

Eco-Social Contracts for the Polycrisis:

Participatory mechanisms, Green Deals and a new
architecture for just economic transformation

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The largest
movement
for green fair
economies

About this paper

We live in an age of “polycrisis,” a chaotic and unstable set of emergencies that feed off and amplify each other, defying reduction to a singular cause. Great power conflict, declining multilateralism, rising energy and food prices, forced displacement, and sovereign debt are accelerating – and being accelerated by – the current and longer-term risk trends of climate, biodiversity loss and rising inequality.

Policies and technologies to address these complex intertwining challenges exist. But despite their well-documented benefits, they also will be disruptive, involve difficult trade-offs between up-front costs and long-term pay-offs, and are sure to be contested by powerful beneficiaries of the status quo. Securing sustained public support for such policies is the political challenge of our lifetimes.

This paper reviews the ideas and processes that could answer such a challenge.

Green Economy Coalition

The Green Economy Coalition is the largest global movement for green and fair economies. Our members represent diverse constituencies but are united by our shared recognition that our economic system is no longer fit for purpose.



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Foreword

Kumi Naidoo is a human rights and climate justice activist, former International Executive Director of Greenpeace International and Secretary General of Amnesty International, and host of the Power People & Planet podcast. Mary Robinson is the former President of Ireland - the first woman to hold the office - and was the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights from 1997 to 2002. She now campaigns for action on climate change through her foundation and as the chair of The Elders.

Together they co-authored this foreword to our report.



Kumi Naidoo: People are getting increasingly anxious about the state of the world. They are feeling a great sense of exclusion, are getting angrier, and losing confidence with power. They are marching in ever larger numbers, they are mobilising in new ways, such as embracing the power of activism as well as developing local solutions and are being proactive in the face of inaction by those with responsibility and power to lead. Governments are failing in their primary responsibility: keeping people safe. The climate crisis, the nature crisis, the inequality crisis – this is a crisis of confidence, a crisis of governance. People want change and want greater clarity about the relationship between power and people.



Mary Robinson: I know. The polycrisis is escalating and putting new strains on society, people, and all forms of governance. But I believe democracy is still our greatest hope. Governments and politics can step up to this moment. In my own country, Ireland, new forms of public participation have changed the political landscape of what is acceptable and what is possible. These new democratic tools – such as citizen assemblies – can give progressive governments the mandate to transform economies and societies.



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Kumi: Following the 2008 global financial crisis and the COVID pandemic which exposed deep deficits in our economic and political systems, what we have seen is a response of “System Recovery, System Maintenance and System Protection. However, what we really need is System Innovation, System Redesign and System Transformation. However, such a large-scale change, while desperately needed cannot be imposed. People are losing or don’t have trust in their leaders. People must be heard, they must be partners, owners and the beneficiaries of this transformation. There is a need for a reset, and a need for renegotiated social contracts – that clearly expresses people’s priorities for change. There can be no effective and inclusive green new deal without a new social contract.



Mary: Can we agree to work together to give democracy new tools – and to invest our time to promote public participation in these new eco-social contracts –so they give the mandate to governments to do the right thing in this polycrisis? If we invest in democracy, we can turn the tide and not only come out the other side of this crisis but come out with societies and economies that are greener, fairer and with stronger democracies.



Kumi and Mary: This is what this paper is about. We commend it to all those who would lead us from Polycrisis.

- Kumi Naidoo & Mary Robinson

Summary

Context

By the middle of 2020 it was already apparent that the COVID-19 pandemic was a seismic shock which would reshape global society. At the height of the pandemic, in a virtual address delivered from a New York under lockdown, the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called for a ‘New Social Contract’ that would respect the rights, identities and freedoms of all. This new social contract, he argued, must “integrate employment, sustainable development and social protection, based on equal rights and opportunities for all.” His call sets the context for this paper.

In the three years since that speech, the interaction of complex geopolitical threats has led to the emergence of a “polycrisis,” a chaotic and unstable set of emergencies that feed off

and amplify each other, defying reduction to a singular cause. Great power conflict, declining multilateralism, rising energy and food prices, forced displacement, and sovereign debt are accelerating – and being accelerated by – the current and longer-term risk trends of climate, biodiversity loss and rising inequality.

Policies and technologies to address these complex intertwining challenges exist. But despite their well-documented benefits, they also will be disruptive, involve difficult trade-offs between up-front costs and long-term pay-offs, and are sure to be contested by powerful beneficiaries of the status quo. Securing sustained public support for such policies is the political challenge of our lifetimes.

This paper reviews the ideas and processes that could answer such a challenge.

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Content

We understand the social contract as a **framework for action**.

Social contracts emerge from claims for recognition, rights, freedoms, and security, and govern – often implicitly – the relations between the many and varied groups that make up society. They can be both horizontal, as relationships between and within communities, and vertical, as in the unwritten contract between citizens and the state.

In previous eras, social contracts allowed for enfranchised populations to claim security and agency from the powerful, but they also excluded many others from full citizenship – including women, colonised peoples, indigenous peoples, and people of colour. Any new social contract must transcend this crude exclusionary approach, and instead provide for equality of opportunity and access to power for all.

But to tackle our ecological and economic crises, it must also provide durable answers to climate change, biodiversity loss, and growing inequality. Building on indigenous worldviews that understand the intrinsic, non-negotiable value of the natural world can be a powerful support to this. To capture the radical nature of the change needed, we follow UNRISD in describing this approach as a new **eco-social contract**, fit for the challenges of the 21st Century.

In this paper, we propose that to be successful, an eco-social contract approach will need to operate at multiple scales, be inclusive of all communities, support rapid and sustained change, promote intergenerational justice, be open to the agency of nature, and seek to guarantee security and wellbeing for all in times of change.

We then examine several examples of policy approaches that aspire to some or all of these elements. These include:

- *green deal* offers to citizens, such as the US Inflation Reduction Act and the EU Green Deal;
- *social guarantees* to underpin welfare services and state support for citizens;
- *new economic approaches* to reduce over-consumption in rich countries while protecting security and wellbeing (including ‘degrowth’, *sufficiency economics* and *circular economy*);
- and proposals for *structural green transformation*, enabling majority world countries to bypass polluting growth models and move directly to green economy models fit for the future.

These approaches can contribute to building inclusive and just eco-social contracts in different contexts, mitigating trade-offs by maximising benefits such as poverty alleviation, job creation, reduced pollution and improved health. To enrich these approaches, the paper outlines a direction for building on the *social guarantees* approach by adding *ecological guarantees* that frame citizen rights within a healthy local environment, a stable climate and a flourishing natural world.

These approaches, while relatively novel, are all reasonably clear in terms of their theoretical foundations and practical implications. What is less clear, however, is how democratic polities will move to enact – and finance – such transformative agendas and sustain them in the face of disagreement and debate, both good faith and otherwise. The recent political history of states as culturally and politically diverse as Brazil, Chile, India, South Africa, the USA, and the United Kingdom show that the green transition is rapidly becoming both politically fraught and socially divisive.

"Recent political history shows that the green transition is rapidly becoming both politically fraught and socially divisive."



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Transformative policy requires deep and enduring popular support. To deliver this, our existing political practices and institutions are insufficient. Indeed, they are already beginning to break down in the face of current challenges. Strengthening our existing governance structures will require a range of new democratic, deliberative, and mandate-building mechanisms.

This paper examines a range of possible options, including citizen's assemblies, just transition approaches to economic and social change, participatory budgeting, and citizen dialogues. The appropriate deliberative approach will depend on context, and will need to assess questions of scale, administrative resources, popular mandate, and scope. It will also need to judge how best to engage different groups within society.

Getting eco-social policies out of the ivory tower and onto the statute book will not be easy. In any specific case, it will be necessary to understand how far the *available civic and political space* will allow for open deliberation of radical pathways of change, which *institutions* are best placed to animate a movement for a new social contract, and which *mechanisms* are likely to be most effective in building momentum and shifting investment.

Moving to action

Navigating this space will require flexibility, sensitivity, and insight: all attributes more easily achieved together than alone. To this end, the Green Economy Coalition will work closely with our members, partners and networks to develop and support new, sustainable, and just eco-social contracts.

There is a growing wave of deliberative democratic action on a global scale – providing ways of engaging citizens in determining how their economies and societies should be run – and the promise of rebuilding trust and legitimacy for policy and political action for a just and sustainable world economy and financial system. Our task is to amplify and energise that.

This is an urgent and compelling agenda. The scale of global challenges in this era of growing eco-social crisis also provides opportunities – for governments, civil society and business – to drive transformative and inclusive economic and social change. We call on all actors to engage to make this a reality. It will be the GEC's first and foremost priority for the coming decade; if you would like to engage with our work, [please do join us](#).

Introduction

In July 2020 UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appealed for a ‘New Social Contract and a New Global Deal’ that could create equal opportunities for all and respect the rights and freedoms of all. He argued that inequality defines our times, with multiple intersecting forms of disadvantage amplifying inequality across and between generations.¹ A common refrain of the late era of the COVID-19 Pandemic has been that the ‘social contract is broken’ – built on the sense that ordinary people are being asked to follow rules and pay taxes but are not in return receiving the security, opportunity and voice that they should as citizens. Economies and markets increasingly function beyond the reach of social governance and are widely seen as no longer fit for purpose, as they drive the world towards social and ecological collapse.

Times of crisis, conflict and contestation bring opportunities for ethical renewal and radically new forms of governance. On the three parallel tracks of climate, nature loss and inequality the world is heading for deep crisis, and the cracks in existing economic and social systems are clearly showing. Furthermore, the different axes of crisis are interacting and reinforcing one another so the whole is worse than the sum of the parts. The term ‘polycrisis’ has emerged to capture this phenomenon – a concept originating in concerns

with ecological degradation and its potential to disrupt human society at all levels.²

Change will need to be built at multiple scales and through interconnected processes. At the global level, the multilateral system is failing: failing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line with the Paris target of 1.5 degrees over pre-industrial levels; failing to reach the modest target of \$100 billion per year for global climate finance by 2020; failing to meet at the global level any of the 20 agreed UN global biodiversity targets for the decade up to 2020.³

The geopolitics of this moment are deeply challenging for co-ordinated multilateral action in all areas. Tensions between political power blocs are seriously disrupting coordinated action on climate; endemic conflict is becoming increasingly widespread, bringing extremes of poverty in its wake.^{4, 5} Change will need to be built where it can - where the will exists - and action from local levels will be necessary to shift the dial at national, regional, and global levels.

"Times of crisis, conflict and contestation bring opportunities for ethical renewal and radically new forms of governance."

¹ 18th July Secretary-General's Nelson Mandela Lecture "Tackling the Inequality Pandemic: A New Social Contract for a New Era." <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-07-18/secretary-generals-nelson-mandela-lecture-%E2%80%9Ctackling-the-inequality-pandemic-new-social-contract-for-new-era%E2%80%9D-delivered>

² Tooze (2022) traces the origins of the term to the French complexity theorist Edgar Morin, who in turn traced the phenomenon to the sense of over-arching global risk that entered public debate from the growing consciousness of environmental danger in the 1970s. A key event in this history was the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment and its influential report *Only One Earth* (Ward and Dubois, 1972)

³ Reuters Explainer December 9 2022 "Why did past targets to protect nature fail over the last decade" <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/why-did-past-targets-protect-nature-fail-over-last-decade-2022-12-09/#:~:text=The%20most%20notable%20Aichi%20objective,the%20world%20ultimately%20fell%20short>.

⁴ Brown, O 2023 <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/03/how-russias-war-ukraine-threatening-climate-security> "..climate action is getting tangled in a politicized stand-off between the West and Russia, which is putting climate action on the backburner according to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres."

⁵ Corral et al (2020) note that the number of people living in proximity to conflict has nearly doubled worldwide since 2007.



Photo: Pawel Janiak via Unsplash

The purpose of this paper is to *lay a foundation for action to promote new eco-social contracts fit for the era of the polycrisis*. It is aimed at a diverse audience including policy, activist, and research communities.

The paper builds on the Green Economy Coalition's track record of engagement on green economy transformation at three levels:

- *Statement pieces* which define foundational elements of green economy thinking and action: GEC (2019) laid out a framework for understanding principles, priorities, and pathways for inclusive green economies; The *Green Economy Tracker* is an interactive online tool which benchmarks the progress different countries are making towards green and fair economies and provides a comprehensive taxonomy for understanding green economy policy and governance.⁶
- *GEC's extensive networks and partnerships* are well placed to provide a basis for building social contract processes at local, national, and global

levels.⁷ In recent years a network of national hubs has provided a base for understanding and promoting social and policy change.⁸

- *GEC's focus on enabling radical new models for social and economic policy* and bottom-up action. Mohamed (2020) outlines the lessons from the experience of seven national or regional dialogue processes aimed at promoting inclusive green transitions.

The rest of this paper will outline (section by section): the rationale for focusing on the social contract at this moment; the history and contemporary framing of the concept of the social contract; the policy content of social contracts in an era of eco-social crisis; mechanisms for animating relevant debates in different contexts; the politics of movement building and change. We will conclude by outlining broad implications arising from the analysis for a range of policy and civil society actors, as well as for the Green Economy Coalition and its future programme of work.

⁶ <https://greeneconomytracker.org/>

⁷ <https://www.greeneconomycoalition.org/>

⁸ <https://www.greeneconomycoalition.org/national-hubs#senegal>

Rationale – Why Focus on the Social Contract Now?

Social contracts are the base of the normative and institutional fabric of societies. They underlie the rights and responsibilities of citizens, what citizens can expect from each other, and from governments and public institutions. They tend to be re-negotiated at times of great turbulence, social challenge, and change. An example is the widespread re-ordering of industrial societies' welfare regimes in the aftermath of the Second World War to provide new entitlements to health care, further education, and social protection, alongside the rights to universal primary education that were won in an earlier era.

"Social contracts reflect their time and context, encoding elements of power and domination on axes such as race, gender, class, or indigeneity."

Over the past half-century, many elements of the social contract in the industrialised societies of the minority world have been undermined or altered. This hollowing out of the citizen-state relationship has been driven by shifts towards private provision of social services, by fiscal austerity, and the undermining of the

infrastructure of community⁹ – the loss of libraries, safe play spaces for children and activity clubs for young people, and access to the natural world. This has been accompanied by an erosion of trust in government and leaders, revealed in data from across the industrialised world.¹⁰

At the heart of the social contract is the duty of the state to protect citizens from personal harm or harm to their livelihoods. This is what brings sharply into focus the failure of states worldwide to get to grips with the massive risks of the climate crisis,¹¹ and the alarming lack of momentum in response to the global ecological crisis in all its dimensions.

Social contracts reflect their time and context. They can reflect bargains that either exclude the powerless or include them on unfavourable terms, encoding elements of power and domination on axes such as race, gender, class, or indigeneity.¹² They can also be founded on economic arrangements that are fundamentally unsustainable in ecological terms. It is thus important to recognise that the social contract challenge of our era is not to repair or resurrect past arrangements, but to form radically new visions for eco-social contracts capable of meeting the challenges of the polycrisis.¹³

⁹ Hertz 2020

¹⁰ IPPR "Trust in politicians at lowest on record" <https://www.ippr.org/news-and-media/press-releases/revealed-trust-in-politicians-at-lowest-level-on-record/>; Dalton, R.J. 2005

¹¹ Willis 2020

¹² Mills, C.W., 2017. Philosophy and the Racial Contract. *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race*, pp.65-76.

¹³ See UNRISD 2021

Box 1: The nature of the challenge – rising inequality, declining democracy, the climate crisis and the assault on the natural world

Inequality: The 2022 World Inequality Report found that the top 10% of the world's population hold 76% of global wealth, while the bottom 50% hold 2% (Chancel et al 2022). Barrett et al (2022) found that the COVID19 pandemic provoked a sharp rise in global income inequality. Sixty percent of all households across the world reported income losses during the first two years of the COVID-19 period, while for lower-income commodity-exporting countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, over 70% reported income losses (World Bank, 2022a). Throughout 2020, those households across the world in the lowest three deciles lost the most household income. Meanwhile there has been a rapid increase in dollar billionaires across the world (ongoing before the pandemic but accelerated by it), from 470 in 2000 to 2,755 in 2021, while the combined wealth of this cohort has risen from US\$0.9 trillion to US\$13.1 trillion over the same period.

Inequality matters beyond basic norms of justice and fairness – lower inequality (in terms of lower concentrations of income at the top and bottom of the distribution) correlates with higher human development (Castells-Quintana et al 2022). In their classic study *The Spirit Level* Wilson and Pickett (2009) found that – for higher income countries – lower levels of inequality correlate strongly with higher human wellbeing on multiple dimensions – including health, human capital, and social relationships.

Democracy under threat: According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's measure of democracy, in 2021 less than half (45.7%) of the world's population live in a democracy of some sort, a significant decline from 2020 (49.4%). The 2021 result followed a deterioration in the first year of the pandemic in 2020, when the global average score sank as a result largely—but not solely—of government-imposed restrictions on individual freedoms and civil liberties that occurred across the globe in response to the public health emergency (EIU 2021). Freedom House's annual stocktake noted that the year to 2023 marked the 17th consecutive year of decline. However, the gap between the number of countries that registered overall improvements in political rights and civil liberties and those that registered overall declines for 2022 was the narrowest it has ever been through the 17 years of global deterioration. Thirty-four countries made improvements, and the tally of countries with declines, at 35, was the smallest FH has recorded since the negative pattern began.

Civics (2022) track continuing deterioration is civic space at a global scale finding that civil society is under threat in 117 of 197 countries and territories monitored – up from 111 in 2018. However, trends in freedom and civic space are dynamic and global metrics do not always capture the sophisticated responses of civil society to changing conditions – the nature of civic space may be shifting, rather than experiencing a relentless secular decline (Sharp et al 2023).

The climate crisis: The headline findings of IPCC AR6, the flagship climate science report published in 2023, are depressingly familiar. The world is already at 1.1C above pre-industrial levels, and global warming of 1.5°C and 2°C will be exceeded during the 21st century unless deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades (IPCC 2023). Meanwhile, impacts on human society and the natural world are more extreme at the current level of warming than had been expected, say, ten years ago. The IPCC Special Report on 1.5 degrees (2018) outlined clearly the greatly increased damage that would occur to human society and natural systems at the 2°C benchmark against 1.5. Meanwhile, increasingly the models which indicate feasible pathways to keeping planetary warming at 1.5°C by the end of the current century rely on incredibly fast enhancements of both the technology and deployment of methods for removing greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere. The question remains why reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the present through the rapid phase out of fossil fuels is making such poor progress, despite the availability and declining cost of sustainable energy technologies, and the increasing costs of climate damages.

The assault on the natural world: Research suggests that the world is losing thousands of species per year and is seeing a rate of loss 100-1,000 times greater than the background rate (i.e., what the rate would be without human intervention). The IPBES (2019) overview of global biodiversity found that around one million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction, many within decades – more than ever in human history. The implications of biodiversity loss have been highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the precise origins of the pandemic may never be known there is no doubt that loss of biodiversity – and particularly loss and degradation of tropical forests – played a significant role in creating the context. Future pandemic risk is unquestionably heightened by biodiversity loss because it increases the potential channels for human contact with many pathogens capable of causing severe damage to human society. The erosion of nature at local scales almost always has a disproportionate impact on the livelihoods of the poorest people who tend to be more dependent on open access or commonly held natural resources.



Photo: Joshua Watson via Unsplash

The confluence of the challenges outlined in Box 1 implies a need for rapid transformational change that will restructure economy and society to a considerable degree. Without this change, individual countries will not position themselves for the green economy of the future and will enter a spiral of decline. With it, multiple co-benefits can be achieved, including green prosperity, security, and improved equity and wellbeing. This also implies need for a new developmental model – one that guarantees respect for planetary boundaries, biodiversity, and nature, and reinforces social justice and rights.¹⁴

But the transition will threaten powerful vested interests, demand behaviour change, and produce losers as well as winners. A transition

of this scale cannot be imposed; broad societal support will be needed, built through processes of deliberation and dialogue.¹⁵ To enable transformational change on the scale required support will be needed from communities *impacted* by the change, from communities historically *marginalised and lacking voice* – as well as from a broad range of groups across society – including the wealthy and powerful. A broad-based process of deliberation and dialogue will be needed to build the mandate, the alliances and the strategies needed to drive rapid and deep green economic transformation. Or, to put it another way, to build the foundation for new eco-social contracts fit for the era of the polycrisis.

¹⁴ Rawoth (2017) provides a strong outline for the necessary change in economic theory and practice.

¹⁵ See Mohamed (2023 forthcoming)

Conceptual History and Contemporary Approaches

Commonalities, differences, and origins

The notion of the social contract – as it emerged from Enlightenment thought through the work of philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke, Hume, and Rousseau – can be either conservative or radical. It can also be either metaphorical in character, or a deeply practical tool of politics and social mobilisation. In the latter sense it can be seen as a language through which citizens make claims for ‘liberty and justice’ – as argued by Barker (1947) in an overview of conceptual origins in European social and political thought.¹⁶ Barker outlines a distinction within the theory of the social contract between ‘the contract of society’ (the horizontal dimension) and the ‘contract of government’ (the vertical dimension). The bargain around the social legitimacy of governance and power frames most modern debates about the social contract. But the strength of the horizontal social contract underpins progressive change. Without solidarity and common purpose at the level of citizens, claims on the powerful are unlikely to be effective.

A division within social contract theory can be identified between formulations which envisage rational individuals pursuing self-interest through a social contract (such as Hobbes and Locke), and philosophers such as Kant and, latterly Rawls, who see the key agreement as being on *principles of justice* which are universally accepted within a given society.¹⁷ The former ‘contractarian’ view can also be seen as creating

a platform for powerful or privileged segments of the population to dominate or exclude others, reflecting unequal power relations in the society where the social contract is formed.

In a background paper for a discussion on Indigenous Peoples and the social contract, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples noted: “In many countries, where indigenous peoples were driven from their lands, their cultures and languages denigrated and their people marginalized from political and economic activities, they were never included in the social contract to begin with. The social contract was made among the dominant populations.”¹⁸ Mills (2017) argues that “the ‘contract’ device is able to capture the idea of people actively creating, or going along with the creation and perpetuation of, sociopolitical systems that are inclusive (the mainstream contract) or exclusionary (the domination contract)” and can therefore be both descriptive and explanatory in character.

Paradoxically, allowing for the possibility that a given ‘social contract’ can encode domination also allows for the recognition that the process of their re-negotiation can drive transformational changes to power structures that challenge and remove that same domination as well. A defining characteristic of the notion of the social contract is that it can embody diverse claims for rights and justice. An emerging literature argues for anti-racist and gender-just, feminist approaches for social contract theory. Ampofo-Ante and Donald (2022) argue for using the universalist framing of

¹⁶ Barker emphasises the activist character and origins of the theory of the social contract – noting it “had also been a factor in the process of historic causation – a factor making for freedom, whether it was applied...to defend the cause of religious liberty, or employed, as it was by English Whigs in 1688 and afterwards, to buttress the cause of civil liberty.”

¹⁷ Cudd and Eftekhari (2021)

¹⁸ UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples (2021)



Photo: Braden Barwich via Unsplash

human rights – particularly as embodied in the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) treaty on women’s rights – as a basis for radical change in the functioning of the economy.

Under this approach the purpose of the economy is seen primarily through the need to fulfil rights for all – especially marginalised or disempowered groups, including women. Phillips (2022) draws on the history of civil rights struggles in the US in the 60s, independence movements in Africa in the 50s, and labour rights struggles in Scandinavia early in the 20th century, to show that bottom up pressure from the marginalised and down-trodden has been central to lasting change in the social arrangements and balance of rights and obligations across societies that we refer to as the social contract.

Communitarian worldviews

Mohamed and Huntjens (2023) argue for a movement towards conceptualising eco-social contracts in ways that fundamentally restructure how humanity views its relationship with nature, drawing on indigenous cosmologies and worldviews, and citing the example of the incorporation of rights for nature in the constitution of Ecuador. The case for a new social contract, fully inclusive of indigenous peoples, made in UNPFIP (2021) raises clearly the question of how communitarian indigenous

cosmologies which do not recognise absolute distinctions between the social/human and natural domains can be incorporated into new and transformed eco-social contracts. The southern African concept of *Ubuntu*, for example, includes the spirit world, inanimate objects, and ancestors – as well as the society of living humans. Desai (2022) notes that the historic experience of using *Ubuntu* as a language of political identity has not been positive but argues it can still be used as a means for progressive mobilisation, with a variety of actors drawing upon such traditions of thought to call people to action for social justice in the present. Desai also notes that indigenous concepts such as *Sumak Kawsay* from Ecuador can be de-territorialised and turned into technocratic framings (in this case ‘buen vivir’) that risk losing the specificities of the local struggles from which they emerge.

The first step on the path to a fully inclusive eco-social contract in any given sociopolitical context is to recognise that the basic understanding of the world of actors, agency, rights, duties and obligations has to incorporate diverse worldviews. From an ecological perspective, stepping outside of the human-centred worldview of European social contract theory creates exciting possibilities for change, already visible in practical examples such as the 2008 Constitution of Ecuador, with its recognition of legally enforceable rights for nature.¹⁹

¹⁹ <https://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/english08.html>

The demands of the moment

Finally, to be effective, any new eco-social contract will have to contend with the extraordinary pressures and challenges of the coming decades. The trends outlined in this paper (climate change, democratic decline, nature loss and rising inequality) are reflected in multiple crises that are impacting different geographies in different ways. In the wake of the pandemic, debt burdens have risen in many countries and now threaten many governments' ability to deliver the security, services and support that comprise the state's part of the social contract bargain.

According to the World Bank in 2022 58 percent of the world's poorest countries were in debt distress or at high risk of it.²⁰ The conditions that gave rise to the COVID-19 virus were in large part created by the loss of forest biodiversity and the heightened risk of zoonotic transmission of viruses that trend created (Lawler et al 2021). Conflict, fragility, and instability are rising in many parts of the world, accompanied by disturbing trends born of growing geopolitical competition, including the rapid internationalisation of internal conflicts. Across the Sahel belt of Africa there are a multitude of simmering or open conflicts, often driven or exacerbated by illicit markets in arms, drugs, contraband, people, and minerals. The climate crisis, even if never the proximate cause of any specific conflict, certainly amplifies risks and provokes further instability.²¹

Multiple shocks at local, national, regional and even global levels have given rise to the term 'polycrisis' to capture a phenomenon visible at different scales, where multiple shocks occur simultaneously or in sequence – and the whole is

worse than the sum of the parts because of multiple complex interconnections. All this has produced a remarkable result. For the first time ever, in 2020 and 2021 the global Human Development Index (HDI) value declined for two years straight (UNDP 2022).

To respond to the range of challenges, eco-social contract proposals need to operate at multiple scales. For this to produce durable change there needs to be articulation between the different levels – local, national, and transnational.

At the global scale a social contract between nations underpins effective multilateral governance which is fundamental for tackling global challenges such as the climate crisis. The failures of rich countries to pitch in with vaccines and support during the COVID-19 pandemic has undermined trust, and through that, the potential for effective action in the face of common challenges globally.

The end of the era of convergence – where a large cohort of poorer countries made remarkable strides towards the level of prosperity of richer countries – likewise threatens to end a sense of buy-in into global institutions and global processes (Barrett et al 2022). Without a commitment to a shared and inclusive approach at global scale, an era of increasing economic and political competition between 'great powers' could result in less powerful countries being unable to position themselves at the forefront of green economic transformation as richer countries lock down control of key minerals, markets, knowledge, and technologies.²²

The national scale is key to effective articulation both upwards and downwards, and effective building of momentum towards a strong and sustainable social contract at all levels. Without the delegation of meaningful power and

²⁰ Estevao and Essl 2022

²¹ Mia 2022

²² Toprani and Bowlus 2021 argue that a scenario of increasing competition (particularly between the US and China) would hamper global green transformation and "lest we all lose... the world must adopt a cooperative and interdependent approach..." Hopkins and Goswami (2023) Outline how competitive dynamics (including carbon border adjustment mechanisms) run the risk of locking poor countries out of pathways to build sustainable prosperity in the global energy transition.

resources to local authorities, 'vertical' social contracts at local scale are difficult to achieve. Without national government actors committed to solidarity and collective action in the face of global challenges, multilateral systems will not function. But power flows between the levels in complex and changing ways. IMF programs since the 1980s have frequently restricted the capacity of countries to provide public services, breaking the basis of the social contract at independence in the many nations born of anti-colonial struggles in the second half of the 20th Century.

The global ecological crisis presents specific demands for the evolution of eco-social contracts at all levels. Various approaches have emerged to drive change, including proposals for 'just transition' and 'green deals'. Their relevance for the negotiation of new social contracts is discussed below – along with consideration of methodologies for citizen engagement to drive social change, such as climate assemblies.

In this section we have reviewed the history of the notion of the social contract and the demands posed by the contemporary context of ecological and social stress. Building on this we propose that an eco-social contract approach which meets the demands of the moment for just green economic transformation will need to:

- *Operate at multiple scales and frame a shared global approach to green transformation which encourages co-operation and embodies solidarity with all.*
 - *Include all communities, social groups, cultures and worldviews in the project of renewing the social contract.*
 - *Engage multiple publics (impacted, marginalised, representative) in the project of building new social contracts at all scales.*
 - *Take multiple forms and find different expression in varying cultural contexts.*
 - *Be open to worldviews that ascribe agency to nature to enrich the eco-social character of the social contract.*
- *Emergence from democratic location-based processes.*
 - *Seek to guarantee security and wellbeing for all in times of change.*
 - *Be a vehicle for rapid transformative change to confront the climate crisis.*
 - *Integrate action on ecological and social imperatives.*
 - *Promote intergenerational justice and include generations yet unborn.*



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The Policy Landscape – Opportunities for Just Transformation of Economies and Societies

Effective eco-social contract models have one key factor that will unite them. *The legitimacy of power and authority – in the ‘vertical’ social contract – has to be built on meaningful action to confront inequality and ecological collapse.* The nature of this requirement changes at different scales and will adapt to different political, social, and cultural contexts. It will always require engagement from different social groups, including the powerful, as well as socially marginalised groups, and those likely to be impacted negatively by the green transition. In this section we give a brief overview of some of the main approaches for transformative economic and social change, including green deals, ecological guarantees, de-growth and others; consider the implications of different country contexts; and reflect on trans-national and global dimensions.

Green Deal

‘Green Deal’ proposals have emerged as a prominent language for talking about transformative economic, social, and political change in the era of the climate crisis – particularly in relatively wealthy industrialised countries.²³ There is considerable variation in content, but they all aim at an integrated programme of social, economic, and environmental measures. While recognising the social costs that stem from switching from a

fossil fuel-based to a renewables-based economy, all Green Deal plans emphasise the opportunities for green jobs and for secure, long-term, socially valued employment, and propose measures to ensure a healthy and sustainable local environment.

The ‘Green New Deal’ proposal put to the US Congress in February 2019 by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Ed Markey had a major influence globally in shaping visions for change.²⁴ It was a radical vision intended to simultaneously address climate change through deep and rapid cuts in emissions; promote justice and equity through addressing ‘historic oppression’ of a range of specified marginalised groups; create millions of high-quality jobs; invest in industry and infrastructure for a sustainable future; and provide a range of public goods including clean air and water, access to nature, healthy food, and a sustainable environment. At its heart was, famously, a commitment to guarantee “a job with a family sustaining wage, adequate family and medical leave, paid vacations, and retirement security to all people of the United States”.

The ‘Build Back Better’ package that emerged as a core part of the policy platform for the incoming Biden administration in 2020 retained much of the ambition of the Ocasio-Cortez/ Markey proposal, with a proposed \$3.5 trillion spending commitment, and proposals to

²³ Pettifor (2019) provides an account of the genesis of ‘Green New Deal’ proposals in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

²⁴ <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/5729033/Green-New-Deal-FINAL.pdf>

introduce universal childcare and publicly supported dental care. The ‘Inflation Reduction Act’ eventually passed after extended negotiations in the Senate was much reduced in scope. The ‘job guarantee’ proposal – emblematic of the ‘green deal’ spirit of leveraging green transformation to promote social justice and provide secure lives for all – was one element that fell by the wayside early on.

The IRA may nonetheless have a transformative impact on climate action in the US. Most of its key provisions to support the energy transition take the form of uncapped tax credits for private energy production and consumer goods such as electric vehicles and appliances. Because they are uncapped, the total green stimulus the IRA will inject into the US economy can only be estimated. The initial estimate from the Congressional Budget office gave rise to a widely cited figure of £374 billion. Recent analysis suggests demand for those tax credits is likely to push the IRA’s total spending to more than \$800 billion.²⁵

The IRA represents a significant political achievement in a tough political environment and has had an impact on green industrial policy at the global scale. It has not been welcomed everywhere, however, despite the boost it will provide to green transition spending and innovation. The geo-politics are controversial due to the incentives to favour US-based manufacturing, and the stripping out of most of the social spending unquestionably shifted its character.²⁶

Perhaps the most developed green deal programme is the EU Green Deal, approved in 2020 (Gough 2021). The vision includes a net-zero Europe by 2050, tackling biodiversity loss, a significant investment in the circular economy, ambitious plans for new green jobs, specific plans for housing, transport, agriculture and land,



Photo: Munshots via Unsplash

funds for vulnerable regions, and much more. The Green Deal commits the EU to a ‘climate friendly’ investment plan of 1 trillion euros over ten years. In addition, the European Central Bank will provide for another 2.6 trillion euros over the next decade via an asset purchase programme. The programmatic side of the European Green Deal also acknowledged the need for societal engagement, just transition, and making the connection to global policy processes through the G7, G20 and the UNFCCC (Greenfield 2020).

²⁵ Robinson Meyer (2022) “The Climate Economy Is About to Explode” *The Atlantic*, October 5 2022.

²⁶ For example, President Macron of France was reported as describing the IRA as ‘super aggressive’ in a meeting with US lawmakers ([Reuters December 1st 2022](#)).



Photo: Josh Appel via Unsplash

Some green deal initiatives with a broader base outside of OECD countries are beginning to gain traction as well. At municipal level C40 Cities' 'Global Green New Deal Pilot Implementation Initiative' is supporting city-level activities in Accra, Cape Town, Durban, Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg, Tshwane, amongst others.²⁷ The Global Alliance for a Green New Deal brings together current and former legislators from Costa Rica, Brazil, Tanzania, Ecuador, Nigeria, Argentina, Colombia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Rwanda, Philippines, Bangladesh, Gabon, and across the globe with the intention of advancing proposals for green deals.²⁸

The relative absence of 'green deal' approaches in the majority world is in one sense surprising, but also readily explicable by the competing

narratives for that terrain. Post-COVID recovery and economic stimulus packages contained green as well as social and elements, drawing from the well of green deal thinking emerging in the late 2010s. The narrative of 'eco-civilisation' and cycles of Five Year Plans have been more than sufficient for China to seize a march in green economic leadership.²⁹ The roll out of Just Energy Transition Partnerships in countries such as South Africa³⁰ demonstrates – at least in intent – some of the spirit of Green Deal thinking in terms of seeking to underpin green transition at the sector level with measures to support social justice.

²⁷ <https://www.c40.org/what-we-do/raising-climate-ambition/inclusive-thriving-cities/global-green-new-deal-pilot-implementation-initiative/>

²⁸ <https://www.globalgreennewdeal.org/about>

²⁹ See Buckley (2021)

³⁰ See CIF (2020)

‘Green deal’ approaches have had huge impact and significantly altered the terms of the debate about what is possible. A transformative policy agenda should not survey the green deal terrain uncritically or pretend the fuzzy edges of the concept are sharply defined. There is a great deal of divergence amongst governments in the level of reliance on public investment, blended and ‘de-risked’ finance, or a private-first approach to green transformation – not to mention integration of social programmes as part of a comprehensive, systemic ‘deal’. But ambitious deals are beginning to emerge from key economic blocs. The EU example illustrates the potential of ‘Green Deal’ policy offers to shift norms and practices in the social contract at trans-national scale, if authorities back words with action and resources.

Social and ecological guarantees

Another concept with demonstrated potential in strengthening social contract processes is the notion of social guarantees. The key examples of this have come from middle income countries.

A guarantees model was applied to the health sector in Chile from 2005 onwards in an attempt to set minimum standards for access and quality between segments of the population dependent on the public insurer (covering three-fourths of the population, including the indigent and low- and middle-income citizens, and providing health services mostly through public providers) and several for-profit private insurers that cover better-off populations and provide services almost exclusively in the private sector. A World Bank study in 2013 concluded that the reforms (known as AUGÉ, meaning Universal Access with Explicit Guarantees) had improved access to health services for all, including the poor, and that

this phenomenon has not only been observed for AUGÉ services, but also for other health services not included in the AUGÉ benefits package.³¹

In an overview of the experience of rights-based social policy in a range of countries, Gacitua-Mario et al (2009) show how social guarantees can be calibrated to match fiscal and institutional conditions in any country context and cover entitlements in relation to five dimensions: access, quality, financial protection, continuous revision and participation and redress. They also highlight the potential role of a social guarantees approach in renewing the social contract at a whole-of-society scale:

“The foundation of contemporary understanding of the link between social policy and the political realm is T.H. Marshall’s insight that effective citizenship requires not only a political voice and a legally protected status, but also a certain level of socio-economic security.... The essence of a social guarantees approach is to take abstract notions of rights and convert them into concrete standards and entitlements against which citizens may make claims.... The process of building and negotiating consensus between different social and political groups on the details of the guarantees can be used to rebuild or strengthen elements of the social contract.”

Gough (2022) argues for combining ‘a social guarantee’ with Green Deal plans to ensure necessary levels of security for citizens in an era when climate hazards will be increasing along with economic turbulence. Expanded public provision of essential goods through a commitment to universal provision of basic services is seen as an essential complement to Green Deal programmes of social and economic transformation.

³¹ Bitran (2013)

Beyond service delivery there is an extensive experience of using guarantees as a rights-based approach to support to livelihoods – with the most important global example being the world’s largest social protection programme, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in India,³² at the core of which is the legal guarantee of a minimum number of days of paid employment (usually 100) per worker who needs it per year. Since its inception in the state of Maharashtra, the employment guarantee approach has been seen as having the potential to drive pro-poor social mobilisation, and through the public guarantee of employment strengthen the social contract between citizen and state.³³ It is also an approach which has proved suitable for adapting to provide support to communities in the face of the multiple threats brought by the climate crisis (Bharadwaj 2021, Kaur et al 2019). The experience of MGNREGS is also highlighted in Norton et al (2020) as an example of the potential of paid employment schemes to support ecosystem stewardship, illustrating the extensive possibilities of using social policy instruments to support ecological objectives.³⁴

To strengthen the place of biodiversity and nature conservation within a ‘guarantees’ framework, we propose that ‘ecological guarantees’ be added to this approach. This would provide clear and accountable limits to the erosion of local ecosystems and biodiversity at whatever scale of eco-social contract under discussion. The content of this could be in large part derived from the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) adopted by the parties to the CBD in December 2022.³⁵ The development of any specific framework of social and ecological guarantees would need to take place in the local political context and with extensive citizen engagement. We suggest the

following elements (for illustrative purposes) drawn from the GBF, as likely to have salience in many instances:

- Ensure that the rights, knowledge, including traditional knowledge associated with biodiversity, innovations, worldviews, values and practices of indigenous peoples and local communities are respected, and documented and preserved with their free, prior and informed consent. (Para 7a)
- Ensure that all areas are under participatory, integrated and biodiversity inclusive spatial planning and/or effective management processes addressing land- and sea-use change, to bring the loss of areas of high biodiversity importance, including ecosystems of high ecological integrity, to zero by [date], while respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities. (Target 1, adapted)
- Ensure that by [date] at least 30% of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and marine and coastal ecosystems are under effective restoration, in order to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, ecological integrity and connectivity. (Target 2, adapted – may not be applicable at less than national/state level)
- Ensure that the management and use of wild species are sustainable, thereby providing social, economic and environmental benefits for people, especially those in vulnerable situations and those most dependent on biodiversity, including through sustainable biodiversity-based activities, products and services that enhance biodiversity, and protecting and encouraging customary sustainable use by indigenous peoples and local communities. (Target 9)

³² https://nrega.nic.in/MGNREGA_new/Nrega_home.aspx

³³ See, for example Joshi and Moore (2000), Norton (2011)

³⁴ GEC highlights the ‘Working for Water’ scheme in South Africa as another example of targeted employment creation for local ecosystem management: <https://www.greeneconomycoalition.org/news-and-resources/working-for-water-in-south-africa>

³⁵ <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-04-en.pdf>



Photo: Mika Baumeister via Unsplash

- Ensure that people are encouraged and enabled to make sustainable consumption choices, including by establishing supportive policy, legislative or regulatory frameworks, improving education and access to relevant and accurate information and alternatives, and by 2030, reduce the global footprint of consumption in an equitable manner, including through halving global food waste, significantly reducing overconsumption and substantially reducing waste generation, in order for all people to live well in harmony with Mother Earth. (Target 16).

Beyond the core script of the GBF, providing guarantees for local populations of access to nature for leisure and wellbeing purposes would be important to consider, to strengthen the links to citizen rights, and promote non-commoditised ways of enhancing the lives of all. A sustainable commitment to protecting nature at local scale requires secure rights to enjoy the spiritual and emotional benefits of connection to the natural world. Ecological guarantees could also be mobilised to support circular economy practices

through instituting a ‘right to repair’ into consumer regulations.³⁶

There is no body of practical experience for operationalising ecological guarantees (in the sense we use the term here), and in that sense the proposal differs considerably from the extensive experience with social guarantees and employment guarantees. It is therefore at this point proposed in this paper as an area for development and practical experimentation.

An approach to operationalising ecological guarantees needs to build on the vital role played by indigenous peoples in ecosystem stewardship and the preservation of biodiversity. IPBES (2019a 2019b) provides the most authoritative overview of the planetary state of biodiversity. The report notes that biodiversity is declining less rapidly in indigenous peoples’ lands than elsewhere but is nonetheless declining as is knowledge of how to protect it. An ecological guarantees approach could be used to provide protection for indigenous peoples’ knowledge, bio-cultural heritage, and rights in their territories.³⁷

³⁶ Chris Hopkins, personal communication

³⁷ See Swiderska et al (2022)

De-growth, circular economy and ‘sufficiency’ approaches

The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (2023) states that the world will exceed 1.5°C in the course of this century, even under the most stringent policy scenarios. We also know from the IPCC Special Report on 1.5 Degrees (2018) that the implications of this will be serious for human societies and natural systems everywhere. In 2020 Anderson et al laid out the scale of the challenge. Even the best-performing rich industrialised countries will need to double their rate of reduction of greenhouse gases with immediate effect to be anywhere near the 1.5°C pathway. That implies reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 10% a year throughout the current decade in countries like the UK and Sweden. It is very difficult to envisage that level of mitigation performance without a reduction in consumption levels. A rapid reduction in rich-country consumption would certainly help with the crisis of nature and biodiversity loss as well.

This has led to an intellectual movement known by the shorthand of ‘degrowth’, defined by Hickel (2020) as a ‘planned downscaling of energy and resource use to bring the economy back into balance with the living world in a safe, just and equitable way’. Gough (2021) characterises the framing necessary to achieve this as ‘egalitarian sufficiency’. This implies a social contract including not just guarantees (minima) but ‘maxima’ too – socially agreed and politically negotiated limits to wealth and consumption.³⁸ The political economy and the economics of this shift will be extremely challenging, nationally, and internationally. It is, however, difficult to envisage adequate

progress being made in terms of the speed and urgency of emissions reductions without the question of limits to over-consumption coming into consideration at some point in the social contracts of rich, industrialised societies.

The concept of the circular economy provides important action principles for curbing over-consumption. Suarez-Eiroa et al (2019) provide an overview of the debate, observing that – although the concept is not new - the scientific literature is scarce and both conceptual discussions and practical strategies for implementation are still emerging. They define the circular economy as follows: ‘*Circular economy is a regenerative production-consumption system that aims to maintain extraction rates of resources and generation rates of wastes and emissions under suitable values for planetary boundaries, through closing the system, reducing its size and maintaining the resource’s value as long as possible within the system, mainly leaning on design and education, and with capacity to be implemented at any scale.*’ This definition includes key operational principles as well as providing a coherent model for implementation.

Circular Economy approaches have attracted interest in both public policy and private sector practice, particularly in Europe and China, and will be key to reducing over-consumption.³⁹ The energy transition is creating a new era of material demands that need to be met by industry, and this will require a combination of recycling/ reclamation and responsible mining. There will be a once in a generation opportunity to get these materials into the economy in a way that is consistent with the values of a new eco-social contract, and circular economy principles will be critical to achieving that.⁴⁰

³⁸ The proposal for a frequent flyer levy is a practical example of a policy measure to disincentivise extravagant levels of consumption. A hard ‘maximum’ would go further and ration flying, as proposed here: <https://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/outdoors/arid-41165827.html>.

³⁹ In Europe the Directive 2008/98/EC on waste introduces the circular economy package and broadens the legislation about recycling and reusing. China’s Circular Economy Promotion Law understands CE as reducing, reusing and recycling in production, circulation and consumption. (Suarez-Eiroa et al 2019 p953)

⁴⁰ Mike Wilson personal communication. See: <https://climatechampions.unfccc.int/3-ways-the-circular-economy-is-vital-for-the->

The Least Developed Countries and green structural transformation

One of the most positive developments in global political economy of the last three decades has been ‘convergence’ in national wealth and income between nations, in which a broad range of poorer countries (mostly in Asia) have seen economic growth much faster than rich (OECD member) countries.⁴¹ The engine of this has been rapid industrialisation to produce largely consumer goods for rich country markets (key examples over a long timeframe include China, South Korea and Vietnam). Industrialisation produces structural transformation - meaning a transition from low-productivity, labour-intensive production to higher value-added and higher-productivity economic activities. As Oks and Williams (2022) note, there is no other pathway that demonstrates the capacity for sustained long-term and broad-based increases in prosperity apart from structural transformation through industrial development. At the same time, development is increasingly recognised as a human right for all individuals and peoples, not merely an equivalent to economic growth.⁴²

UNCTAD (2022) deals with the daunting challenge for poorer countries of achieving structural transformation during the low-carbon transition. Structural transformation is usually associated, especially at the beginning of the development process, with increased domestic production and consumption and a related rise in greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, green structural transformation is mainly accomplished by striving to improve the efficiency of the use of resources (materials energy, land, water) along the development path. UNCTAD (2022) also



Photo: Matthew Tran via Unsplash

advocates policies to expand the development of local entrepreneurship, increase the stock of skills in science, technology and innovation, promote public and private research and development, and provide supportive infrastructure. In members of the Least Developed Countries group, for example, eco-social contracts will need to incorporate a shared

energy-transition/

⁴¹ OECD (2012) notes that in the decade 2000-2010 “as many as 83 developing countries managed to double OECD per capita growth rates” (summary). Barrett et al (2022) note that this process of inter-country wealth convergence was largely brought to a halt by the Covid19 pandemic from 2020 on.

⁴² The Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2022-2031 manifests a new generation of renewed and strengthened commitments between the least developed countries and their development partners, including the private sector, civil society, and governments at all levels.



Photo: Susan G Komen via Unsplash

goal of increasing broad-based prosperity to engage publics effectively, which implies finding ways to make green structural transformation happen. Achieving this while avoiding lock in of fossil fuels and high-emission practices will ensure the long-term sustainability of the countries' growth paths.

Global dimensions – a Shared Green Deal

Without co-ordinated global action to ensure investment in green development pathways and access to markets, development pathways for many emerging economies will see lock-in to carbon and nature intensive economic models, missing the window to leapfrog to green technologies via targeted funding (Hopkins, Goswami 2023). Competitive dynamics in markets (through carbon border adjustment mechanisms, for example) and in investment (efforts by various G20 countries to target investment at building domestic capacity to produce key goods such as semi-conductors) run the risk of locking poorer countries out of pathways to build sustainable prosperity.

A 'shared green deal' at a global level would promote green policies, create concessionary finance opportunities, and drive national green investment across all country categories and regions.

The set of proposals championed by Prime Minister Motley of Barbados and known as the Bridgetown Agenda provided an example of how agendas can be shifted with imaginative leadership from the Majority world (Box 2). A key element of these proposals is that they all avoid drawing on taxpayer-funded Official Development Assistance from OECD countries – which in the wake of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine is in short supply. It should be emphasised, however, that concessional resources from richer countries will continue to be needed to maintain appropriate financial flows, particularly to low-income and conflict-affected countries. Moving from transfers funded from general taxation to a 'polluter pays' principle (as proposed in the Bridgetown agenda for loss and damage finance) would be an important breakthrough for ensuring both appropriate volumes and the political sustainability of the arrangements.

Box 2: The Bridgetown Agenda

The four pillars of the Bridgetown Agenda as outlined by Persaud (2022) are summarised here as follows:

The Global Climate Mitigation Trust: A proposal to “break the deadlock over climate finance” with a \$500bn Global Climate Mitigation Trust seeded with IMF Special Drawing Rights (SDRs). The Trust would use \$500bn of SDRs and similar instruments as security to borrow at least US\$500bn, spread over the SDR constituent currencies to reduce currency risk, and keep rolling over this borrowing. The Trust could then break up the borrowed \$500bn into tranches of different sizes to be on-lent to qualifying projects that the Trust approves on the basis of how much and fast they reduce global warming per each dollar the Trust invested. The Trust lends directly to projects and not to governments which is a critical difference from the other IMF Trusts. These loans would become an asset of the Trust and a liability of the project, critically taking climate mitigation off government balance sheets.

More concessional finance to climate-vulnerable countries to build climate resilience: Most of the core costs of climate resilience and adaptation cannot be shifted to a private sector or third balance sheet. They rest on government balance sheets where space is limited and cost of capital is high; as a result too little adaptation is being done. Loss and damage are rising exponentially as a consequence. If Multilateral Development Banks raise their risk appetite, include callable capital in their risk frameworks, and hold SDRs to provide extra liquidity they could provide loans on concessional terms to countries not eligible for the current IDA facility to build climate resilience.

Introduce pandemic and disaster clauses in all debt instruments: The clause suspends debt service for two years when an independent agency declares a natural disaster of a certain threshold has hit and extends the instrument’s maturity for two years at the initial interest rate. This automatically provides enormous liquidity when countries most need it without having to pay the cost of crisis liquidity, negotiate conditional arrangements and increase debt levels. If all developing countries had had these instruments in their sovereign debts during the pandemic, it would have released one trillion dollars of liquidity to devote to whatever they needed to spend it on, from healthcare to employment-protection schemes.

Grants to address loss and damage from climate change: When an independent agency declares that a climate event has taken place and loss and damage are over 5% of GDP, an automatic payment is made to the Government to pay for reconstruction. This would be funded from a levy on fossil fuel companies linked to the carbon content of fuels.

The Summit for a New Global Financing Pact⁴³ convened by France in June 2023 built on the momentum generated by the Bridgetown Agenda. It represents the first high level attempt to align climate, development and debt agendas and “build consensus for a more inclusive financial system.” Although the Summit failed to deliver significant announcements on the scale many stakeholders had hoped to see, it provided a stronger voice for the Majority world in debates on climate and development finance. This needs to be a platform that enables more

radical future change in some of the areas discussed, such as: levies on fossil fuel use and production; debt for climate and nature swaps; reforms to the risk frameworks of multilateral development banks; new frameworks for concessional lending; more effective support to the restructuring of debt for severely affected countries; and increasing the transparency and predictability of country credit ratings.

⁴³ See Chair’s Summary: <https://nouveau Pact financier.org/pdf/chairs-summary-of-discussions.pdf>

Negotiating Eco-Social Contracts

Social contracts are not only about the what, but also the how. They should be catalysed by processes of genuine voice and participation that respect the values, perspectives, and rights of all stakeholders. These processes can involve different mechanisms capable of initiating social change, and actors and social movements capable of operating in ways that shape a new consensus for action. In this section we review a range of relevant mechanisms before considering the ways in which they can be integrated into processes of transformative change.

Process and mechanisms

To achieve the broad-based social change necessary to tackle the era of eco-social crisis – and engage both winners and losers, wealthy and poor, and particularly those from the margins, in the process – inclusive mechanisms of citizen engagement, dialogue and deliberation will be needed.⁴⁴ There is no blueprint for this that would be applicable everywhere. Distinctive location based or regional discourses may provide framings that resonate strongly in particular cultures and places. Political contexts also vary. In authoritarian environments democratic engagement needs to be tailored to available spaces where progress can be made.

GEC has developed a three-part taxonomy for understanding how the engagement of particular groups can be structured, comprising *impacted communities*, *marginalised communities*, and *representative mini-publics*. These can be described as follows:

- **Impacted communities.** These are social groups or communities that risk experiencing negative impacts as a result of sectoral green transition measures – for example mining communities or workers in coal-fired power plants, whose livelihoods will be impacted as a country transitions from coal to renewables in its energy mix.
- **Marginalised communities.** These are social groups or communities either excluded from mainstream social, political and economic processes, or included under highly unfavourable terms. These groups have often suffered deep historical marginalisation with particular individuals badly affected through being at the intersection of multiple marginalised identities. Fault lines include gender, race and ethnicity, disability, and religion.
- **Representative ‘mini-publics’.** Some processes of deliberation (e.g. participatory budgeting in the Porto Allegre model from Brazil)⁴⁵ involve a combination of deliberative processes open to all citizens of a given unit – and layers of representation where delegates are selected to take part in later stages of the process. Some deliberative or dialogic processes require selection of participants on a proportionate (sample) basis – such as citizen assemblies, for example. This is the case where the purpose of the exercise is to generate deliberations which are representative of an entire population – and the size of the population concerned makes open participation unfeasible. Typically, stratified sampling methods are employed to ensure that

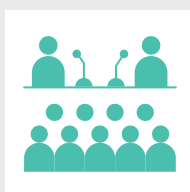
⁴⁴ See Mohamed 2023 forthcoming

⁴⁵ Schneider and Goldfrank 2002

key constituencies are included in adequate proportions within a representative national sample. The sample for the citizen's assembly which sat in Ireland from 2016-18, for example, comprised an independent chair and 99 participants who were selected by random sample stratified by a range of demographic characteristics including age, gender, social class, and region (Torney 2021).

Figure 1. below from Mohamed (2023) provides a taxonomy of important mechanisms for citizen engagement that can contribute to developing eco-social contracts for green economic transition. Annex 1 provides a fuller outline and analysis of these.

Figure 1: Key mechanisms for citizen engagement for social contracts for green transition⁴⁶



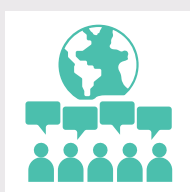
Citizen Assemblies cover a wide range of issues and can be applied to address broad societal challenges such as economic reform, biodiversity loss, and climate change at multiple levels. While current application is limited in global scope, they are becoming key mechanisms for people to co-determine policies. They are also suited to extended periods of deliberation. Broad social movement support exists for both peoples and citizen assemblies.



Participatory Budgeting enjoys uptake globally and plays a critical role in the devolution of decision-making by enabling people to influence the allocation of public resources so that it advances economic reform. By supporting priority setting in budget allocations, people can ensure that their values, visions and plans for new economic models e.g. that create green and decent work and uphold human and nature's rights for instance, are reflected in what is being financed.



Just Transition Processes employ context-specific mechanisms, such as dialogue structures, community forums and focus groups, to produce negotiated agreements that integrate people's visions in economic strategies, investments and plans. They have expanded beyond trade union-led engagement on agreements that protect the rights of impacted workers and affected communities in clean energy transitions to broader societal engagement e.g. on gender-just transitions.



Citizen Dialogues have been applied globally with countless examples of citizen-led policy dialogues leading to progressive policy changes. They have been used to address complex policy questions and lead to detailed policy recommendations and proposals, making them suitable for deliberations on economic reform. Often an iterative process, citizen dialogues have kept people connected to policymakers by partnering with broader movements to monitor policy outcomes post-deliberation.



Climate Advisory Councils and Commissions while a recent democratic innovation will become a critical conduit for holding governments to account for climate commitments. They are integrating people's visions and needs in climate policy, and supporting citizen engagement in climate - a central pillar of the Paris Agreement. And they can evolve into a critical conduit for engaging with citizens and political assemblies on the economic reforms needed to meet net zero and low carbon goals.

⁴⁶ Mohamed 2023 (forthcoming).



Photo: Matthew Nolan via Unsplash

The three different ‘publics’ outlined above (*impacted, marginalised and representative*) map to these different mechanisms in two ways. Some deliberative or participatory processes have a natural slant towards either (or both) of impacted and marginalised communities. ‘Just transition’ processes, for example should include an element of both addressing those who stand to lose directly in the transition, and others who start from a position of marginalisation.⁴⁷ Achieving social justice in the transition process will require engagement of both kinds of social groups. A broad deliberative process engaging either a relatively small local population (e.g., municipality based participatory budgeting) or a larger population (‘deliberative mini-publics’) can also be structured to ensure voice, and equal levels of empowerment in the process to marginalised and impacted groups, for example by using stratified random sampling in the way referenced above for Citizen’s Assemblies. Where expert testimony is engaged as part of the deliberative process this can also be structured to ensure concerns and perspectives of marginalised and impacted groups are fully

incorporated. In Ireland for the recent Citizens’ Assembly on biodiversity a separate children’s assembly was convened, as children would not have been able to participate on equal terms in the main exercise.

The selection or appropriate ‘fit’ of different mechanisms (for the purpose of promoting transformative change) depends on context, including the following dimensions:

- **Scale**

Participatory budgeting has mostly been applied at local scale where whole populations can engage. When scaled up to cover larger areas the process has often been challenging, but some considerable successes have been achieved.⁴⁸ *Citizen’s assemblies* have operated widely from local to national scales, with well-established tools for engaging mini-publics that are representative of different criteria. *Citizen dialogues* facilitated by GEC partner hubs have usually focused on making progress in specific policy areas through engaging multiple stakeholder groups.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ CIF 2021

⁴⁸ Schneider and Goldfrank (2002).

⁴⁹ See Mohamed 2021, Worsley 2017 for examples. The GEC India Hub facilitated dialogues in three states, for example. The case in

• Administrative Context

The administrative context – particularly in terms of linkages to existing power structures and the ways these shape agendas – vary greatly in practice for any of the mechanisms in Figure 1. *Just transition* dialogues can be entirely run by civil society, or related to major government-led and internationally-funded investment programmes. Space to engage for different actors and the opportunity to push for transformational change can be very restricted in cases where major centralised energy transition planning is at the core of the programme, as in South Africa.⁵⁰

Participatory budgeting is often presumed to only be workable where there is both a reasonable level of funding for local government, and a high degree of formal fiscal devolution, allowing for genuine local-level discretion. Bezera and Junquiera (2022) for example, argue that participatory budgeting in Brazil went into decline under the PT (Worker’s Party) administration and before the election of Bolsonaro in 2019, because the PT – having used participatory budgeting extensively to gain political traction in the 1990s and early 2000s, eventually started to starve local administrations of the financial resources necessary to animate the process. Other factors though also condition success. A recent overview of a large sample of participatory budget experiences by Ryan (2023) concludes that the commitment of political leaders to ‘participation in word and deed’ is the most fundamental condition for success; resource availability and bureaucratic commitment are also significant.

Climate Advisory Councils have a specific position in relation to national climate policy frameworks and are more closely linked to

national policy machineries that the other mechanism listed in Figure 1.⁵¹ Their role and mandate differ according to the governance context, but these councils essentially provide knowledge and evidence to help governments meet their climate pledges, measure progress towards climate goals and commitments, and ensure transparency in the policymaking and implementation process. They are composed of representatives from across society, including civil society and social movements, and often broker between people and the government, sharing their recommendations with both government and the public.

• Mandate

The question of mandate can be either highly variable (*policy dialogues* can be ‘invited spaces’ commissioned by authorities or executed with a high degree of separation from power structures) – or rather fixed (there isn’t much point in attempting *participatory budgeting* without a clear mandate to apportion public resources). The literature on *citizen’s assemblies* revolves more strongly around the question of mandate, perhaps because there is a high degree of variation, and because some high-profile successes have seemed to stem from strong initial mandates from central government.

The Citizen’s Assembly process in Ireland from 2016-18 is instructive – as it was set up with strong buy-in to the process by the legislature and the executive, with a commitment to debate in parliament recommendations from the Assembly (which has continued in subsequent exercises). The Assembly had one spectacular success – moving the debate forward towards rescinding the long-standing ban on abortion in Ireland’s constitution. Some have argued that in other areas tackled by that

Bihar focused on transitioning brick manufacture from high energy, highly polluting technologies to sustainable and healthier alternatives.

⁵⁰ See CIF 2020

⁵¹ The *International Climate Councils Network* has 24 members, including Chile and South African institutions as well as a range of European and other OECD countries and institutions.



Photo: Gayatri Malhotra via Unsplash

2016-18 Assembly (including climate change) the results were less impressive and clear cut.⁵² However, these processes can take time – and the result highlighted in Torney (2021) of a revision (and considerable strengthening) of the climate law in mid-2021 seems impressive. Torney notes, however, that other factors played a part in this change and that the assembly recommendations are best seen as ‘an inspiration or spur’ for the change rather than its proximate cause.

Torney’s analysis also contrasts the Irish experience with that of the French Citizens Convention for the Climate – commissioned by President Macron as a direct response to the shock of the ‘gilets-jaunes’ public protests against climate-related policy measures that rocked his administration in 2018-19. There were significant differences in terms of mandate (the French one being more specific and concrete), the level of participation (higher in the French case), and policy integration (again, at the outset the French case appears stronger). However, in terms of impact, arguably the Irish assembly had a stronger lasting influence on policy and legal frameworks, and the Irish assembly led to a vibrant programme of follow-on assemblies, including one recently on biodiversity. Torney concludes that the analysis points to the importance of ‘context and contingency’ in shaping influence on climate governance.

• Scope

There are significant differences in terms of the scope of different mechanisms and their potential to influence policies and processes of green transformation. *Participatory budgeting* is clearly restricted to fiscal processes and would appear to have limited potential to address a range of other important areas of policy, including regulation. It operates predominantly at a sub national level which restricts its ability to influence key areas of green transition which do have fiscal policy elements, such as energy policy. *Dialogues* can be geared to any topic and are thus highly flexible, though possibly difficult to institutionalise or mainstream into practice in the way that has happened with citizens’ assemblies in some cases (such as Ireland), or many instances of participatory budgeting. *Citizens’ Assemblies* have been argued by some to have particular suitability for addressing the complexity and multi-faceted,



Photo: Koshu Kunii via Unsplash

cross-sectoral nature of environmental challenges. Their flexibility in terms of the range of recommendations they can offer and the provisions for drawing on a range of expert testimony are also advantages for addressing environmental challenges such as biodiversity and climate change. As an illustration, the March 2023 report of the Irish citizens' assembly on biodiversity loss, prepared for presentation to the national parliament, contains impressively specific and ambitious overarching recommendations.

Shifting the dial: movements and political change

A process to support the forging of a new eco-social contract for green economy transformation needs to be designed to take account of key elements of the political economy, including the level of civic space and openness to public debate; the strength of social movements (organised labour, women's movements, indigenous organisations, etc); the strength of commercial, financial and other

powerful vested interests either threatened by, or potentially benefitting from, a radical green economy transformation; and the level of consensus across the political spectrum on the need for change.

It will also be important to determine the potential distributional impacts across social groups of a radical green economic transformation in terms of employment and livelihoods, services access and quality, land and natural resource rights, voice and power, and prices. These elements of distributional impact may be unclear at any given point, but being aware of potential winners and losers should help to shape green transition propositions that are both inclusive and fair.

Tailoring approaches to political context is critical to the success of deliberative or dialogic approaches to change (Bass 2013). The analytical guidance provided in Bass et al (2021) provides useful background to approaching these issues. Box 3 provides a clear rationale for grounding analysis of environmental problems in a solid understanding of the political economy context.

Box 3: The political economy of environmental decision making.

- “Many environmental problems have ‘political’ roots. They relate to the ways that power and resources are secured and used in a country or society and are intimately meshed with problems of poverty and inequality. For example:
- Environmental degradation is very often associated with inequality: in essence, it is driven either by elites seeking wealth (greed), or by poor people seeking survival (need). What we perceive as ‘people exploiting nature’ often also turns out to be ‘people exploiting other people’ to access nature.
- Many conflicts between people emerge over environmental resources, and from the ‘weaponising’ of these resources.
- Environment-dependent actors often tend to be marginalised, facing problems of access and lack of representative, procedural or distributional rights and justice. Nature conservation policy and practice, for too many people, means loss of access to land and resource rights.
- Policy, fiscal and market measures can create incentives or disincentives for sustainable and equitable development. However, they are not ‘magic bullets’ and their effectiveness is highly context-specific.
- Progress on management of public environmental goods such as biodiversity conservation requires collective action among diverse players. This depends upon good communication channels and trust, which may be lacking.”

Bass et al 2021 p5

In practice, situations of conflict and fragility, as well as authoritarian governance, can affect the feasibility of deliberative, participatory, mechanisms in any given context. Mohamed (2023) argues for the importance of broadening the spread of participatory mechanisms beyond the ‘comfort zone’ of contexts where civic space is relatively strong, to places which may be more challenging but the need even more urgent. In situations where civic space is constrained, participatory budgeting (particularly at municipal level) and citizen dialogues may be more feasible – while the Citizens’ Assembly process (particularly if there are guarantees of implementation or parliamentary deliberation of recommendations) will usually require higher levels of civic space and openness to citizen engagement.

In summary, the ‘deliberative wave’ outlined in OECD (2020) has opened up a range of mechanisms and strategies for facilitating deep social change in ways that can contribute to rebuilding of fractured social contracts. But the kind of deliberative and dialogic processes outlined above have weaknesses as well as

strengths, and don’t always work out as hoped. In situations of conflict or outright state collapse constructing a coherent and inclusive dialogue focusing on either horizontal or vertical dimensions of the social contract will be extremely challenging. Any form of deep social change process needs to be driven by national or local actors working in partnership and with a deep understanding of the politics of change.

In any context there are three analytic questions that can guide thinking about structuring social contract processes:

- How far does the available civic and political space allow for open deliberation of radical change?
- Which institution or institutions are best place to animate a movement for a new eco-social contract?
- Which mechanisms, involving which stakeholder groups or publics, and in which sequence are likely to build momentum towards a new eco-social contract most effectively?

What is Achievable? The Green Economy Coalition's Role

The Green Economy Coalition and partners will build on its strengths to animate and support processes to build new, sustainable, and just eco-social contracts. We will work alongside agencies building on the UNSG's call for a new and radical approach, including UNRISD's work to refine the notion of the eco-social contract and UNDP's Climate Promise and Nature Pledge.

The Green Economy Coalition has significant strengths for the task of pioneering social contract processes and mechanisms that are suitable for green economic reform and transformation. These strengths include: the work that GEC has done to analyse essential elements of green economic reform; an extensive network of members including seven global hubs that can act as platforms to go through social contract review, debate, and 'negotiation' processes in specific places; a normative framework emphasising the foundational principles and values needed for building social contracts in an era of eco-social crisis (box 4); extensive experience in catalysing and supporting citizen dialogues that have promoted meaningful and radical change in a range of contexts (Mohamed 2020, Worsley 2017). Finally, the Green Economy Coalition's theory of change engages the practical demands of social contract negotiation at all levels (figure 2).

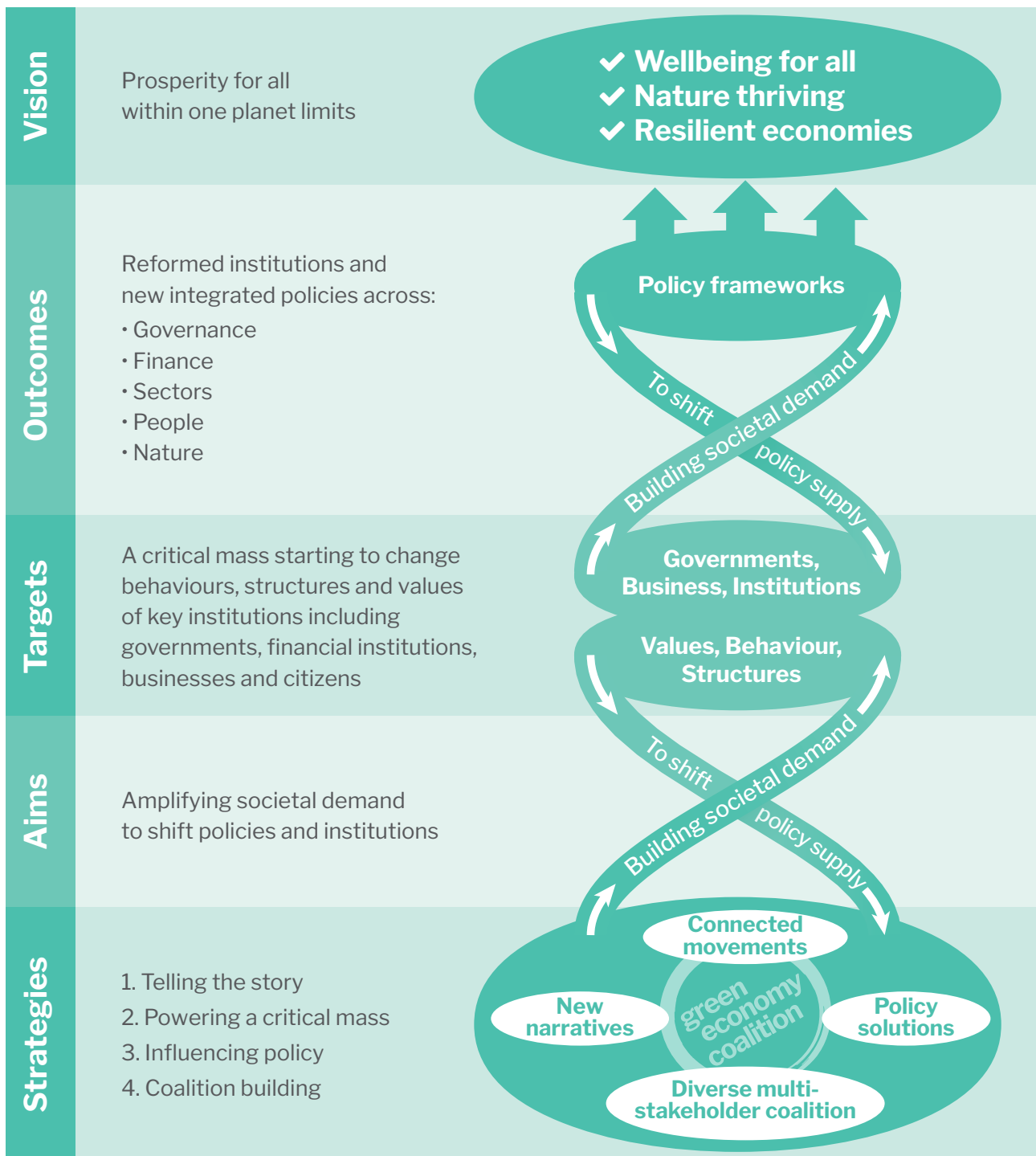
"The GEC has significant strengths for the task of pioneering social contract processes and mechanisms that are suitable for green economic reform and transformation."

Box 4: Five principles for green economic transformation

- **The Wellbeing Principle**
A people-centred green economy focused on supporting human wellbeing.
- **The Justice Principle**
An inclusive and non-discriminatory economy, supporting gender empowerment, and promoting justice within and between generations.
- **The Planetary Boundaries Principle**
An economy that safeguards, restores and invests in nature.
- **The Efficiency and Sufficiency Principle**
An economy geared to support sustainable consumption as well as production.
- **The Good governance principle**
An economy guided by integrated, accountable and resilient institutions.

Source: GEC 2019

Figure 2: GEC theory of change

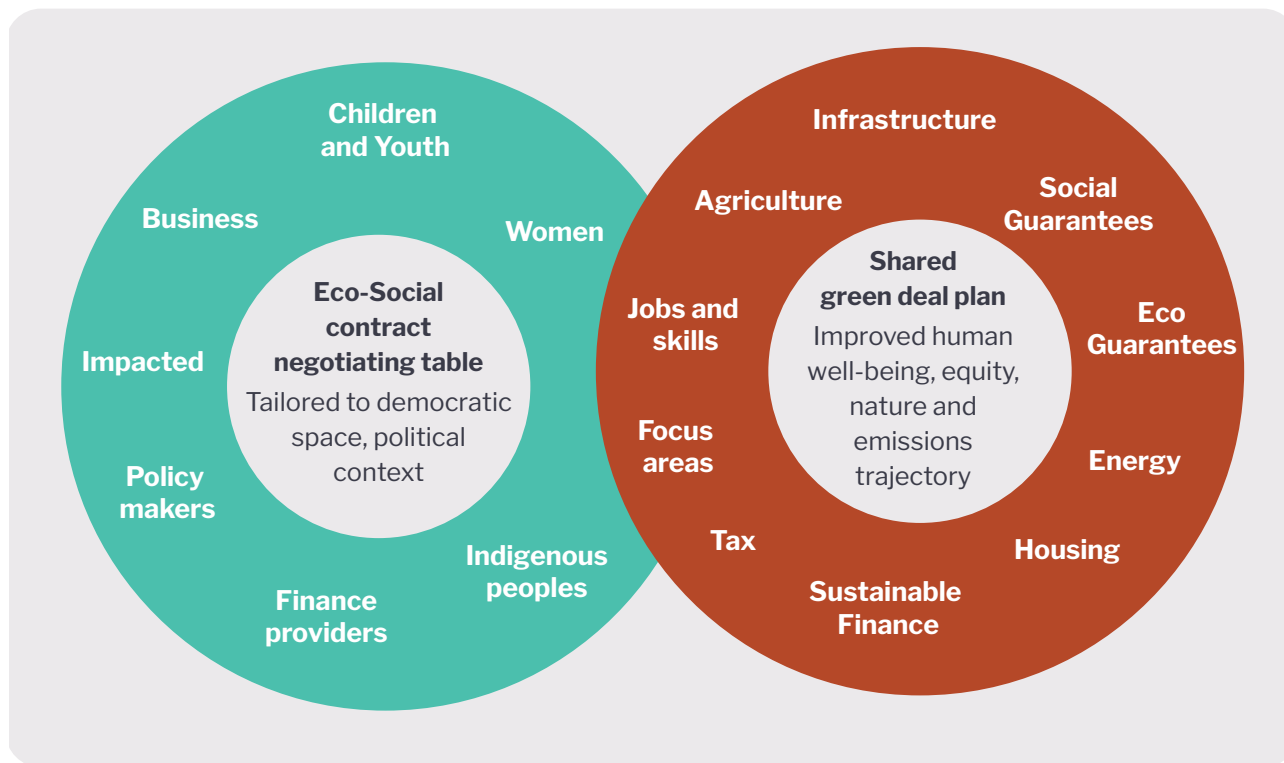


Over the next two years, GEC members and partners will support eco-social contract negotiation at the country level, by mobilising networks and resources to shift public debate towards more ambitious and radical options for promoting green economy transformation. The process will involve analysing the political economy and available levers of change – and

feeding this understanding into strategies for change at country and global levels.

The process proposed at country level is represented in Figure 3 below, illustrating the links between process and substance in the negotiation of social contracts for an era of eco-social crisis.

Figure 3: GEC view of the social contract process



In addition to continuing to work to understand how best to animate inclusive eco-social contract processes at the country level, GEC will also work with others to explore important areas for conceptual and methodological innovation, including: private sector engagement in social contract processes and the relevance of concepts such as the ‘social license to operate’; the relation between social contract processes and conflict prevention/peace building; possibilities for strengthening the environmental content of social contracts through developing the concept of ecological guarantees; subsidiarity and the best way to frame synergies and complementarities between social contracts at different scales (local, national, regional, global); legal dimensions including constitutional law; other possible mechanisms for building eco-social contracts not covered in this paper (e.g., citizen science).

Through this work, the GEC has laid down the contours of the **why** and **what** of eco-social contract. Our next work centres around the **how** and **who**. This will involve finding partnerships to

help deploy it, in multiple spaces, countries, across regions; learning what works best, and sharing that learning. We shall gather and distribute guidance on how to run effective social contract process for social contract animators, and we will better define how this supports bottom-up new green deals that have both citizen mandate and transformative ambition.

We shall work to better define what each stakeholder group should be negotiating for, with particular attention on explicitly excluded communities – women, youth, indigenous, small and informal business. We shall help clarify the role of government in both commissioning supporting and enacting the social contract mandates, and provide more guidance for the commissioners and funders of green economy policy or just transition processes. We will help orientate businesses so that they can contribute effectively. Finally, we will look at international governance organisations and assess how they can evolve to be the custodians and implementors of the outcomes of this emergent bottom-up global solidarity.

Conclusion

Too many societies have lost the capacity to negotiate social contracts that meaningfully provide justice, freedom, happiness, wellbeing rights and protection for citizens – as well as (critically) providing for sustainable management of the natural world and the planet’s climate. Current models for economy and markets are driving interlinked crises of climate, biodiversity, inequality, and democracy. The resulting turbulence creates opportunities for renewing the social contract as well as posing large and growing risks.

Forging new national and local eco-social contracts cannot be done without addressing the global dimensions of action in relation to the planetary crisis. Reducing inequality, alleviating poverty, bringing emissions rapidly to the point where stocks of greenhouse gases are stabilised in the atmosphere, and ending the assault on the natural world will place different requirements on different countries. Tackling inequality and over-consumption in the minority world will involve a social contract that provides for limits for the rich, as well as guarantees for all.

Evidence suggests more equal societies have higher levels of human capital and wellbeing – so focusing the organisation of human society on wellbeing rather than growth is an agenda for a better life as well as a more equal and safer world.⁵³ Rapid change will also be necessary in middle income countries and LDCs, addressing inequality, climate, and nature loss. Policy and civil society communities in these countries will rightly aspire to growing shared prosperity and this must be part of the global element of the new eco-social contract.

There is a growing wave of deliberative democratic action on a global scale – providing ways of engaging citizens in determining how their economies and societies should be run – and the promise of rebuilding trust and legitimacy for policy and political action for a just and sustainable world economy. Our task is to amplify and energise that. A new eco-social contract must provide not just a safe and liveable planetary space for future generations, but also enhanced wellbeing for all in the present, and active inclusion of groups and peoples previously disadvantaged by prevailing norms and power structures.



Photo: Justin Essah via Unsplash

⁵³ Wilson and Pickett 2009



Photo: Duncan Shaffer via Unsplash

This is an urgent and compelling agenda. The scale of global challenges in this era of growing eco-social crisis also provides opportunities - for governments, civil society and business to take forward eco-social contract processes to drive transformative economic and social change. This will require international cooperation and dialogues, coupled with regional, national and local action.

"The scale of global challenges also provides opportunities to drive transformative economic and social change."

For governments, this means making space for and supporting meaningful deliberative processes to drive change towards just and inclusive green transformation, with active support from multilateral agencies, the third sector and the research community. For civil

society, this means engaging with emerging citizen movements, governments and the private sector to provide support and resources targeted towards building constructive, inclusive and participatory democratic support for sweeping policy and investment change. And for business, it means recognising that the status quo of a deregulated, laissez-faire private sector run exclusively for the benefit of shareholders cannot continue. Playing an active role in negotiating eco-social contracts and consequently supporting their ambitious policy reform agendas should secure for progressive businesses a continued licence to operate and sustainable prosperity.

GEC and partners will seek to support these processes where we can make effective contributions. We call on all actors to engage to make this a reality. It will be the GEC's first and foremost priority for the coming decade; if you would like to engage with our work, [please do join us.](#)

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Annex 1

A Selection of Innovative Mechanisms for People’s Participation in Decision-Making.
From Mohamed 2023.

Mechanism	Description	Example/s & Initiatives
Citizen assemblies	A citizens’ assembly or public is a representative group of (between 50–160) citizens selected at random from the population to learn about, deliberate upon, and make recommendations in relation to a particular issue or set of issues. Assemblies are made up of three groups of people: citizens, expert witnesses and facilitators and are held at multiple levels covering a wide range of issues. Participants deliberate on a particular issue or policy and eventually provide government with a set of recommendations, supported by the reasoning and facts which informed their position. Recently, there has been an upsurge in climate-focused citizen assemblies with permanent citizens assemblies now deliberating alongside policymakers in co-determining climate policy. The overwhelming majority of citizen assemblies have been held in UK, Europe and the US.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat, France • People’s Plan for Nature, UK • Global Citizens Assembly at CoP 26
Citizens’ Juries	A citizen’s jury is a downscaled version of an assembly involving a broad and representative range of voices. It generally consists of 12-24 members that could call on expert witnesses to provide evidence which is then interrogated by the ‘jury’. This blends the values, knowledge and lived experience of the jury with evidence to support deliberation. The deliberation delivers a highly specific outcome and has been used largely on an ad-hoc basis: to issue a verdict on a particular policy or issue. Citizens’ juries have addressed issues as diverse as environmental sustainability, waste, public health and reconstruction, and have been largely held in the USA, Canada, UK, Europe and Australia with some examples of citizen juries in Africa and Asia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen juries on windfarms, Scotland • Panel obywatelski, Poland • l’Espace Citoyen d’Interpellation Democratique, Mali
Participatory budgeting	Participatory budgeting is a democratic process or mechanism in which citizens participate in decision-making around the allocation of public resources. Like many other citizen deliberation processes, participatory budgeting is initiated by government to include people in decision-making processes. Outcomes and recommendations are put forward for adoption or rejection. Deliberations can centre on concrete public investments, but also take a broader view on priority setting in public expenditure, as evidence in green budgeting that assesses the environmental impacts of budgetary and fiscal policies and how they support delivery of national and international commitments. Its adoption is widespread globally and applied at multiple levels, from local to national level such as Indonesia where it has been mandatory since 2004.	<p>Green Participatory budgeting in Lisbon, Portugal</p> <p>Participatory budgeting in Makueni and West Pokot Counties, Kenya</p> <p>Just Transition Participatory Budgeting Fund, Scotland</p>

Mechanism	Description	Example/s & Initiatives
Citizen dialogues	Citizens' dialogues are pervasive mechanism for integrating citizen deliberation globally and has been applied at all multiple levels. They can address more than one policy question and range from short to longer term processes. In some countries, policy dialogues have been institutionalised in participatory policymaking. Some learning and deliberation, such as engagement with expert panels, often sets the context for the dialogue. Dialogues are well-suited to inform citizens on policy issues and gather their broad ideas and reactions, but they can also elicit detailed policy recommendations. They have been used to engage with systemic and broad challenges, such as citizen visions for <u>post-COVID recovery</u> and for green economy diagnosis which could then evolve into mechanisms for broader action learning on policy needs, creating a policy feedback loop where people's local perspectives feed into the <u>green economy policy cycle</u> .	<u>Citizen dialogue on Canada's Energy Future</u> <u>Citizen-led green economy dialogues</u> <u>Citizen dialogues on the future of Europe</u>
Just transition processes	<u>Just transition</u> has evolved from an initial focus on impacted workers in clean energy transitions to a macro-economic and cross-sectoral framing and process that anchors social justice in climate policy, planning and finance. It is now a central part of transition plans of several countries and regions. For instance, citizens, communities and workers are actively engaging with government and business in priority setting and in shaping transition plans of <u>coal regions globally</u> . But just transition deliberations also provide a frame and a platform for meaningful, long-term engagement on the trajectory of transitions within society, enabling trust building and co-creation. Just transition deliberations employ multiple forms of engagement, such as <u>social dialogue structures</u> and community forums to produce negotiated agreements that integrate people's visions in transition plans and strategies.	<u>Transition Pathway Action Plans, New Zealand</u> <u>Just Transition Agreements, Spain</u> <u>Social compact for a Just Transition, South Africa</u>
Collective bargaining	<u>Collective bargaining</u> is a mechanism – usually voluntary, whereby trade unions negotiate with employers, on behalf of their members to reach collective agreements on a wide range of issues such as work conditions, wages, working time and the rights and responsibilities of workers and employers. The level of bargaining can be at firm, sectoral or even national level. While primarily a deliberative instrument employed by trade unions, it can be a powerful instrument for workers to not only address workplace concerns, but to broaden the consultation agenda and use their mobilisation skills to galvanise public sentiment and build <u>social solidarity</u> around issues of universal concern. Green collective bargaining is an example of how unions are addressing environmental issues, ensuring that trade unions retain one of their functions of engaging with relevant societal challenges, such as the shift to climate resilient and just economies.	<u>Environmental bargaining, Australia</u> <u>Collective bargaining and a fairer economy, ILO</u> <u>Collective bargaining and social solidarity</u>

Mechanism	Description	Example/s & Initiatives
Climate advisory councils and commissions	With national climate policy frameworks in place in every nation, most governments have established independent climate advisory councils to support policymaking. Their role and mandate differ according to the governance context, but these councils essentially provide knowledge and evidence to help government’s meet their climate pledges, measure progress towards climate goals and commitments, and ensure transparency in the policymaking and implementation process. They are composed of representatives from across society, including civil society and social movements, and play the role of an honest broker between people and the government, sharing their recommendations with both government e.g. parliamentarians and the public. They are increasingly playing a role in creating a social partnership around climate action and supporting governments in their legal obligation to ‘educate their citizens on climate change, involve them in policymaking, and ensure they have all the necessary information’. Climate councils engage multiple stakeholders and increasingly engaging with the public – feeding people’s visions, values and priorities into national climate policies.	<p>International Climate Councils Network</p> <p>Presidential Climate Commission, South Africa</p> <p>Consejo Científico de Cambio Climático (4C), Costa Rica</p>
Deliberative Polls or Surveys	A deliberative poll or survey is a process that aims to capture citizen preferences and opinion changes on a policy question before and after they have been exposed to learning and deliberation. These are often commissioned by public authorities and have been used in different contexts to address a variety of policy questions. Deliberative polls differ from ordinary polling that at best provides a snapshot of public opinion. A representative sample of participants is randomly selected and partakes in an opinion survey to measure initial attitudes towards a policy question. Participants gather for plenary sessions where they pose questions to experts and participate in moderated dialogues in smaller groups. A second opinion survey then captures citizens’ opinions after they have carefully considered the policy question. Opinion changes are analysed, made public, and presented to the government authority. Deliberative polling is better suited to identify citizen opinion changes rather than produce detailed recommendations or extend decision-making influence to citizens.	<p>Deliberative poll on single European currency, Denmark</p> <p>Public deliberation on nuclear energy, South Korea</p> <p>Deliberative poll on reconciliation, Australia</p>

Mechanism	Description	Example/s & Initiatives
Participative constitutional reform	<p><u>Participatory constitution-making</u> offers several benefits that align with the participatory turn in political processes, i.e. conferring greater legitimacy, informing and engaging the public, and building a shared political identity. Globally, people have been participating in various stages of constitutional reform processes, from agenda setting to reviewing and ratifying a constitution. In many countries, constitutional commissions have been created either alongside, or as an alternative to, constituent assemblies as a mechanism for citizen consultation. In this way, citizens can engage through informed deliberation and free from political influence, including everyday issues of importance to people. Major constitution-making processes initiated in post-conflict contexts have all included public participation and consultation e.g. Uganda (1988-1995), South Africa (1994-1995), Nepal (2008-2015) and more recently in Sri Lanka (2016). <u>Climate constitutionalism</u>, the inclusion of dedicated climate provisions and clauses, is a growing shift in constitutional reform, and could provide a conduit to link citizen climate and constitutional assemblies.</p>	<p><u>Towards an eco-social contract</u>, Nepal</p> <p><u>Green constitutional reform</u>, Ecuador</p> <p><u>Direct public participation in constitution-making</u>, Constitution Transformation Network</p>
Strategic litigation	<p>Strategic litigation – also called impact litigation uses legal means to tackle injustices that have not been adequately addressed in law or politics and to review the soundness, legality and constitutionality of policies and actions. It aims to bring about broad societal impacts beyond the scope of the individual case – such as the advancement and fulfilment of social, economic, cultural and climate and environmental rights. If successful, strategic litigation can <u>guarantee</u> the equal rights of minorities, halt an environmentally damaging activity or hold governments and corporations to account for climate inaction. Citizens, children and youth and people’s movements are using <u>climate litigation</u> as a mechanism to achieve societal impact, call for transparency and hold governments and corporations to account for their climate commitments. With the recent recognition by the UN General Assembly of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right, <u>human rights arguments</u> - such as the right to life, the right to adequate food, the right to self-determination, signals a growing area of strategic litigation will increasingly draw on the protection of human rights (and the rights of nature) as a basis for the upholding climate laws and policies.</p>	<p><u>The Legal Empowerment Network</u>, Namati</p> <p><u>Safeguard Children and Youth from Climate Change</u>, Australia</p> <p><u>Environmentalists sue governments for inaction on plastic pollution</u>, The Philippines</p>