.

#### **10. *Build the virtuous circle of empathy and community***

Collective social progress depends on increasing empathy between people, and with future generations and other species. Empathy has repeatedly triggered moral concern for oppressed social groups (such as slaves), whose moral inclusion was subsequently legally codified. Empathy is biologically rooted in humans yet is declining in rich societies as selfish individualism has been validated as an acceptable social norm. Investing in empathy education, community engagement, sharing platforms, and community empathy projects could help reverse this trend. It could generate common interest and rebuild communities able and interested to care for the collective commons on which we all depend. Projects such as human libraries and schools education programmes such as Roots of Empathy have potential in this area.

#### **11. *Introduce accountability and reconciliation to global (climate) politics***

International politics should learn from restorative justice. In restorative justice offenders have to face the real life consequences of their actions. Face to face meetings require them to empathise with the people they’ve wronged. To develop fair international agreements, we need to personalize them. Most proposals for cutting climate deadlock give most power to the biggest polluters. But the idea of ‘inclusive unilateralism’ would suggest a ‘Climate Council’ consisting of representatives of the most capable, the most affected and the most responsible countries. In such a small group, empathy will develop and perpetrators would find it difficult to block action while looking into the eyes of the affected. Sadly there are no examples we could find of this happening in practice (yet).

### **12. Enshrine enabling environmental rights in international law**

Governments have long committed to public involvement in environmental decision making. Principle 10 of the Rio declaration of 1992 advocated the public right to information, involvement in decision-making and access to justice. In some countries this has been introduced into law – albeit poorly enforced – through the Aarhus convention; and in others such as Ecuador, strong environmental rights are established constitutionally. Enshrining Principle 10 in international law would help deliver genuine participation. 175 countries now have instituted a ‘right to a healthy environment’ but in many this is a rhetorical commitment that a realizable right.

### **13. Protect Internet Freedoms**

States and businesses are capturing and controlling the Internet, curtailing citizens’ freedoms to communicate and campaign. Even with concerns about so-called ‘fake news’ and Facebook filtering of the news we read, the Internet remains a critical space for debate. It can be used to empower the disaffected and abused, expose violations against people and the environment, and enable people to join forces even when physically separated. Without the freedoms and anonymity to speak out, fewer people will take the risk. We need to save the Internet as an open commons free from interference. Brazil’s Bill of Internet Rights, establishing guidelines for freedom of expression, net neutrality and data privacy offers a positive example here.

### **14. Embrace digital technology to democratise global commons protection at all levels**

Democratic global governance – essential for environmental sustainability - is often stymied by countries and transnational corporations more interested in promoting their own interests above the common good. The use of collaborative and creative digital technologies offers the possibility of “open source global commons governance”. Such governance commons can supplement and could even supplant the existing market and state governance structures at all scales from local to global. Through this approach ordinary people, acting together globally via digital communications, can create spaces to deliberate, collaborate and share resources in order to protect the global commons. These are early days, but initiatives like the blockchain, and Loomio and other digital cooperatives illustrate the possibilities.

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See also Big Idea 16 (Oligopolies) 19 (Real Rights), and 26 (Innovation Democracy).

### **How can we focus economies and mainstream businesses on long-term sustainability?**

#### ***15. Give business a purpose: enable new social business models***

We value production and consumption where they meet social needs, not for the sake of profit regardless of environmental or social impacts. In today's economy profit-oriented businesses tend to squeeze out social purpose. Interventions are needed to enable and promote purpose-driven businesses, particularly cooperatives, social enterprises and sharing enterprises. New rules and tax measures to ensure access to finance, fair competition, and responsible practices must be developed so we can continue to benefit from the vibrancy and innovation of private enterprise, while delivering wellbeing for all stakeholders. The B-corporation model, establishing formal objectives and accountabilities for purpose-led businesses offers a good example of possible ways forward.

#### ***16. Make it a fair contest: Break-up over-sized and over-powerful businesses to enhance competition.***

Huge private businesses not only dominate markets to the detriment of consumers and purpose-based enterprises, they dominate governments and undermine fair taxation and social and environmental protections. While it is still possible, governments must intervene to break-up national, regional and global oligopolies, while simultaneously put in place social and environmental rules for remaining businesses. Anti-trust legislation which could be used to achieve this exists in many jurisdictions but regulators have been remarkably complacent. Breaking-up these corporate giants would also reduce the 'too-big-to-fail' risk which has led to massive injections of taxpayers' money to prop-up private enterprises in, for example, banking, and the US car industry. The European Commission is considering anti-trust action against Google but limited to addressing its dominant position in on-line search advertising and is also looking at Facebook for its data rules, but neither case looks at addressing the dominant positions these companies have in the market.

#### ***17. An economics fit for a finite planet: measure real wellbeing***

The current economic system relies on growth and rising consumption for stability, even though that growth is exacerbating the growth of inequality, and outstripping the rate at which our environment can regenerate or absorb pollutants. Measures to transform the future of work, support sharing, and enable new purpose-led business models will help. But to trigger the shift to prosperity without growth and reveal the unsustainable pyramid scheme at the heart of modern capitalism, we need alternative measures of wellbeing and economic progress to replace GDP. Indicators that value domestic labour, include environmental costs, and account for inequality expose the failure of rich countries to increase sustainable wellbeing in recent decades.

### **18. Transform the future of work with basic incomes and shorter working weeks**

Increasing automation appears to threaten unemployment and even more unequal distribution of satisfying paid work. Already today, those in work tend to complain of stress and overwork, whilst those out of work lack the income to live a satisfying life. Governments should introduce measures to enable ‘dis-employment’: such as shorter working hours to encourage redistribution of work. This would also enhance wellbeing by reducing work-related stress and enable male and female parents to dedicate more time to their children, and vice versa in a globally aging population. The introduction of basic incomes and fairer pay, coupled with socially progressive taxation can ensure socially useful work ranging from child- and elderly-care to art and popular education is not neglected. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 2017 Finland started a 2 year pilot basic income for the unemployed, even if they find work, and other pilots are set to be carried out elsewhere across the globe.

#### **Reading**

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See also Big Ideas 1 (Cities), 2 (Participation), 8 (Sustainable Marketing), 10 (Empathy), 12 (Environmental Rights), and 19 (Gender equality)

### **Can women’s empowerment transform the chances of environmental sustainability?**

#### **19. Equality of opportunity: make rights real with genuine recognition**

Despite much rhetoric, in the real world politics is still dominated by elites: typically wealthy, often white, and predominantly male. The barriers to participation faced by disadvantaged and oppressed groups, including women, are real and high. So making political rights real for all citizens has to begin with recognizing – and actively compensating for - the inequalities and obstacles arising from identity, gender, inheritance and education, amongst others. Equal recognition and rights demand targeted action and support as much as they need universal measures such as improved childcare or citizen’s incomes. We can learn from Scandinavian countries’ promotion of parental leave and rules on women’s representation in politics and business.

#### **20. Valuing Care: recognizing and rewarding “women’s work”**

Although care for our fellow humans is central to the human condition, in the modern world it is often invisible and given no or little financial value in economies (for example, care for children or the elderly). In most societies care is viewed as “women’s work”, as is taking care of the home or providing food. While a citizens’ income would help partly address this

injustice - as would measures and indicators of economic activity that account for this labour – deeper change is needed. Political, business and cultural leaders need to lead norm change through practical behaviors that demonstrate the intrinsic values of this work, for example by working shorter weeks and sharing caring duties. Management Today Magazine showcased 50 part-time business leaders in 2016, many of who spent part of the week on ‘caring duties’.

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See also Big Ideas 2 (Participation), 17 (Measuring Wellbeing) and 18 (Future of work).

## **How can we provide resilient, affordable, low-carbon energy for all?**

### ***21. De-energize, not just decarbonize***

Replacing polluting energy sources with carbon-free energy supplies is not alone enough to tackle climate change and enable global justice. In the rich world we must also ‘de-energize’ our lives, making energy do work only where it is really needed - in the home, at work and in travel – prioritizing new supply for those in most need. This means strategic interventions not only to reinvent behaviors and practices, but also to reconfigure social norms and technological infrastructures to enable high-quality low-energy living. The German Energiewende illustrates some of the practical and political steps that might be taken towards this transformative goal.

### ***22. Redesign transport policy – freedom to travel for all***

On average people are travelling more than ever, contributing significantly to climate change. Yet this average hides the fact that many people don’t travel much at all, for example because they can’t drive, public transport is limited or they don’t have the money or time. This creates massive global and national inequalities in the cultural and educational benefits transport brings. Transport decision makers must aim that everybody has the freedom to travel. This means redesigning transport for everybody, not just for car users, and addressing affordability issues. As demonstrated in leading continental cities like Copenhagen, planners must ensure that developments don’t require car use; provide quality cycling, walking and shared transport facilities; and where appropriate, constrain car use.

### Reading

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See also Big Ideas in 2 (Participation), 3 (Sharing), 6 (Identity and Consumption), 9 (Commons Governance), 25 (Frugal Innovation), and 29 (Divestment)

### **How can we foster innovation in technology and thinking to focus it on wellbeing without risking the environment?**

#### ***23. Redesign education for creativity: dump unnecessary testing***

In many countries an obsession with testing and assessing is stressing out teachers and students alike, and suppressing creativity in children. Yet with the challenges the world faces, more than ever we need creative thinkers and innovators emerging from our education systems. Governments, regulators and school governors should place more trust in teaching professionals instead of monitoring them to an extent where schools become exam factories. Finland demonstrates what is possible. Here schools are responsible for their own curriculum and student assessment: there are no state inspections; and now the system is being rebuilt to enable much more practical and applied learning, rather than a focus on abstract subjects.

#### ***24. Disrupt ethically: link funding for innovation to responsibility standards***

To deliver wellbeing for all requires disrupting and transforming the conventional markets and states that are harming the environment and failing many in society. Harnessing disruptive innovation to deliver socially useful new technologies and new behaviours can be done but needs ethical guidance. All public funding for innovation should be guided by and subject to ethical guidelines (or rules). Principles of ethical innovation should promote care and responsibility, openness and public involvement including in broad pathway choices and over 'licences to operate'. Such principles can also be promoted in the private sector, by linking them to tax incentives or reporting requirements for innovators and their funders (venture capital and others).

#### ***25. Pick winners: drive innovation towards a frugal economy***

The rejection of interventionist industrial policy by many western Governments has destabilized the global economy and undermined prospects for sustainability. Examples from China to Germany demonstrate that states can actively and successfully set big-picture goals for innovation and investment. The condition of the global environment demands that the mission of a modern entrepreneurial state should be to develop frugally. Design and innovation should be directed towards making better, more durable and more efficient products. Business models that enable us to share and repair should be supported. And frugal innovation rooted in low-impact creativity and improvisation, as seen in India's Jugaad innovation culture, should be championed.

#### ***26. Stimulate innovation democracy through grassroots participation***

Innovation has more capacity to transform society than governments and laws, yet it doesn't have the same democratic oversight. Democratic authorities should therefore support and promote 'grassroots innovation' which focuses on helping communities solve social and environmental problems in ways that strengthen local economies and grassroots democracy. Grassroots innovations such as open-source software, makerspaces, community energy and edible forests need supportive conditions, but not all the pressures and constraints that

come from conventional commercial innovation policy and funding. We can learn from examples such as India's National Innovation Foundation, which works with the Honey Bee Network of grassroots innovators.

## Reading

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See also Big Ideas 14 (digital governance), 15 (Business) and 27 (New Money).

## **How can we get money flowing to socially useful activities?**

### ***27. New money: from Bitcoin to the Bristol Pound***

Finance, controlled by the big banks and financial institutions, is not yet funding sustainable socially useful activities to the extent needed and is still pouring too much money into unsustainable activities. Local and alternative currencies such as the Bristol pound, or time dollars, and in different ways, cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin, offer important diversity. They can give value to socially useful work – notably care work, typically done by women, often unrecognised - and provide more patient investment funding where commercial models fail. Such currencies allow for communities and commoners to establish their own effective exchange rates and values. They can help people escape benefit traps and perverse tax incentives. Most alternative currencies tend to strongly benefit local economies whereas conventional spending which rapidly leaks money out of them. The Bristol Pound has 600 participating businesses, the equivalent of £700,000 in circulation and the former Mayor took all his wages in the currency.

### ***28. Rewild finance: Break up the banks***

Ecology suggests that resilience arises from diversity. Financial sector instability results from dominance by a few huge entities with massive financial and political power and scarily short-term investment horizons. Political leadership is needed to not only to regulate the finance sector - constraining the banks' power to create money – but also to break-up the over-sized financial institutions. Governments need to create new publicly-mandated banks to patiently invest in socially valuable activity, including by stimulating peer-to-peer finance and supporting alternative currencies. We can learn from the German finance system, which has preserved local and municipal banks, and weathered the crash of 2008 much better than the UK or US.

### ***29. Redouble and broaden financial divestment beyond fossil fuels***

The fossil fuel divestment movement has successfully secured shifts in investment on the twin basis that, firstly, such investments are increasingly risky in a climate-challenged world with governments increasingly committed to action on the problem, and secondly, that the

moral imperative is to avoid complicity in the harms caused. Climate change is not the only scientifically proven environmental harm that brings moral responsibilities. Public bodies and responsible financial institutions now need to go beyond divesting from fossil-fuels to deny finance to other unjust and unsustainable business practices. The University and student-led fossil-fuel divestment campaigns are a great example of how civil society can have leverage on where money flows in our societies.

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See also Big Ideas 2 (Participation), 15 (Business), 17 (Measuring Wellbeing), 24 (Innovation Finance), and 25 (Frugal Innovation).

### **How can we apply lessons from the past to the challenges of today?**

30. The challenges societies face can nearly always be described as unprecedented. But history can still provide important context, dispel myths and illuminate possibilities. Policy makers too often ignore history or succumb to seductive falsehoods. Policy makers need to invest the time and money needed to learn from history. Governments should be required to employ independent historians to inform their policy-making and their advice should be published. Businesses, campaigners and others should likewise reach out to historians to inform positions. The work of the History and Policy network in the UK – historians dedicated to help the policy community engage with historical lessons – shows the way forward.

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