Thinking differently

ideas for action on planet & climate

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ABOUT ASHOKA

Founded in 1980, Ashoka is the world's leading network of social entrepreneurs. We pioneered the field of social entrepreneurship and are now building toward an "everyone a changemaker" world: where all of us have the confidence and support to contribute to the common good. Ashoka identifies and supports leading social entrepreneurs, learns from the patterns in their innovations, and mobilizes a global community of more than 3,700 social entrepreneurs in over 90 countries. Ashoka is leading a movement to transform how young people grow up, so they have the power to lead and to contribute. For each of Ashoka's strategic priorities, we mobilize a network of organizations - schools, universities, corporations, citizen sector organizations, media, and others - to join us in shifting mindsets and reshaping how we learn, work, and live together to catalyze changemaking for the good of society. Working with our movement co-leaders and partner institutions, we inspire and enable changemaking in the public-at-large, and work to give all citizens the confidence and tools to solve problems for the good of all.

ABOUT NEXT NOW: PLANET & CLIMATE

Next Now is Ashoka's new initiative focused on four urgent global challenges: Planet & Climate, Technology & Humanity, New Longevity, and Gender. Next Now aims to identify and support new solutions for better and more equitable systems, weave new powerful networks, and help people and institutions see and build a radically new future.

ABOUT THE ASHOKA LEARNING AND ACTION CENTER

The Learning and Action Center is a European Ashoka think tank started in 2018. Its research cuts across all Ashoka programs and initiatives. It screens and analyzes our knowledge about social challenges, social innovation, system-changing new ideas and the approaches of Ashoka Fellows to social issues, and delivers actionable insights that can inspire collective solutions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank first and foremost the Ashoka Fellows that shared their valuable time and experience with us. This report would not have been possible without their reflections, insights, and visions for what it means to adequately address climate change and rebalance our relationship with our planet.

We also wish to thank the extended Ashoka team that was involved in the entire process for this report: Alessandro Valera, Ana Saenz de Miera, Anamaria Schindler, Ankita Terrell, Bill Drayton, Corina Murafa, Diana Wells, Hanae Baruchel, Maite Arango, Mark Cheng.

→ Authors:

Alexandra Ioan, PhD
Head of the Ashoka Learning and Action Center

Pip Wheaton
Global Co-Leader of Next Now: Planet & Climate

Irene Wu
Director of Knowledge, Next Now

Claire Heiden
Research assistant, Next Now

→ Graphic design: Liviu Barbulescu

→ Others whose ideas and support contributed to this work:

Bill Carter, Dr. Elizabeth Sawin, Flavio Bassi, Florian Rutsch, Gary Cohen, Marian Ignat, Peter Goldmark, Peter Sweatman, Rachel Fauber, Richard Johnson, Sophie Lambin, the Woka Foundation, Zuhura Plummer

For a complementary report on the topic, see Climate Changemakers: Seeing Sustainability Through the Lens of Social Entrepreneurs (to be published).

→ GET IN TOUCH

For more information about Next Now Planet & Climate please contact
Corina Murafa - cmurafa@ashoka.org
Pip Wheaton – pwheaton@ashoka.org

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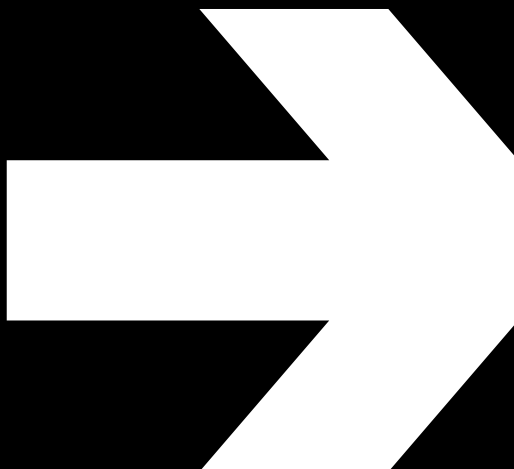
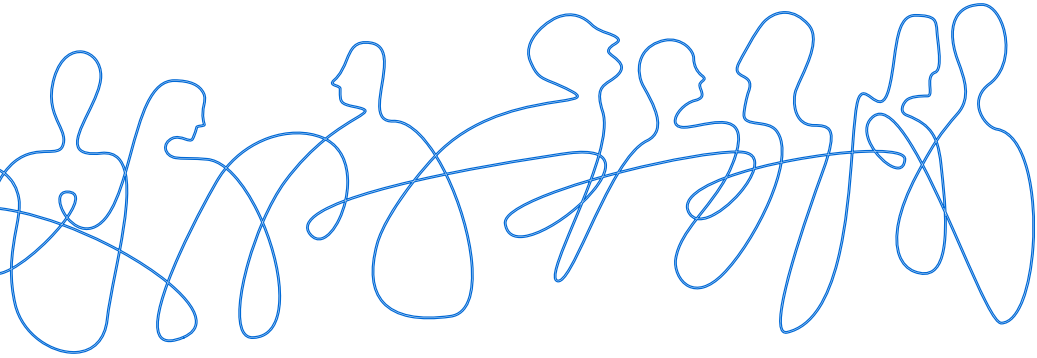
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



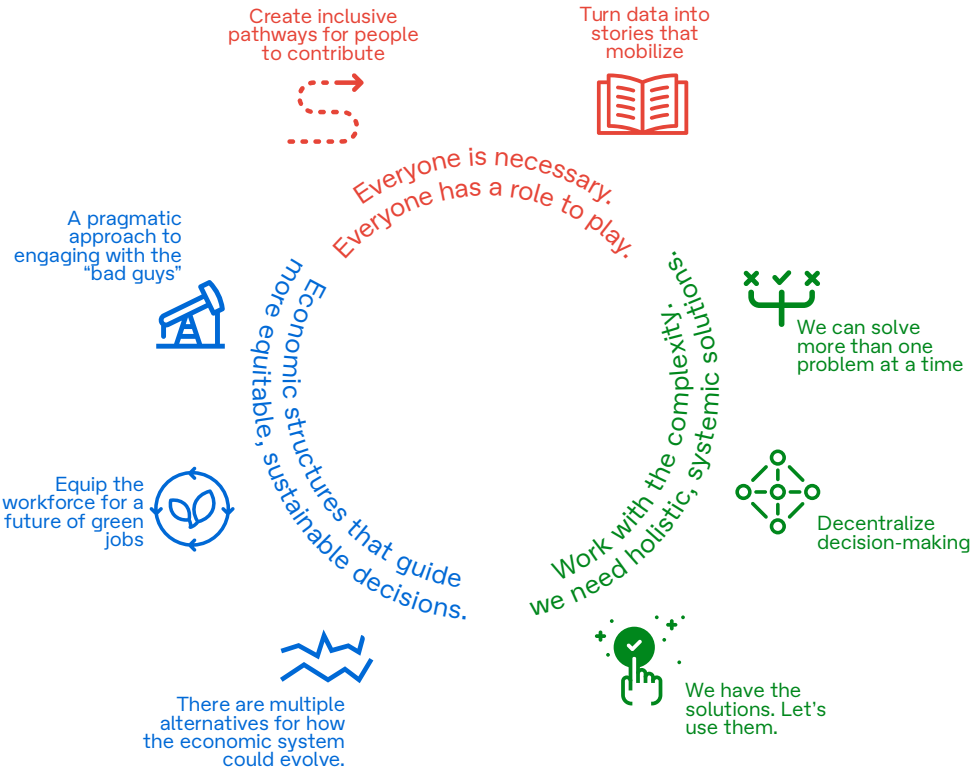
The threats facing our planet are changing quickly, as are the proposed solutions. There are new entrants daily, ever-increasing public awareness, and growing support for action. At the same time, we are racing past planetary boundaries faster than anyone had anticipated. The rate of change is simultaneously one of the biggest indicators of success of the environmental and climate movements to date, and one of the biggest risk factors. This ever-increasing rate of change is impacting solutions —they now have shorter and shorter lifespans.
The purpose of this research is to share principles that cut across specific solutions that can orient anyone wanting to take action, even as the context around us changes.

For 40 years, Ashoka has been working with the world's leading social entrepreneurs, who are recognized as Ashoka Fellows. We can see patterns in these Fellows' approaches to complex issues, which point to larger shifts that can unlock change in a system. With this in mind, we looked for patterns in the work of hundreds of leading social entrepreneurs working in the field of Planet & Climate.[1] We did this through more than 20 in-depth interviews with Ashoka Fellows, nearly 200 survey responses (sent to all Fellows, not just those working in the field of Planet and Climate), and a mapping of over 600 Fellows elected in the field throughout Ashoka's history. This was complemented with interviews with experts and literature reviews.

The concepts that emerged can be organized into three tiers: a meta-level insight that points to an emerging paradigm shift, three design principles cutting across fields and geographies, and a further set of ideas that bring those design principles to life. This final tier is a mix of tactics, systems change strategies and even one compelling question for all to consider. The relationship between the tiers are illustrated in the diagram on the next page.



1 "Planet & Climate" is the title we've given to the field that covers the multiple, interconnected crises threatening the health of our planet, including biodiversity loss, climate change, ocean acidification and more.


Create inclusive pathways for people to contribute
Turn data into stories that mobilize
Everyone is necessary. Everyone has a role to play.
A pragmatic approach to engaging with the "bad guys"
Economic structures that guide more equitable, sustainable decisions.
We can solve more than one problem at a time
Work with the complexity, we need holistic, systemic solutions.
Equip the workforce for a future of green jobs
Decentralize decision-making
There are multiple alternatives for how the economic system could evolve.
We have the solutions. Let's use them.

THE FINDINGS

Our conversations pointed to a fundamental need to rebalance our relationship with nature. This requires a paradigm shift in how humanity sees itself, how we understand what nature is, and how we see ourselves in the unfolding arc of time. The first part of the report deals with this **reframing of our relationship with nature:** we need to move from seeing humanity as separate from and superior to nature and recognize the interconnectedness that means in fact, **we are nature**. As part of this, we need to understand timescales in natural terms, fighting the short-termism that we are biologically programmed to prioritize. We need to understand our own lifespans as being part of a connected whole, embracing the concept of **'forever'**.

We surfaced three design principles that depict the way in which we can reframe our relationship with nature. Each of the design principles is expanded in the second part of the report, drawing on examples of how Ashoka Fellows are putting them into practice through different tactics and systems change strategies.

→ Everyone is necessary. Everyone has a role to play

Every person is involved in contributing to the collective impact humanity is having on the rest of the natural world. Every day, each of us is taking actions and making decisions that have an effect – large and small, positive and negative. Every person has the power and responsibility to play a role; everyone can be a changemaker. One of the most important tasks is therefore helping people find the role they can play and making sure no one is left out of this process – particularly those who the traditional environmental movement has tended to overlook, leave behind, or shun. Approaches that deliberately enable the previously disenfranchised to be part of the solution and empower those who will be the worst and soonest hit by the impacts of climate change are particularly important.

Two strategies emerged from the interviews:

Create inclusive pathways for people to contribute.

Turn data into stories that mobilize.

→ Work with the complexity: create holistic, systemic solutions

Each of the planetary crises we are facing sits at the intersection of several systems, such as national and global economic systems, the physical climatic system, and socio-political systems. They are all complex in each of their own ways: cause and effect often do not have linear relationships, and feedback loops create inertia, which means that our efforts to drive change can sometimes be highly leveraged while other times get nowhere no matter the effort. The status quo prefers stability and systems often resist change. On top of it, these systems interact with each other as in the case of Planet & Climate, making it even more difficult to create change in all of their complexity. This deep interconnectivity requires that we tackle climate change in a holistic and systemic way. Three strategies emerged from the interviews:

We can solve more than one problem at a time.

Decentralize decision-making.

We have the solutions. Let's use them.

→ Update our economic structures to guide more equitable, sustainable decisions

There is no way to seriously address the interconnected issues in the field of Planet & Climate without engaging with our global economic system. This system which sees nature as a "resource" to be extracted to fuel profit and growth provides us with the default framework for billions of decisions every day. Within the economic system, many of the decisions we make daily are constrained so that the only options available to us have negative environmental impact by default. What would an economic system look like that focused on human and planetary health rather than solely financial growth? This is the place we see the reframing of our relationship with nature potentially providing a north star.

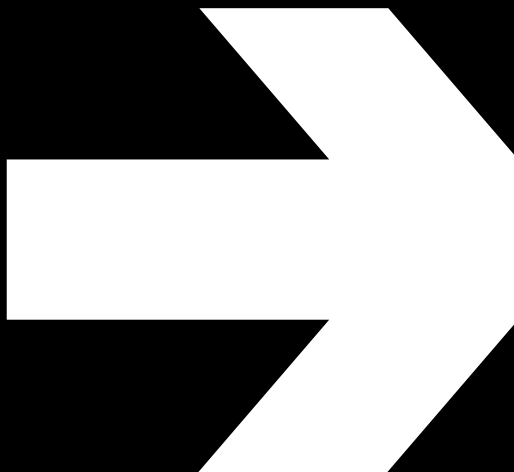
There are multiple alternatives for how the economic system could evolve

Equip the work force for a future of green jobs

A pragmatic approach to engaging with the "bad guys"

BACKGROUND

WHY DID WE DO THIS RESEARCH?



We are facing a convergence of stressors on our planetary health. Species are becoming extinct at a rate that has not been seen in millions of years. Our planet is warming up and we are seeing the effects across the world every day. Oceans are acidifying faster than we can find evidence for in the earth's geological history.

We are running out of time to address these issues. We have until 2030 to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels.[1] There is still a significant gap between the greenhouse gas emission reductions needed to meet this target and what current policies and pledges can achieve.[2] There is also good news though: citizen-led climate movements have picked up pace, corporations have joined various environmental pledges, and 196 governments have signed the legally binding Paris Agreement. While action has not reached the speed and scale needed, we see momentum building.

There are many reasons for why we are not moving fast enough. Although there is scientific consensus on the urgent need for change, decades of disinformation have created the perception of a lack of consensus.[3] Public awareness of the issues is uneven around the world, and within countries. Even amongst those committed to action, there is little consensus on how to effectively make change. In addition, the lag time between any enacted change and its effects means people do not recognize direct links between action and the urgency in their everyday lives. We realized that what is needed is not just a shift in what people are doing, but also a change in how we think about these problems.

This was the main motivation behind this report: to better understand the shortcomings in how we currently think about issues of planetary health and climate change; and to identify alternative perspectives that can better guide the actions we take.

To answer these ambitious questions, we looked to the Ashoka Fellows. Ashoka—the world's largest network of social entrepreneurs—has been identifying and supporting innovators addressing human and environmental challenges for the past 40 years. We mapped the 600+ working on environmental issues, conducted a survey of the whole network of Fellows, and carried out 22 in-depth interviews. The Fellows whose work informs this study span 67 countries across six continents, many of whose work stems from local communities and has scaled globally.[4] **These radically optimistic social innovators are equal parts pragmatic and idealistic.** Their pragmatism allows them to acknowledge the sobering reality of climate change, while their idealism helps them maintain the vision and hope necessary to work tirelessly for change.

We complemented the insights from the Ashoka Fellows with additional desk research – reading the latest publications in the field – and with conversations with experts from around the world. This report is the result of all these exchanges and reflections. It exemplifies how we currently make sense of a field as

1 IPCC. (2018). Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5C. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (Online) Available at: https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/ (Accessed on December 17th, 2020)

2 See, for example, Carbon Action Tracker. (2021). CAT Emissions Gaps. (Online) Available at: https://climateactiontracker.org/global/cat-emissions-gaps/ (Accessed on February 22nd, 2021)

3 Treen, K., Williams, H. and O'Neill, S. (2020) How climate change misinformation spreads online. Carbon Brief. (Online) Available at: https://www.carbonbrief.org/guest-post-how-climate-change-misinformation-spreads-online (Accessed on January 26th, 2021)

4 For an overview of these climate changemakers, see the Methodology section at the end of the report.

complex as that of Planet & Climate and what we see as needed moving forward. In order to reverse the effects of our activity on the planet and secure our joint future as humans and the rest of the planet, citizens and organizations from all corners of the world need to take drastic actions. Considering that we arrived where we are today with old paradigms of economic and social structures, it follows that these systems require fundamental redesign. It is with this lens that Ashoka, through the work of our Fellows, seeks to contribute to the thinking around new principles that can guide our efforts toward a world where everyone can thrive within planetary boundaries.

THINKING DIFFERENTLY: HOW RE-EXAMINING THE CLIMATE CRISIS CAN OPEN NEW POSSIBILITIES

It is increasingly clear that we need to change the way we think about the climate crisis in order to address it more effectively. We embarked on deep conversations with Ashoka Fellows to untangle exactly what this different type of thinking means, how they interpret what is currently happening, and what we can do as humanity. The following is a result of these particular conversations, coupled with additional exchanges with experts and scientists in the field, as well as a review of the literature on these topics. The overarching principles we distilled from this intense iterative process can help us reach the much-needed new paradigms of thinking and action.

We have structured these principles in two sections:

- Part 1: reframing our relationship with nature
- Part 2: crosscutting design principles to shift the Planet & Climate field

The reflections and insights of Ashoka Fellows can inform future strategies of action for all types of actors – funders, social entrepreneurs, businesses, governments – and it will also inform our work at Ashoka. As would be expected for a field as vast and complex as Planet & Climate, the interviews did not reveal full consensus, yet strong themes still emerged. We have included contradicting elements where relevant, to show the breadth of possibilities.


←Lift
Chefs
FUCK

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

There are a multitude of ideas flowing into this body of work. They build upon each other, but also contradict each other at times. The following sections are our making sense of the expertise we collectively gathered so far – from Ashoka Fellows, from experts, from our individual readings. For an easier navigation, we structured these ideas in a way that can make the process of how we reached the insights clearer.

- The 8 core insights that structure the report are the result of the in-depth qualitative analysis of our conversations with Ashoka Fellows.
- Look out for the boxes on “The Global Empathy Gap”, “Multi-solving” and “Current Economic Incentives Do Not Work” which are based on the data and knowledge of other experts in the field.
- Ashoka’s voice and perspective frames all of these findings throughout the report and especially in the “What’s next” section where we reflect on how we bring the knowledge we’ve gathered to action.

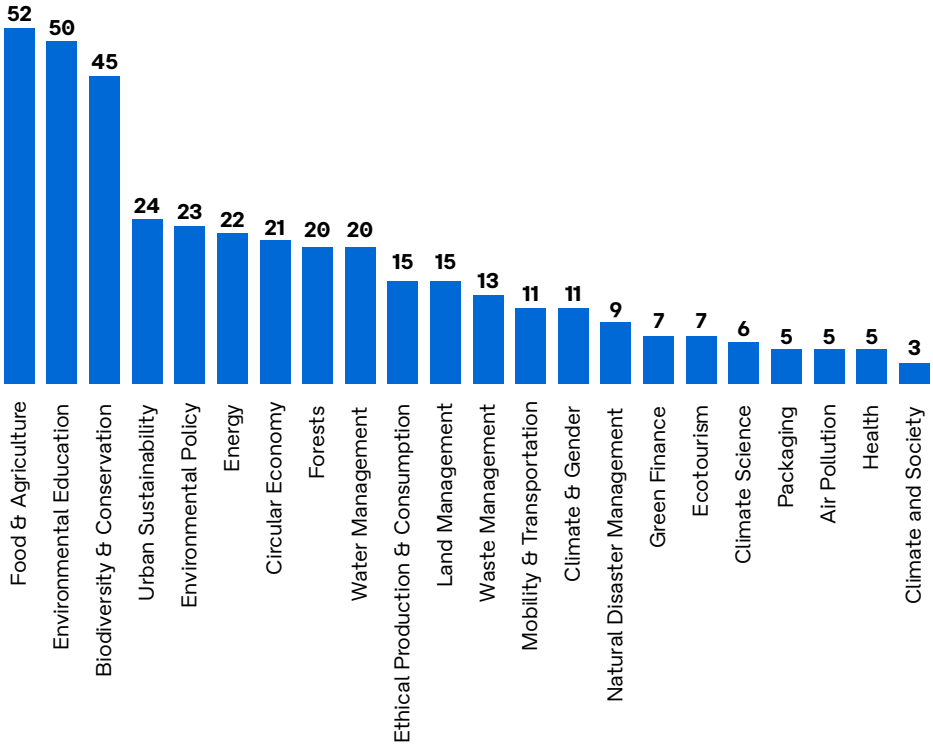
WHAT WE LEARNED FROM 191 ASHOKA FELLOWS WORKING ON PLANET & CLIMATE

→ Distribution of Impact

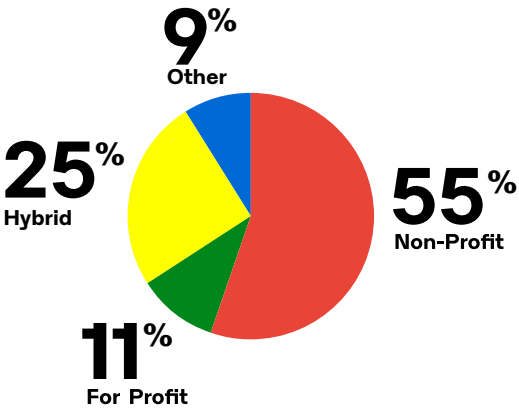
Fellows' work has impact across 95 countries. The majority only have impact in one country (135 of the respondents), 47 have impact in more than one country, with 6 of those in over 20 countries.

→ Climate Subfields

Ashoka Fellows are active in a multitude of subfields in Planet & Climate and most Fellows work in more than one subfield. Food & Agriculture, Environmental Education, and Biodiversity & Conservation are popular areas of work, although we are seeing a growing trend of Green Finance and Circular Economy in more recently elected Fellows.



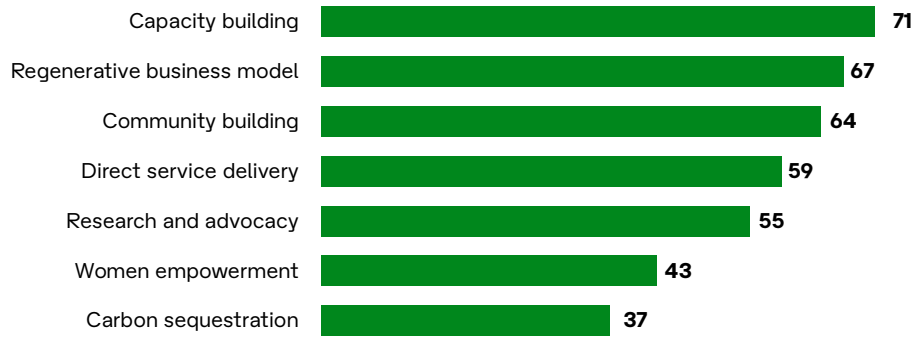
→ Fellows' Enterprise Structure



For Fellows working in the climate space, non-profit remains the most popular enterprise structure, though hybrid models have become increasingly popular in recent years.

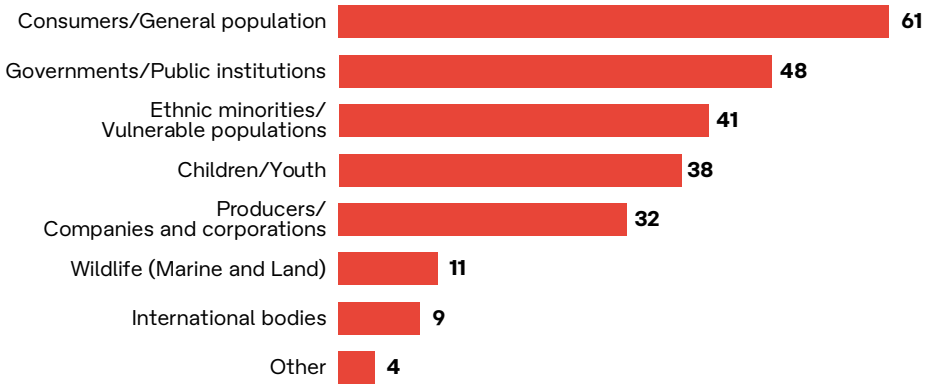
→ Fellows' Approach to Impact

Many Ashoka Fellows enable and empower others to be changemakers. From the survey, capacity building was the most common approach to impact. For climate specifically, designing and delivering regenerative business models (including building the capacity of the target population to adopt this model), such as regenerative farming and fishing, is also a common approach.



→ Target Population

We asked Fellows who the target population of their work is. The most common response was the general population and consumers. However, as they advance their impact, Fellows often begin working with governments and public institutions to scale their solutions.



Ashoka Fellows working in Planet & Climate measure their impact in a variety of ways, and most utilize multiple impact indicators. These impact metrics generally fall under three broad categories:

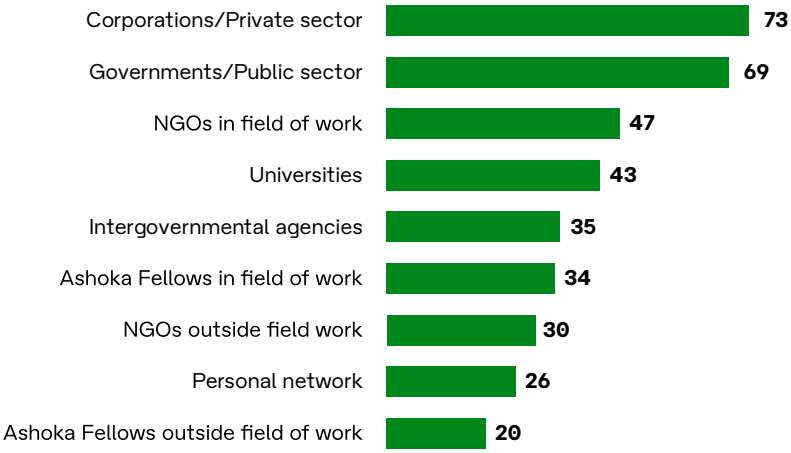
01 **Increased capacity from a human, infrastructural, and/or economic perspective**
Approximately half of the impact indicators listed by Fellows are related to these;

02 **Direct environmental impact**
About 33% (a third) of the indicators measured direct impact on the environment, and conservation and carbon mitigation each occupy about half of these indicator buckets even though these two are obviously interrelated;

03 **Institutional-level impact such as policy and regulations**
About 13% of the indicators are related to this category, such as the adoption of a program by the government, the institutionalization of an environmental education curriculum by the national government, and the publication of reports or advocacy work being picked by the media, hence exerting pressure on the public and private sector to be accountable for their actions.

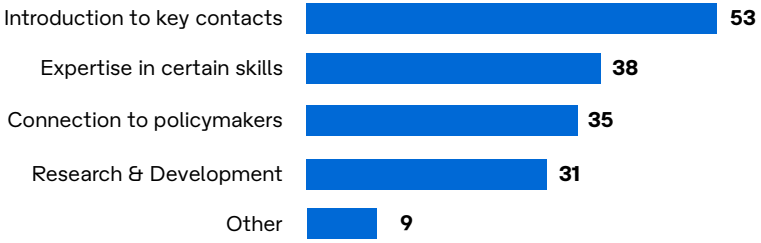
→ Partners most needed to scale Fellows' impact

When asked about the partners that they currently need at the moment in order to scale their impact, the respondents highlighted corporations and governments as the main stakeholders that they wish to engage.

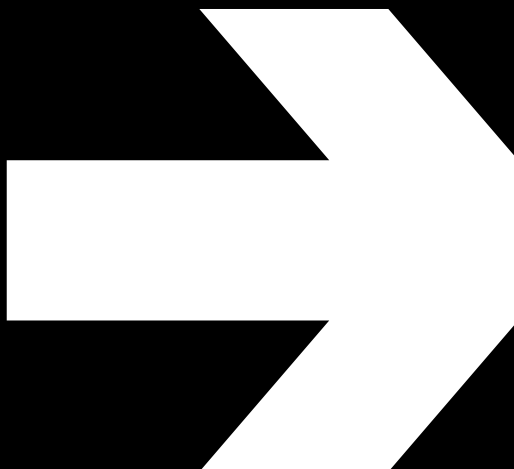


→ Non-financial support needed

Apart from the financial support needed by Fellows in scaling their impact, introduction to key contacts and expertise are the ones most required.



REFRAMING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE



WE ARE NATURE

Our perception of our relationship with nature is something so fundamental we often do not stop to think about it in our daily lives. However, these deep-rooted beliefs underpin how we approach the challenges in the field of Planet & Climate. As a result, we are operating from often uninterrogated assumptions. We risk trying to fix these problems using the same thinking that created them. This calls for an explicit examination of the paradigm we are operating from. Although the way humans see their relationship with nature is not static, nor is it the same around the world, we see the need for a paradigm shift. It is time for us to fundamentally shift our relationship with nature and understand that in fact, "We are nature."

Ashoka Fellows working in the field almost unanimously indicated that **any viable way forward must build on a fundamental reframing and restoration of our relationship with nature: one that is characterized by balance, respect, and reciprocation.** This is not a call to prioritize caring for the environment over humans. On the contrary, this awareness is fundamental to building any kind of longevity for human societies.

We are all part of an interconnected whole.

Before humans started living in concrete buildings, driving metal cars, and migrating to urban metropolises, our ancestors understood their existence as interconnected with the rest of nature. Rapid industrialization and economic growth seismically shifted the way humanity relates to the planet by viewing it as a resource available for exploitation. We no longer viewed ourselves as part of nature but rather as removed from and superior to it. This mindset is so prevalent in much of modern, globalized culture that it is almost invisible. We see it in things like our expectation that we can tame nature and outsmart natural disasters, growing rates of meat eating, and even in the language of "saving the planet" which subtly places nature as passive and humans as the heroes. This paradigm is particularly evident in our economic system – the living world is reduced to being resources we can turn into profit to fuel economic growth.[1]

The fact that we are all interconnected is an insight long understood by our ancestors and is still practiced by indigenous communities around the world today. Several Fellows spoke of the need to re-indigenize ourselves in the context of modern society. Across the different approaches, we see a skillful combination of data and scientific knowledge with indigenous wisdom, leveraging the technical capabilities of today, while staying congruent with how nature operates and working within its confines.

1 For a thorough overview, see Hickel, J. (2020). Less is more: How degrowth will save the world. Random House.

Ashoka Fellows in the spotlight

RETURNING AGRICULTURE TO ITS EVOLUTIONARY BLUEPRINT
REGINALDO HASLETT-MARROQUIN

Conventional agriculture harms the earth's living systems and exploits farm labor and whole communities. Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin works with farmers and farm workers in the U.S.A. and small farmers globally to scale economically viable and dignified food production using poultry-centered regenerative agroforestry. Regenerative agriculture reflects an indigenous understanding of nature's intended design for food production and land management.

In this model, much of the start-up work – regenerating the soil, actively and continually weeding, managing pests, and fertilizing – is performed by a universally ubiquitous farm animal: chickens. This system follows natural energy flows and plays to chickens' innate tendencies and strengths. These regenerative poultry farms not only sequester carbon but also deliver healthy and diverse foods while cooling the planet. Chickens evolved as jungle fowl, so this model mimics those conditions: a diverse canopy of native, perennial cover crops, free-range chickens that browse for bugs, work the soil, and fertilize the crops are among the core production system components, while collective enterprise design allows for aggregation of small-scale farms into large-scale entrepreneurial and economic development systems.

Regi is implementing this innovative system in regions spanning from Minnesota to Mexico, covering 12 Midwestern states in the U.S. as of 2021. The Regenerative Agriculture Alliance coordinates actors throughout the poultry supply chain, including smallholder farmers, processing plants, and retail distributors. In its short life, the Alliance has formed critical partnerships with farm associations to scale their model. The poultry supply chain is a path to fundamentally transform our food systems to enrich the earth rather than deplete it. Regi is bringing this concept to multiple destinations including Canada, Guatemala, and Belize.

Rather than an approach in which humans exert control over the environment, regenerative agriculture is an indigenous concept grounded in supporting all living systems and geo-evolutionary energy transformation processes.

> “Nature operates on very simple laws. The whole foundation of indigenous minds that native communities have preserved is critical… Balance is the key.”

For a closer look at Reginaldo's work, see our article on Forbes here.

→ The urgency of "forever": we need to redefine our approach to time.

Today, our world is marked by an ever-accelerating pace of change. Globalization and technological innovations have exponentially increased the speed of almost all aspects of our lives: we can travel to a different continent in mere hours, heat up a pre-cooked meal from the store in a matter of minutes, and access whole libraries worth of information at the tip of our fingers. This new reality has shifted our perception of time and expectations for how quickly our needs should be met. All around us, we see this mindset at work with negative consequences: the 24-hour news media cycle incentivizing instantaneous, shallow reporting; shareholder capitalism requiring that corporate executives and employees focus on short-term profits over long-term vision; politicians making short-sighted policies incentivized by election cycles.

This temporal assumption of modernity is a vast departure from nature's timeframe—operating in years and decades, and spans and evolves over lifetimes. It is also incongruent with how we have naturally existed in the world—the lifespan of each generation lasting a few decades, at which point we pass down our memory, legacy, and wealth down to our children, grandchildren, and future generations. Based on this intergenerational linkage, we ought to align with nature's timeline and assume the inherent responsibility of safeguarding and extending the health and wealth of our Planet & Climate for generations to come.

Ashoka Fellows working in the climate space hold two coexisting temporal dimensions in their minds: the urgency to address climate change now and the multi-generational impact of our actions today – both positive and negative. They work with communities in real time and their decentralized models allow for rapid scaling and replication, but the baseline of their designs is long-term, the envisioned impact on both the target population and environment spanning decades and centuries.

> "I think it's important for people that are committed to change to understand ourselves as part of a much longer story. We shouldn't expect that we're going to reach the panacea in our lifetimes. It's important to know that this is a long story and we're standing on top of the shoulders of a lot of people that came before us, and there's hopefully going to be a lot more people that come after us."
>
> **Enrique Lomnitz,**
> Founder of Isla Urbana and Ashoka Fellow

Ashoka Fellows in the spotlight

PLANNING FOR FOREVER
CYNTHIA ONG

The island of Borneo is one of the world's most resourceful marine areas with rapidly decreasing biodiversity and increasing fragmentation due to logging, oil palm plantation conversions, and mining. How does a group of stakeholders with competing interests come together to co-create an equitable and diversified circular economy in the region?

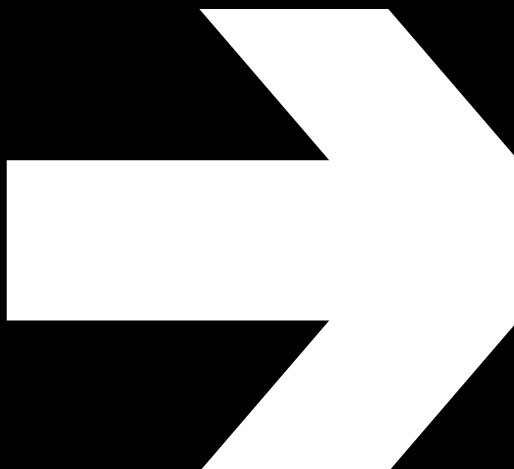
Cynthia Ong, founder of Forever Sabah, uses the power of distributed and facilitative leadership to breakdown the traditional hierarchical decision-making model and instead, create spaces where diverse voices from all levels of society come together to co-create a future. This process begins with a particular challenge and a range of stakeholders convened in the same space, including farmers, businesspeople, and government officials. Together, they explore the answer to the question: "Where will we be in 50 years if we continue on our current development trajectory?" From there, they arrive at a common vision of their imagined future where their goals align. Then, participants map out the entire value chain and identify who could be champions of change, tracing the history of how the issue came to be and analyzing its root causes, resulting in a shared understanding of the challenge. This iterative process engages diverse groups and reveals the complexity of the challenge, and surfaces and makes visible potential solutions.

Cynthia's methodology of converging stakeholders with vastly different priorities and interests to willingly make compromises and work towards common goals relies on a key design principle of aligning those in the room with a common timeframe. Rather than thinking in terms of the next election cycle, the next business quarter, or the next harvest season, people in the room are all asked to think in terms of future generations: "what will I be able to tell my grandchildren in the future?" This humanizes the process and reorients us towards nature's timeline, helping us break out of our professional identities and work together as fellow community members, seeing our professional capacity as a value-add contributing to the overall solution chain. The impact of such approach is immense: Forever Sabah is engaged in rolling out a sweeping sustainable palm oil initiative where the Sabah palm oil sector aims to shift its production towards RSPO (Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil) standards by 2025.

> "We are trying to ignite in each person the idea of Forever Sabah. Everyone finding their place in the whole ecology of change. Forever we will protect and preserve this heritage so that it's accessible in the future for generations to come. What we see is people being inspired to find their place, to act, find their own expression of what forever looks like"

For a closer look at Cynthia's work, see our article on Forbes here.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES TO SHIFT THE FIELD



EVERYONE IS NECESSARY.
EVERYONE HAS A ROLE TO PLAY.

In many parts of the climate crisis, we know what needs to happen – whether behavior change, structural change, or technological solutions – but the 'political will' required for uptake is largely missing. It is much easier to see it as someone else's responsibility to take care of our planetary health and develop solutions to things like the climate crisis. However, the scale and complexity of the issues and the speed of change needed requires the efforts and involvement of everybody.

CREATE INCLUSIVE PATHWAYS FOR PEOPLE TO CONTRIBUTE

There is an increasing desire to act. There has been a powerful increase in mass movements over the past few years, such as Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, and the Sunrise Movement, which have contributed to the groundswell of support for climate action. People need pathways to contribute.

→ Finding unique contributions

While we need both individual and systemic actions, we see examples of how to make each individual's contribution add up to more than the sum of their parts. We see many Fellows around the world create highly specific roles that tap into people's unique context. Such as Molly Burhans, who is working with the Catholic Church to use their vast land holdings as a way to contribute to climate change; or Nicole Rycroft, who works with companies with the biggest footprints on the forestry system to use their supply chains to incentivize sustainable forestry practices. These approaches enable individuals to play a role in ways that make their individual actions contribute to systemic change at societal level.

→ Increasing diversity in the global community working on climate change

Specifically, it is important to include marginalized and disenfranchised communities, since they are frequently the most impacted by climate change. We need to involve those first and worst hit by the impact of the climate crisis. Despite their direct contact with the effects of climate change, these communities are rarely involved in decision-making. Ashoka Fellows, in contrast, show how to develop effective solutions by engaging marginalized communities with their whole experiences, thoughts, and willingness for action. For example, Alasdair Harris, founder of Blue Ventures, puts traditional fishers at the heart of ocean conservation. Similarly, Joel Heath, founder of Arctic Elder Society, mobilizes traditional knowledge from the Inuit to facilitate indigenous-driven solutions for — and strategies to mitigate — climate change in the North, where vanishing sea-ice and unpredictable weather are shifting their cultures and livelihoods.

→ Just transitions

if solutions are not equitable by design, they are unlikely to have equitable outcomes. Large groups of people are at risk of being negatively impacted as we transition away from fossil fuel-driven systems – those who are directly affected by changes in production systems, industries, technologies. We have to involve them in what comes next: we have to actively embed social inclusion into the massive task of transitioning our economies and workforces, otherwise the transition will create real winners and losers. This is relevant from a justice perspective, and from a pragmatic perspective – the people who are invested in the status quo and who are at risk of losing out in the transition are more likely to fight it. This means that there is a solely social justice route into making a contribution to climate action: by providing people with a climate positive alternative for a dignified living they end up being involved by default. For example, Ashoka Fellow Wietse van der Werf is empowering unemployed youth and navy veterans to monitor Marine Protected Areas, embedding social inclusion into climate action (see our Forbes articles on Wietse's work here).

Ashoka Fellows in the spotlight

TURNING ILLEGAL LOGGERS INTO STEWARDS FOR HEALTHY FORESTS
KINARI WEBB

The interconnectedness between healthcare and the environment has become very visible during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it has been Kinari's area of expertise for a long time. Through her organization Health In Harmony, Kinari has been focusing on providing high-quality and affordable healthcare to communities in the Indonesian rainforests, so that they do not have to use logging the forest as a source of income that can pay for very expensive care. The clinic offers discounted healthcare to community members who stop illegal logging, and anyone can pay for their care with non-cash payments such as tree seedlings, manure or volunteering work in the hospital's organic gardens. This has reduced the pressure on communities and has also allowed the regeneration of the forest. Health In Harmony is now expanding to other regions such as Madagascar and Brazil and aims to develop mechanisms through which the spread of their approach can accelerate in order to avoid further damage for the environment.

When it comes to knowing how to live in balance with rainforest ecosystems and stop forest loss, rainforest communities are the experts. Health In Harmony enters these communities and practices a grounded methodology called Radical Listening in order to position Indigenous and traditional rainforest communities as climate and conservation experts, and identify and interrupt the various root causes of rainforest degradation. For example, to reverse deforestation, rainforest communities from Brazil to Indonesia do not design siloed, sector-based solutions; they design exchange systems, consistently defined by the following interdependent elements: healthcare, conservation, jobs training and education. From 2007-2017, Health In Harmony's $5.2 million USD investment in community-designed exchange systems (1) Averted the loss of $65.3 million USD worth of above ground carbon (a 12X return on investment), (2) Halted loss of primary forest & catalyzed 21,000 hectares of secondary forest regrowth, (3) Expanded habitat for 3,000 critically endangered Bornean orangutans, (4) Reduced by 90% the number of logging households, and (5) Facilitated a 67% drop in infant mortality in their hospital's catchment population (120K).

> "As I got to know the logging communities in Borneo, Indonesia, they told me that they were often logging to pay for healthcare since one medical emergency could cost an entire year's income. And that's very common throughout much of the world. When you are a subsistence agriculturalist and you don't have much cash, and you have essentially no savings, it's very, very difficult to figure out how you're going to get that money…what I found was that this intersection between human needs and particularly healthcare needs and destruction of the environment was nearly universal… So, either logging, overfishing, bombing the coral reefs, destroying the land to get gold, or putting mercury in the rivers. All of those things were driven often by the need for healthcare."

For a closer look at Kinari's work, see our article on Forbes here.

TURN DATA INTO STORIES THAT MOBILIZE

A huge amount of data and knowledge has been gathered on our planetary systems, but its full potential is not yet realized. We have an opportunity to better use this not just as a basis for action but also for empowerment. Technical knowledge and data should be made more widely available in formats that are understandable and relatable to a variety of citizens that can also concretely make use of this knowledge and implement solutions in their daily life. In particular, **we need to tell better stories** that help people see how the issues are relevant to them, how the things they are seeing happening in the world are part of a bigger pattern of a changing climate and our environment being harmed.

→ Democratization of access and understanding of data and knowledge to mobilize for action

We need to speed up acceptance of new research results and data and this can be accomplished through more effective communication of knowledge. Ashoka Fellow Mélanie Marcel brings together laboratories, companies, nonprofits, academic institutions, and social entrepreneurs to deliver social and environmental impact. By creating a space for cross-disciplinary collaboration and "social valorization" — attributing value to scientific research that is applied to solve social issues—Mélanie's work translates complex, scientific insights into understandable formats easily translatable into action (see our Forbes articles on Melanie's work here). Science communication needs to get to the local, household level, not just policy, while accounting for different education levels.

→ Data creation and usage can serve as an empowering tool for communities

By gathering and processing information and data, community members can leverage their own knowledge and direct access to essential information in front of more powerful bodies and within decision-making processes. Data can strengthen the voice of disenfranchised communities and emphasize their role as important stakeholders. For instance, Ashoka Fellow Regi Wahyu trains farmers to monitor weather conditions for their crops throughout the year and input the data through a secure app. This in turn increases their negotiating power with governments. The regulators need the fine-grained data and information from the ground and farming communities can leverage the systematic data-collection into well-argued policy requests, such as introduction of subsidies or improved legislation (see our Forbes articles on Regi's work here).

→ Expand the type of knowledge we base actions upon:

While scientific knowledge is at the core of understanding climate change, it is crucial to recognize and use all kinds of knowledge. Specifically, we need to value knowledge coming from direct experiences and emotional connections from traditional and indigenous communities. With his colleagues at the Arctic Eider Society, Ashoka Fellow Joel Heath creates an online network that facilitates the uptake and application of Inuit oral knowledge in modern day resource management while fostering inter-territorial governance systems to catalyze local conservation economies. Decisions based on much more complex information, data, and knowledge—going beyond quantitative indicators and relying also on grassroots knowledge and contextualization—tend to address the core of issues much better. We can also benefit from involving a dimension of spirituality – whether religious or tapping into the relation to nature. This can address the need for different action tactics in different cultures and also increase intrinsic motivation to get engaged for some people.

> “We've done a really terrible job at valuing every kind of knowledge. The official scientific knowledge from experts is considered good and superior, but the experience of someone who is ill, or a farmer, etc., is not considered knowledge...How do you really integrate into research and the innovation system everyone that is relevant? When we talk about climate, you have to integrate citizens. It is very complicated for a citizen to participate in research because we don't consider that [they] have to be part of these conversations. There is a need to democratize science, but not in the sense of just letting [people] know what is going on. It has to be one step further: being able to make industrial and scientific decisions where the voices and experiences of citizens are part of the equation. Doing so actually creates a new common knowledge.”
>
> **Mélanie Marcel,**
> Founder of SoScience and
> Ashoka Fellow

Ashoka Fellows in the spotlight

MAKING DATA WORK FOR EVERYONE
AL HARRIS

Millions of traditional fishers around the coastal tropics live precariously, dependent on dwindling fisheries, struggling with biodiversity loss, climate breakdown, and unequal access to basic services.

Alasdair Harris founded Blue Ventures, a marine conservation organization that exists to protect the life in our ocean, in 2003. The organization was founded on the simple idea of putting communities at the heart of conservation. For almost two decades, Blue Ventures has supported coastal communities across the tropics to develop locally led approaches to marine conservation that benefit people and nature alike. The organization's approach is to listen and respond to basic human needs in traditional fishing communities.

Data and evidence are the key tools that Blue Ventures uses to empower communities to reorient their approach to the marine areas. The model consists of expeditions with scientists and volunteers who collect data on the status and biodiversity of a local marine environment. Then, Blue Ventures gives the data to the communities so that they can observe how collective ecological management could provide both environmental and economic benefits. The data encourages communities to temporarily forego fishing in specific areas to allow the habitat to regenerate itself, in the process attracting more valuable marine life.

Blue Ventures also helps communities develop decision-making and management structures to better govern choices regarding the marine habitats they interact with. This approach demonstrates to communities how establishing a Marine Protected Area even for a short period of time can be beneficial. The Blue Ventures model also engages fishers and locals in research. Blue Ventures uses data and evidence to create behavior shifts, promote biodiversity, and ultimately empower and protect the coastal communities most vulnerable to climate change.

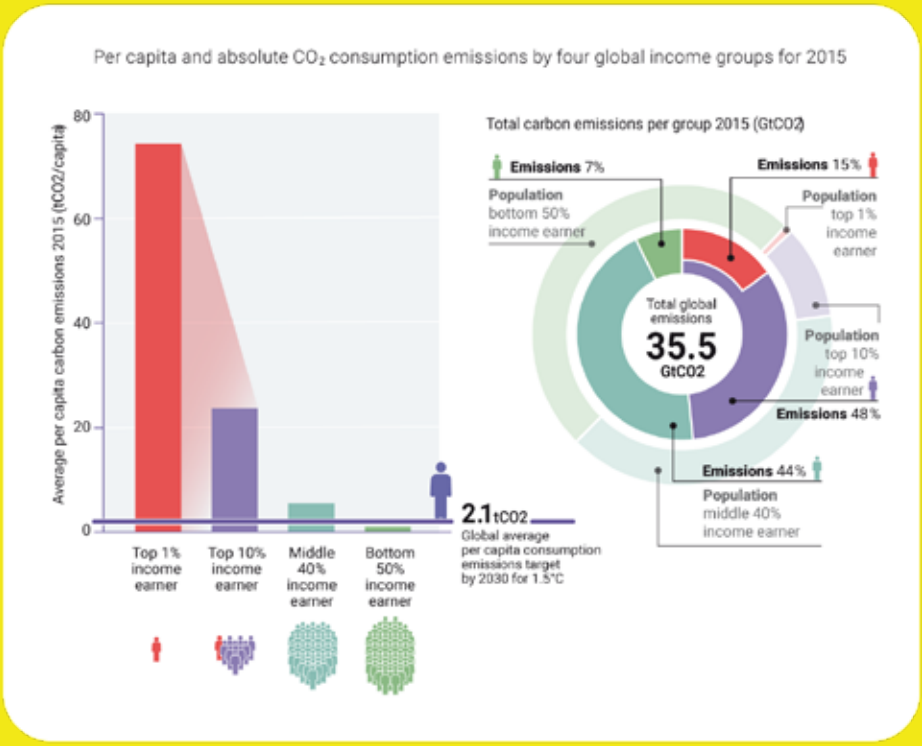
Blue Ventures has developed a scalable model for catalyzing and sustaining marine conservation, unlocking the potential of fishing communities to protect our ocean. Their grassroots replication strategy centers on finding credible community-based organizations which know their context, communities and how to deliver conservation on the water. Today, ocean areas equivalent to 17.7% of Madagascar's continental shelf are managed by communities working with Blue Ventures. Working alongside communities directly or through partners, Blue Ventures' supports communities to assert their rights and develop durable, evidence-based solutions for managing their oceans and fisheries.

> "We can't achieve marine conservation at scale without engaging the people that depend on the sea for survival."

For a close look at Al's work, see our article on Forbes here.

WE FACE A GLOBAL EMPATHY GAP

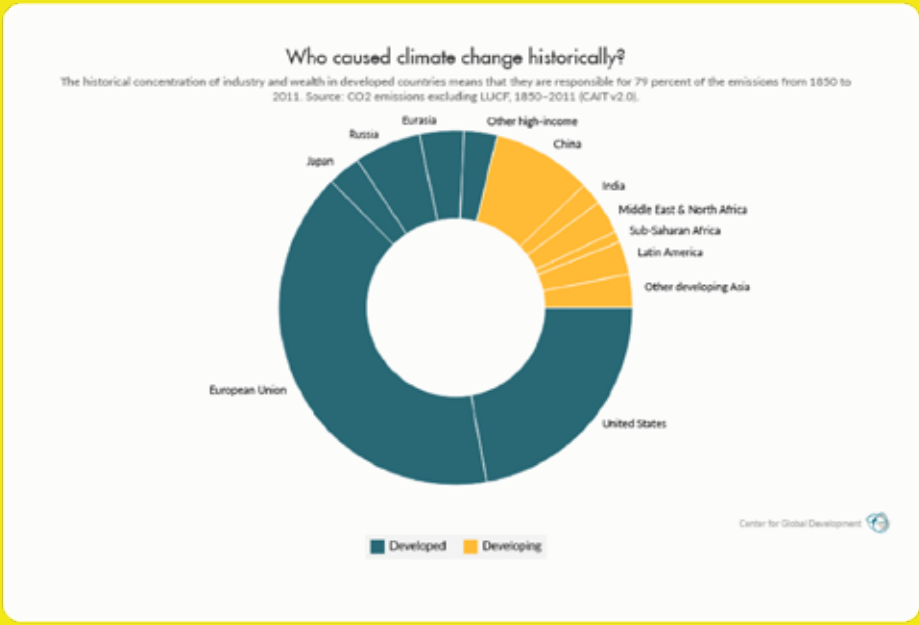
Those who are the least responsible often experience the impact first and most severely due to geography, heavy reliance on climate-sensitive sectors, and / or lacking the means to buffer the risks and damages of climate change. A recently published UN Environment Programme report found a stark inverse correlation between income and emissions, with the top 10 percent of income earners responsible for 36-49 percent of global emissions, while the bottom 50 percent responsible for only 7-15 percent.[1]



(Source: UNEP Emissions Gap Report 2020)

1 United Nations Environmental Programme. (2020). Emissions Gap Report 2020. (Online) Available at: https://www.unenvironment.org/emissions-gap-report-2020 (Accessed on January 11th, 2021)

According to a recent study by the Open Society Foundation, a significant proportion of Europeans and US-Americans still underestimate the degree of human contribution to climate change and the severity of its impact. Although many people support climate action in principle, they are at best ambivalent in their behaviors towards climate action and voting for corresponding policies.[1] This apparent incoherence between one's contribution towards and cognitive awareness of climate change, and the corresponding lack of behavioral shift towards its remedy could be explained by the separateness between human and nature, and among people across nations and continents. This empathy gap underpins much of our collective inaction towards climate change.



(Source: Center for Global Development)

> "We have an empathy crisis here…empathy towards the ones that are suffering the consequences of the crisis in relation to those that are not necessarily living it and personally being affected."

Gonzalo Muñoz,
Founder of TriCiclos and
Ashoka Fellow

1 Eichhorn, J., Molthof, L., and Nicke, S. (2020) From Climate Change Awareness to Climate Crisis Action: Public Perceptions in Europe and the United States. Open Society Foundations. (Online) Available at: https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/from-climate-change-awareness-to-climate-crisis-action (Accessed on February 22nd, 2021)

WORK WITH THE COMPLEXITY: WE NEED HOLISTIC, SYSTEMIC SOLUTIONS

Soil quality is not only a food and agriculture issue. Ocean acidification is not only a fishing industry issue. Climate change is not only a pollution issue. These all link to energy, water, cities, migration, human health; they are not just environmental issues, they are issues of poverty, equity, justice, gender. It is about the whole planet and what enables all living things to thrive.

Each of the planetary crises we are facing sits at the intersection of several systems, such as national and global economic systems, the physical climatic system, and socio-political systems. Each of these on their own are complex systems and often interact with each other through feedback loops, making it difficult to disentangle cause and effect.

This deep interconnectivity of issues requires that we tackle climate change in a holistic and systemic way. No single approach or organization will solve these issues alone. Technology has an important role, but we need to be wary of technological fixes that do not take into account the current economic, climatic and social systems and their resilience before building new and more appropriate structures for the future.

WE CAN SOLVE MORE THAN ONE PROBLEM AT A TIME

→ Addressing the interconnectivity of issues

The connection between multiple social and environmental issues is not always visible at first sight. It is important to stay aware of spillover effects both positive and negative. The following details the positive side – however, the negatives are just as common. For example, as people have become more conscious of the issue of plastic waste, the burden on the forestry sector to supply cardboard packaging risks undoing progress on sustainable practices (see the text box on Ashoka Fellow Nicole Rycroft, who is working with companies to address this – page 62). Land use is another place where these complexities surface: because solutions linked to land use are generally conceptualized by specific sectors operating in isolation, the accounting of how much land is required is not put into a broader context. For example, there will not be enough land available for what is projected to be needed for reforestation and rewilding for carbon sequestration, while also allowing enough for food production or for current biofuel needs projections. When a proposed solution is being analyzed (e.g., by government, an organization, or in the media), the direct costs and benefits are generally the limit of the equation. We would like to see the spillover effects also factored in – particularly the co-benefits (see below). Systems change requires understanding both the intended and unintended consequences of solutions and the feedback loops they play into, addressing multiple parts of the system simultaneously and making all these connections visible.

→ Finding the co-benefits

Co-benefits are the additional benefits that arise from action on climate change beyond the benefits directly linked to averting climate change. This is more than just a positive side effect of climate action – there is evidence to suggest that where people see co-benefits, they are more likely to support climate action or to take action themselves. Ashoka Fellow Alexander Eaton creates co-benefits with the invention and adoption of biodigester systems by small-scale rural farmers. These systems transform animal waste into an odorless gas usable for cooking and heating in addition to organic fertilizer for crop production. This not only creates renewable energy and captures soil carbon, but also reduces the use of chemical fertilizers that directly benefits crop yields (see our Forbes article on Alex's work here).

> "We live in a holistic world where everything we manage involves a web of social, cultural, environmental, and economic complexity. You cannot reduce that complexity to meeting your needs, your desires, or addressing problems without unintended consequences. When you develop policies holistically, the better practices float to the top automatically, because they're socially, environmentally, economically sound."
>
> **Allan Savory,**
> Founder of Holistic Management Framework and Ashoka Fellow

→ Beyond co-benefits to "multi-solving"

The interconnectivity of issues can lead to an approach called "multi-solving." This term comes from the work of Dr. Elizabeth Sawin of Climate Interactive, who defines it as situations "where people pool expertise, funding, and political will to solve multiple problems with a single investment of time and money."[1] Rather than choosing one objective as primary, and something else as the secondary, or "co-" benefit, multi-solving is an approach that allows for several problems to be solved simultaneously, with each of the problems being given equal footing.[2] One Ashoka Fellow who is taking this approach is Gary Cohen, founder of Healthcare Without Harm. Gary works with hospitals around the world for better waste management, eliminating harmful toxins, and more sustainable food procurement, as a way to simultaneously improve healthcare outcomes and environmental sustainability of the healthcare industry.

> "Our mission is critical from a gender perspective, a food perspective, a climate perspective, a biodiversity perspective, a human rights perspective. It's all of the above."

Al Harris,
Founder of Blue Ventures Framework and Ashoka Fellow

1 Sawin, Elizabeth. (2018). The Magic of "Multisolving". Stanford Social Innovation Review. (Online) Available at: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_magic_of_multisolving (Accessed on February 22nd, 2021)

2 You can read more here: Ashoka. (2021). How Our Covid Response Can Address Climate Change And So Much More. Forbes. (Online) Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/ashoka/2021/02/05/how-our-covid-response-can-address-climate-change-and-so-much-more/?sh=10f393bc23e1 (Accessed on February 22nd, 2021)

→ Moving beyond the narrative of sacrifice and trade-offs

At its most fundamental level, we still see a real need to help people understand the interconnectedness between human wellbeing and the prosperity of the rest of nature. What is often positioned as being in conflict is in fact inextricably interwoven – harming the environment has a negative impact on human health and well-being, and regenerating nature has positive impacts on human health and well-being. As we see with the possibilities of co-benefits and multi-solving, this interconnectedness does not have to result in a zero-sum game. The conventional narrative of trade-offs not only turns people away from climate action but also puts undue consequences on vulnerable populations who often become the target of such "sacrifice." In general, we see that framing action through the lens of trade-offs and sacrifice is at best missing out on opportunities, and at worst creating false dichotomies that obscure vested interests. An example of literally creating new and better opportunities, that could have been framed as a sacrifice by conventional thinking, is Ashoka Fellow Sue Riddlestone's Bioregional initiative. Bioregional uses 10 principles covering all aspects of social, environmental, and economic sustainability to guide governments and corporations to design and build physical infrastructure and communities able to operate within planetary bounds (see our Forbes article on Sue's work here).

Fighting climate change does not have to take the form of sacrifice. This challenge is ultimately an opportunity to lead healthier and better lives together with the rest of the natural world that we are part of.

Ashoka Fellows in the spotlight

HUMAN HEALTH AND CONSERVATION ARE INTERCONNECTED.
GLADYS KALEMA-ZIKUSOKA

In Uganda and across the world, public health and conservation programs are managed separately in wildlife-protected areas using different resources and institutions. Veterinarian and Founder of Conservation Through Public Health, Dr. Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka successfully helped institutions see the interconnections between the two and empowered the communities to view themselves as stewards of nature, undertaking an active role in protecting wildlife.

Gladys has created collaboration between Uganda's wildlife management and rural public health initiatives to develop programs and resources that benefit both people and animals. Gladys' work strives to promote gorilla conservation through improving their health and habitat, monitor and track zoonotic disease transmission to prevent outbreaks among wildlife, humans, and livestock, and create sustainable livelihoods for community members.

Conservation Through Public Health also advocates for their holistic, interconnected approach to be institutionalized at regional, national, and multilateral levels. The program's impact is tremendous: it has created 444 Village Health and Conservation Team community volunteers in Uganda to improve the lives of both animals and people. To date, the number of endangered mountain gorillas has been increased to 1,063 (almost double the number from when she first started working with the mountain gorillas in 1996). Conservation Through Public Health also engages local communities in tracking disease trends among both human and animal populations, ultimately improving public health and economic prosperity. Gladys's work revolves around recognizing the interdependent relationship between humans and nature and promoting mutually beneficial methods of engaging with wildlife.

For a more detailed look at Gladys's work, see our article on Forbes here.

DECENTRALIZE DECISION-MAKING

One way to address the complexity of these issues is through decentralization. This means empowering the communities, organizations, and people closest to the context to make decisions, rather than a centralized institution or government. In addition to increasing the contextual relevance of decisions, it also ensures everyone can play a role. This goes beyond participation and consultation practices from centralized bodies. For example, in response to national government inaction, we see many cities and communities building regenerative systems and practices independently. We also see organizations with global footprints move decision-making away from central headquarters to local offices. This allows decision-making to be more inclusive and enables citizens and marginalized communities to be more present in the decision processes. It provides ways to embed different types of knowledge, experience, and emotions as part of decision-making processes – thus gaining higher buy-in and commitment from citizens and communities who are closest to the issues.

While not all decisions are appropriate for decentralization, the argument from Fellows is that we too often default to centralization. It is possible to amplify the impact of decentralized approaches through coordination and knowledge sharing across multiple communities, creating feedback loops both between communities who face similar challenges or share other resemblances and also back to centralized bodies such as government to inform official policy. An example of this comes from Ashoka Fellow John Richardson, who created Canada's largest-ever consultation as input to the federal government's budget after COVID-19 crisis. Through Build Back Better, citizens are able to directly participate in impacting the government of Canada in determining priority areas for the next budget cycle towards reduced greenhouse gas emission and just economic transition.

> "In a country as diverse as Colombia, we have totally different contexts in our cities. If you go from one place to another, we have totally different landscapes, climates, etc., the diversity is enormous. In terms of climate change, the consequences are diverse too. So, the different approaches for solving or for adapting and mitigating climate change should be totally different, and the national policies that try to generalize the action are not going to work. We need localized and decentralized perspectives."
>
> **Juliana Gutierrez,**
> Founder of Low Carbon City and Ashoka Fellow

Ashoka Fellows in the spotlight

DECENTRALIZED WATER HARVESTING MITIGATING WATER CRISES
ENRIQUE LOMNITZ

Enrique started Isla Urbana to promote and expand rainwater harvesting as a method to tackle Mexico's water crisis due to extreme weather conditions and failing infrastructure. By providing households with the simple technical tools that allow them to harvest their own rainwater, Isla Urbana reduces the pressure on the Mexico City's water delivery infrastructure and offers viable alternatives for neighborhoods and communities. The rainwater harvesting system is part of what Enrique calls "resilience infrastructure": water harvesting also has an effect on local flood mitigation, as the sewage system does not get overburdened during heavy rains and storms. Additionally, the Isla Urbana system also acts as an empowerment avenue for citizens: by harvesting their own rainwater people gain more control over essential resources for their lives, reducing dependency on centralized and sometimes remote systems.

Enrique's decentralized model was so successful at the local level that the government adopted and scaled it, especially after it showed much more resilience in case of potential flooding than the centralized government water infrastructure. The work of Isla Urbana is a telling story of how local, community-based solutions for environmental issues are key for making progress in this field. Connecting these solutions with systems already in place will trigger the deep transformation required.

> "Having a solution that actually works is a two-sided thing. You need to have something that works physically, and it also needs to be something that's perceived as working by people. That means that you need to do a lot of proof-of-concept work. In our case, you need to actually put up rainwater harvesting systems and have people say that they work. It can't be you convincing people all the time."

For a closer look at Enrique's work, see our article on Forbes here.

WE HAVE THE SOLUTIONS. LET'S USE THEM.

We sometimes still think that what is needed is new solutions. The reality is that we already have the vast majority of technological and social solutions and we know what they can deliver. Ashoka Fellows emphasize that what is needed now is to find innovative and appropriate ways to make use of and scale existing, proven solutions. This means thinking about the whole system, and the barriers and enablers to scale. This should not assume a copy/paste approach will work – it is important to tailor solutions to fit specific contexts.

→ Make proven solutions more visible

Decision-makers do not always have visibility of what is working. Given the breadth and complexity of the issues, this is understandable. Identifying what works both locally and at scale and making those solutions visible is key. These solutions need to be easily understood by a variety of people – particularly decision-makers within government and funders/investors – and then strategically deployed. For example, Ashoka Fellow Biplab Paul established a cost-effective irrigation system for farming in rural India, which can be tailored to regional needs. As a result of its success local deployment, the solution was adopted by the regional and national government in India to be scaled all over the country.[1]

→ Prioritize solutions coming from communities who are the guardians of natural resources

This links to the aforementioned decentralization theme. The knowledge of these communities is all too often under-prioritized, leading to less effective solutions. In addition, they are often marginalized in the process of deploying solutions. Treating these communities with respect – understanding and empathizing with their daily realities, taking their concerns seriously, and seeing them as the experts that they are in dealing with climate realities - is something we need to collectively become better at.

→ Existing solutions also need to be scaled

Rather than overly prioritizing innovation, more investment needs to focus on scale. Scaling strategies need to harness the speed of scaling through policy and working with governments and commercial chains rather than scaling individual organizations. This is an incremental process that requires alignment internationally, while also enabling adaptation to local contexts. More intensive connections between solution providers – local communities, social entrepreneurs, technological companies – need to be fostered to create more effective change. An excellent example of this comes from Ashoka Fellow Juan Pablo Larenas: through Sistema B, Juan Pablo brings together businesses, civil society, and governments on an open platform where they collaborate and align on solutions to social and environmental problems. Then, the best solutions are presented for consideration as new public policies for scaled deployment.

1 Ioan, Alexandra, Mühlenbein, Odin and Shirobokova, Olga. (2020). Systemic and empowering.
Social entrepreneurship in the time of philanthrocapitalism. Ashoka Learning and Action
Center. (Online) Available at: https://lac.ashoka.org/story/systemic-and-empowering (Accessed on March 9th, 2021)

Ashoka Fellows in the spotlight

DELIVERING LAST-MILE ENERGY SOLUTIONS TO THE POOR
HARISH HANDE

Harish Hande is the founder of SELCO India which offers sustainable energy solutions for low-income populations. Based in India, Harish created SELCO in 1995 to sell, service, and finance clean energy to underserved populations. Given that around 80 percent of those in the world who lack electricity reside in rural areas, SELCO developed unique technology to serve the needs of the rural poor.

SELCO's portfolio includes over 20 customized solar products geared towards households, livelihoods, and institutions. SELCO has developed and distributed several innovations including a decentralized renewable energy system for home lighting, mini grids, and solar-powered community energy hubs. The technologies concurrently solve multiple problems including climate change: each solar system that SELCO installs reduces more than 5 tons of CO2 emissions per household, ultimately reducing global warming.

Furthermore, SELCO empowers health centers and educational centers through its renewable energy systems. In under 25 years of operating, SELCO has scaled tremendously: it operates 67 energy centers and has reached 1 million people in India. In addition to its grassroots operations which directly distribute renewable decentralized energy systems, SELCO has expanded to operate an open-source research lab for replicable social innovations, an incubation program for clean energy enterprises, and an impact fund for energy access enterprises.

For a closer look at Harish's work, see our article on Forbes here.

FUNDING SYSTEMICALLY AND HOLISTICALLY

An overarching challenge in global climate action relates to the disconnect between climate funding strategy and climate change complexity. Currently, climate-related causes receive less than 2% of the total global philanthropic giving.[1] Donors and investors often prefer short term projects with quantifiable results. There is a prevalence of funding for technical inventions or direct service over collaborative approaches that address the interconnectivity of environmental, social, and economic issues over a multi-year timeframe. Furthermore, there is often an artificial delineation between environmental and social programs, despite the interconnectedness of climate and human issues. These factors create significant bottlenecks for solution providers trying to take holistic approaches and promotes disaggregation of efforts. It incentivizes solutions that address symptoms rather than the root causes of climate change. It is understandable that under such overwhelming pressure and urgency, we tend to gravitate towards solutions that prioritize speed. However, we must zoom out and recognize that addressing the complexity of these issues necessitates a systems approach that corresponds to the scale and interconnectedness of the problem.

Ashoka, with several partners, has worked on how we as a sector can get better at funding and supporting systems change. This is not just a challenge for the Planet & Climate field, but the message from Ashoka Fellows interviewed for this report was clear: funding practices are all too often standing in the way of impact. In a 2020 report Ashoka produced in partnership with McKinsey & Co., we identified five principles and resulting practices that funders can adopt[2]:

- → Embrace a systems mindset by being clear about the systems you want to change.
- → Support evolving paths to systems change by funding systems leaders with transformative visions of improved systems rather than projects, investing in learning and capability building and encouraging collaboration among systems change leaders.
- → Work in true partnership by acknowledging and working against power dynamics, providing support that fits systems change leaders' needs, and being mindful of their limited resources.
- → Prepare for long-term engagement by being realistic about the time it takes to achieve systems change, acknowledging that the path of the initiatives will change along the way and encouraging realistic ambitions.
- → Collaborate with other stakeholders by aligning with other funders, building networks for systems change leaders, and leaving the leading role to systems change leaders.

For concrete recommendations for how the five principles can be put into practice, see the full report in the references.

1 Roeyer, H., Ahmad, M., Fox, M. and Menon, S. (2020). Funding Trends: Climate change mitigation philanthropy. Climateworks Global Intelligence. (Online) Available at: https://www.climateworks.org/report/funding-trends-climate-change-mitigation-philanthropy/ (Accessed on February 22nd, 2021

2 Ashoka, Catalyst 2030, Co-Impact, Echoing Green, McKinsey, Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, Skoll Foundation, SystemIQ. (2020). Embracing Complexity. Towards a shared understanding of funding system change. (Online) Available at: https://lac.ashoka.org/ sites/default/files/atoms/files/Embracing%20Complexity_Full%20Report.pdf (Accessed on February 22nd, 2021)

ECONOMIC STRUCTURES THAT GUIDE MORE EQUITABLE, SUSTAINABLE DECISIONS

There is no way to seriously address the interconnected issues in the field of Planet & Climate without engaging with our global economic system. The paradigm of separation between humanity and nature has come to underpin our global economic system. A system which sees nature as a “resource” to be extracted and used to fuel profit and growth – provides us with the default framework for billions of decisions every day. Within the economic system, many of the decisions we make daily are constrained so that the only options available to us have negative environmental impact by default. What would an economic system look like that focused on human and planetary health rather than solely on financial growth? This is the place we see the reframing of our relationship with nature potentially providing a north star.

In addition to talking to Ashoka Fellows about this, we also sought out expert contributions and ideas in this space and found that approaches to rebalancing our economies fit into three broad categories:

01

Working within the existing system

based on assumptions that growth can be decoupled from resource use and greenhouse gas emissions, using profit as a motive for positive environmental outcomes, for example, ethical consumption or the B Corp movement.

02

Improving structures and rules of the game of the current system

making profit and positive environmental outcomes align structurally. For example, "natural capital," which aims to put a financial value on nature, turning it into assets that can be accounted for in cost/benefit analysis. Other examples include circular economy approaches and the Green New Deal.[1]

03

Redesigning the whole system

moving away from profit and growth as the orienting goals of our economic system. This requires fundamental shifts in our thinking and priorities for how we produce, trade, and utilize resources. Some examples of this approach are the degrowth movement[2] or the doughnut economics framework.[3]

While the economic system came up in most interviews, few Ashoka Fellows work directly on structurally changing the economic system. In the immediate future, Ashoka will be looking for additional innovations in this area, as our interviews revealed the need for more grassroots approaches to be surfaced. Still, during the Ashoka Fellows conversations, the below themes were explored.

1 Friedman, L. (2019). What is the Green New Deal?, New York Times. (Online) Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/21/climate/green-new-deal-questions-answers.html (Accessed on December 17th, 2020)

2 Degrowth. (2020). What is degrowth?. (Online) Available at: https://www.degrowth.info/en/what-is-degrowth/ (Accessed on December 20th, 2020)

3 Raworth, K. (2020). Exploring Doughnut Economics. (Online) Available at: https://www.kateraworth.com/doughnut/ (Accessed on December 16th, 2020)

THERE ARE MULTIPLE ALTERNATIVES FOR HOW THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM COULD EVOLVE.

→ Redefining what we understand by value and wealth to prioritize nature over money

Despite the dominance of economic drivers in how decisions are made by default, not everyone is motivated by economic targets. For many people, there is existing intrinsic motivation to protect nature. However, there are often competing motivations that are more urgent. We see this tendency whenever livelihoods come into conflict with protecting nature – whether in marginalized communities or in big business. For example, Kinari Webb, whose work is explored on page 34, discovered that an absence of reliable healthcare led families to illegal logging to pay for treatment when health issues arose. Many Fellows made the case for moving beyond economic incentives as the default levers for change, harnessing the intrinsic motivation to protect nature for nature's sake by removing the competing priorities like access to healthcare. A shift in how we define wealth could be part of the solution: collectively realizing that nature is wealth, and that financial wealth brings little advantage on an uninhabitable planet. This school of thought rejects the idea that by pricing natural value into our economic system we will have better decisions. Nature is valuable beyond our imagination, far more than any price tag that can be placed on it. There is a risk that by pricing nature it reframes it as explicitly being for sale, reducing it to purely financial value and meaning that the price of its destruction could be justified by the highest bidder.[1]

→ Changing incentives through markets

Markets are complex decision-making structures, enabling decentralization by utilizing a shared value system in the form of money. However, the current market system is not optimized for preventing environmental harm or incentivizing positive environmental practices. This school of thought recommended shaping economic markets by changing tax systems, types of investment available, metrics for investing sustainably, etc., to better incentivize decisions that align with positive environmental outcomes. By collectively triggering changes to the supply side of the economy, consumers would be offered more sustainable choices, enabling behavioral change both individually and collectively throughout supply chains. Ashoka Fellow Donna Morton is one of the early innovators in using tax shifting as an economic incentive to align social and environmental needs with market drivers. Donna has built support from NGOs, governments, corporations, and financial institutions to create the necessary momentum for such a shift. More recently, Donna is creating North America's first 100% clean ETFs (Exchange Traded Funds) for sustainable investments.

1 Monbiot, George. (2018). Price Less. (Online) Available at: https://www.monbiot.com/2018/05/18/price-less/ (Accessed on February 22nd, 2021)

> It's a really interesting time to rethink our capital markets and how they work. At both the political and market capital levels, we can do a better job including the negative externalities of our current infrastructure and make rational market incentives, so that there's a real cohesion in terms of how things are purchased, the types of investment that's available, and results-based financing. All of that could unify to support a number of positive initiatives in the economy and to stop favoring elements that still allow dirty or unjust business models to thrive.

Alex Eaton,
Founder of Instituto Internacional de Recursos Renovables and Ashoka Fellow

→ Starting from the real availability and sustainability of natural resources

While there has been a robust debate about the possibility of decoupling economic growth from resource use,[1] there is a growing body of evidence that indicates that regardless of the theoretical appeal of "green growth," economic growth currently drives resource extraction and growth. Rather than starting with the objective of economic growth in mind, this school of thought argues we instead need to start from what the planet can sustainably provide and regenerate year by year. This means reducing consumption of resources to rebalance it with what is available within sustainable limits. For example, Ashoka Fellow Regi Wahyu invests in small farmers and traditional agricultural methods by equipping rural farmers with a fair and transparent agricultural data sharing platform using blockchain, thereby increasing their collective power in the agricultural supply chain. Another Fellow, Gonzalo Muñoz replaces the inefficient waste management system in Chile by expanding materials available for recycling and creating financial incentives for both the public and companies to recycle effectively, thereby moving to a closed loop and circular model. Here, too, a refocus on local resources and local communities can help ensure more responsible usage.

> The other [positive trend] that's already emerging and hopefully will accelerate is the ESG [Environmental, Social and Governance] financial system. It is evident that it's much riskier to anchor your investments in dirty activities that are destroying the environment and destroying society, but it wasn't evident a few years ago. Now, we have to develop the right taxonomy and metrics for that to be absolutely integrated into all the financial systems around the world. And again, that's something that the pandemic has accelerated.

Gonzalo Muñoz,
Founder of TriCiclos and Ashoka Fellow, COP High Level Champion

1 Hickel, J. (2020). Less is more: How degrowth will save the world. Random House.

Ashoka Fellows in the spotlight

INVESTMENT BASED ON CLIMATE GOALS
MARK CAMPANALE

At Carbon Tracker, Mark Campanale works with companies to connect their business practices with the goals of the UN Paris Climate Agreement. In order to address global warming, the organization not only tracks carbon stockpiles and the environmental footprint of corporations in the fossil-fuel industry, but it also works directly with shareholders, financial analysts and fund managers on building more sustainable investment practices and increasing pressure for responsible business practices.

Mark is changing how analysts, fund managers, regulators and rating agencies evaluate risk and connect financial to environmental risk. By pointing out the existence of "unburnable carbon" as a class of stranded assets (i.e., "unburnable" oil reserves that can never be exploited due to treaties like the Paris Agreement) he is shifting how financial markets value the fossil fuel industry. This leads to more climate-aligned capital markets and stronger accountability for fossil fuel companies. It also allows shareholders and environmentalists to argue for a new approach to responsible investment.

Mark's work kickstarted the global fossil fuel divestment movement. It also triggered change in individual companies such as BP, which plans to cut down its oil and gas production by 40% by 2030. The launch of the DivestInvest movement triggered some $14 trillion of pension funds and endowments divested from fossil fuels. Through Mark's work providing analysis to Climate Action 100+, over $52 trillion of pension funds and asset managers are engaging on climate risk. His work depicts the way key players in our current economic systems can play an active part in shifting practices and thus creating a new functional and sustainable global economy for the planet.

For a closer look at Mark's work, see our article on Forbes here.

EQUIP THE WORKFORCE FOR A FUTURE OF GREEN JOBS

The labor required to deliver a green transition is huge.[1] Many of the industries that will transform most dramatically will be entering a permanent state of increased demand for labor (for example, both the renewable energy transition and the transition to regenerative agriculture will require larger workforces). In fact, research has shown that more jobs will be created than lost in the transition to a green economy. However, there is a need to retrain people to deliver the specific requirements of the transition process and what comes next. The speed required for this transition means that this will need support from forces outside of the normal labor market. This creates important questions about who should pay for this during the interim phase – governments, business, individuals – as the benefits accrue to all groups.

1 International Labour Organization. (2018). Greening with Jobs. World Employment Social Outlook. (Online) Available at: https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_628654/lang--en/index.htm (Accessed on March 9th, 2021)

Ashoka Fellows in the spotlight

BUILDING A NEW WORKFORCE
BRANDON DENNISON

Brandon Dennison started Coalfield Development in West Virginia with the mission to create new employment opportunities and pioneer viable economic markets in US rural communities, especially those that have been suffering from the closing of the mining industry in the region. Brandon and his team have a 3-tier approach: they offer disadvantaged workers employment at a living wage for 33 hours/week in one of their many start-up businesses; 6 hours/week are dedicated to formal education towards a degree in collaboration with a community college; and 3 additional hours/week are dedicated to personal development and community-related skills and issues such as financial management, communication, leadership, etc. Today, Coalfield Development has created over 300 new jobs, trained over 1,300 people, leveraged more than $25 million in new investment to the region, and revitalized over 200,000 square feet of formerly dilapidated property.

Brandon's approach is a clear illustration of the opportunity mindset, rather than one of sacrifice. On one hand, he is focusing on developing a professional, dynamic and adaptable workforce that can thrive in an increasingly changing economy. On the other hand, he is building real economic alternatives in rural regions previously centered around extractive industries. His work illustrates how every community and every person can become an active part of a more harmonious existence between humans and the rest of nature, while not sacrificing economic well-being, as well as creativity, innovation, and dynamism.

> "Jobs are important. What we're saying though is that quality jobs allow people to discover themselves, contribute, have a full and meaningful life. This is not about giving out certificates in one skill set or the other and setting people up for 30-year careers in that one thing. It's about cultivating lifelong workers who are also lifelong learners. The mindset we want to model, inspire, and unlock is more entrepreneurial w– prepared for shifting industries, for a changing world."[1]

1 Ashoka. (2021). Why this workforce program in West Virginia can be critical for the nation. Forbes. (Online) Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/ashoka/2018/10/26/why-this-workforce-program-in-west-virginia-can-be-critical-for-the-nation/?sh=2153404a1c1d (Accessed on February 24th, 2021)

A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO ENGAGING WITH THE "BAD GUYS"

100 companies are responsible for 71% of all industrial emissions.[1] Vested interests have lobbied to maintain subsidies and tax breaks for fossil fuel companies around the world that dwarf the investment into renewables. Oil and gas companies have followed in the footprints of the tobacco industry by funding and spreading disinformation that has directly caused years of delay on decarbonization. In addition, these big emitters have caused direct harm to communities where they worked and, rather than compensating them for the damages, waged devastating legal battles against the environmental activists and lawyers who sought justice.[2] In short, while it often feels like everyone is responsible for climate change, there are definitely actors that carry a disproportionate amount of responsibility.

→ Pragmatic idealism

Because of the complexity of climate change, it is often unclear the best way to engage with these actors. Many Ashoka Fellows chose to use an approach we call "pragmatic idealism" – choosing to use all the levers of influence at their disposal to transform the actors that have disproportionate negative impact on the environment. We see a move away from the narrative of "good guys vs. bad guys."

→ Leveraging corporate enlightened self-interest

In order to trigger corporate behavioral change, an opportunity to influence can be found in pragmatically assessing the interests of companies – such as workforce (hiring, retention etc.) or financial pressures. Instead of antagonizing, it is possible to identify the business case for change and the human motivations of the individuals that are present in the organization at the same time.

→ Vigilance for greenwashing

This approach does not ignore the risk of companies greenwashing. There is still a challenge around how we can know if a company is striving for real transformation. Many of the worst actors have a track record of denial, distraction (greenwashing), and delay, despite knowing that the impact of doing so, in order to continue profiting off unsustainable, unjust practices. Social entrepreneurs know that partnering with organizations who are not committed to true transformation runs the risk of giving a company the positive association of their brand, unintentionally becoming complicit in maintaining a company's social license to operate even when they are not truly transforming. As a result, every social entrepreneur we spoke to chooses to explicitly avoid interacting with certain categories of actors. They have different criteria for where they draw that line.

1 Griffin, P. (2017) The Carbon Majors Database. The Carbon Disclosure Project. (Online) Available at: https://b8f65cb373b1b7b15feb-c70d8ead6ced550b4d-987d7c03fcdd1d.ssl.cf3.rackcdn.com/cms/reports/documents/000/002/327/original/Carbon-Majors-Report-2017.pdf?1499691240 (Accessed on December 16th, 2020)

2 For example, lawyer Steven Donziger. See Lerner, Sharon. (2020). How the Environmental Lawyer Who Won a Massive Judgment Against Chevron Lost Everything. The Intercept. (Online) Available at: https://theintercept.com/2020/01/29/chevron-ecuador-lawsuit-steven-donziger/ (Accessed on February 24th, 2021)

→ Strengthening accountability mechanisms

We see several strategies being used for this through civil society: social entrepreneurs and NGOs exerting public pressure to trigger regulatory and corporate change; consumer-driven movements for ethical consumption influencing company strategies (e.g. boycotts); citizens sanctioning their elected representatives for failing to take action on climate change through voting behavior, mobilizing for policy change, etc. For example, Ashoka Fellow Ignace Schops was one of the initiators of "Klimaatzaak" in 2014, a famous court case filed by citizen organizations against the Belgian governments for failing to fulfill their climate obligations.

On the other hand, government needs to do more than simply incentivize positive adaptation through the subsidies they offer. They also need specific regulation of sectors impacting the environment, which can be enforced legally. One example of action at the intersection between regulation and civil society is Client Earth, founded by Ashoka Fellow James Thorton, who initiates legal proceedings against companies and governments in favor of their sole client – the earth - enforcing accountability and improving the law for environmental protection.

→ Power dynamics matter

Ensuring checks and balances means explicitly addressing power dynamics. Aspects such as the colonial past and the differences in economic power between different players in the field can also influence to what extent accountabilities can really be built between corporations, public institutions, and grassroots initiatives. Corporate economic power usually surpasses that of citizen efforts in terms of advocacy and lobbying. Ashoka Fellow Nicole Rycroft from Canopy made an explicit strategic decision to not enter into financial relationships with any of the companies they advise so they can maintain equal power, maximizing their ability to influence some of the largest companies in the world (see the Fellow Spotlight for more details on Canopy's work).

> "We are up against huge corporate, profit-driven machines. These mechanisms are designed to extract value from nature and distribute maximum profit to shareholders. I don't primarily blame the individual corporations or the individuals within them for creating this system. But they are very, very powerful machines, that currently operate in ways that are detrimental to the long-term interests of life on earth."

Tristram Stuart,
Founder of Feedback and Ashoka Fellow

Ashoka Fellows in the spotlight

FROM EXTRACTION TO CONSERVATION
NICOLE RYCROFT

As the Founder of Canopy, Nicole Rycroft partners with the private sector to develop business solutions that protect forests. Canopy partners with companies who benefit from the current system of forest degradation, working with the forest industry's largest customers, including publishers and clothing, food and cosmetic brands. Since its founding in 1999, Canopy has worked with over 750 partners to reform their practices and integrate environmental conservation into their companies' values, one of its most influential projects being the greening of the Harry Potter series internationally. In 2019, Canopy launched the Pack4Good initiative which aims to support the world's largest corporate consumers to move the massive global paper packaging supply chain out of high carbon forests and towards resource-efficient design. So far, 126 global brands worth over $71 billion have already made Pack4Good commitments, including H&M, PVH, Lush, and HH Global.

Recognizing the power of the market, Nicole is also generating market demand for environmentally friendly and circular alternatives to forest products. Canopy works to incentivize and support consumer brands and producers to voluntarily reform their practices, eliminate their consumption of species and carbon-rich forest products, and become champions of forest conservation. In the process, Nicole is preserving a crucial asset for mitigating climate change. Forests – particularly large, biodiverse frontier forests – store more than 430 billion metric tons of carbon. Canopy engages potential opponents as allies in preserving the world's forests.

For a closer look at Nicole's work, see our article on Forbes here.

LOOKING AT THE CURRENT ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK AND INCENTIVES

The Industrial Revolution began an era of hyper-production and consumption that has continued to this day. This evolved into the current version of globalized capitalism that is now the world's economic modus operandi. The process of industrialization released greenhouse gases at an unprecedented rate, starting what we now know as climate change; it consumed ever increasing amounts of resources, putting whole eco-systems into irreversible decline and causing species extinction; and it created waste which, like plastic, will outlive generations.

At the institutional level, the current growth-based economic system has created a disproportionate concentration of power and resources in the hands of multinational corporations and government entities who have been the largest contributors to climate change. According to the Carbon Disclosure Project, over half of industrial emissions since 1988—the year human-induced climate change was recognized— can be traced to just 25 corporate and state entities, and just 100 companies are responsible for 71% of all industrial emissions.[1]

The fact that relatively few actors hold the key to reversing climate change would be more encouraging if the destruction of the natural world was not so intricately tied to their profits. Our existing global economic framework is designed to rely on perpetual growth and profit maximization. This paradigm has driven companies to seek short-term profits at the expense of depleting our natural resources and exploiting human labor rather than planning for long-term financial, social, and environmental sustainability that will ultimately provide longevity for both humans and the rest of the planet.

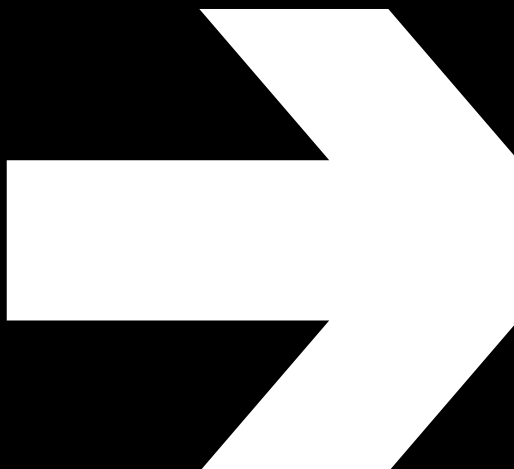
Economic growth is seen by many as the path to improving living standards for all people. Because economic growth comes with many negative side effects – environmental degradation and inequality being just two – by focusing on economic growth as a proxy for improving living standards we miss the signals that tell us if it is working or not. If our objective is to improve living standards for all people, let us pursue that directly. What makes this more complex is the way profit-maximization and growth are embedded. For example, where companies are legally obliged to maximize shareholder returns; where pension funds hold large stakes in polluting companies; and where people's basic needs are being provided by environmentally destructive companies. Even many corporations that have committed to climate pledges or claim to include sustainability in their practices have been called out for greenwashing— i.e. marketing that aims to present companies as climate stewards but in reality, underplay or cover up their harmful environmental practices.[2] Similarly, some "low-carbon funds" invest in oil and gas and companies that are not low carbon.[3] To meaningfully and permanently shift the behaviors of those with resources and influence, we urgently need a new framework for our global economy.

1 Watson, B. (2016). The troubling evolution of greenwashing. The Guardian. (Online) Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2016/aug/20/greenwashing-environmentalism-lies-companies (Accessed on December 16th, 2020)

2 In December 2020 the Financial Times covered a report by the think-tank Common Wealth showing a third of all "low-carbon funds", or so-called climate funds, invest in oil and gas and companies that are not low carbon, like technology and banks that indirectly contribute to or support high-emissions industry

3 Riding, Siobhan. (2020). Third of Low Carbon Funds invest in Oil and Gas. Financial Times. (Online) Available at: https://www.ft.com/content/cd819461-1925-48e0-86af-e81a56c0d3f8 (Accessed on February 24th, 2021)

WHAT NEXT?



In our conversations with Ashoka Fellows, we tapped into their reflections, wishes, concerns and visions for the future – not only in what needs to be done, but also regarding how we should do it. Ashoka Fellows have worked within and across communities and sectors to finetune their understanding of people's realities, as well as the realm of what is achievable. The ideas presented in this report are a result of their decades of carefully crafted responses to the biggest challenge of our times, linked up to the current debates in the field. What we each choose to do with the insights here is up to us.

In 2020, Ashoka launched Next Now: Planet & Climate as a way to galvanize our community around the urgency of the field. Even though Planet & Climate is a crowded space, we believe that everyone can and needs to contribute. Because even with the growing sense of momentum, we are not on track to avert the worst of climate change, let alone the myriad of other environmental issues that are playing out at the same time such as biodiversity loss, soil degradation or resource depletion. We do not have time to waste on solutions that are not going to deliver transformation at the speed and scale the challenge demands. With this in mind, at Ashoka we've chosen to focus our next steps on three connected and mutually reinforcing themes that emerged from this research. We will also focus on three main action pillars in the next 5 years to concretely apply these learnings in the field.

Find new solutions for better, more equitable systems

IDENTIFY & SUPPORT

Find the next 200 leading social innovators in Planet & Climate, Tech & Humanity, Gender and New Longevity.

Emphasize social innovators who break down barriers for the most vulnerable

Support new Fellows directly via a targeted financial stipend and in kind support

Weave new powerful networks

CONNECT

Connect Fellows with their peers from other parts of the world who they otherwise would not know about or meet

Invite innovators from other sectors who share goals and intentions

Create spaces of trust that foster collaboration

Help people and institutions see a radically new future, and build it

SHIFT

Show solutions and the changemakers behind them in new ways that inspire, inform, and energize new audiences

Leverage global social media channels and partners to give solutions the visibility and traction they deserve

Use art to amplify the message – e.g., the Museum of Social Innovation

01

The solutions to the climate crisis do not always require sacrifice and trade-offs, they can improve our lives in multiple ways.

The climate crisis holds at its core an opportunity that could define our era: as we design and implement solutions, we can also improve the health and happiness of people and nature. Whether it is job creation, or the health benefits of decreasing air pollution, or improving well-being by increasing urban green space, there are benefits that go far beyond cutting GHG emissions. When we think about the climate crisis as a cross-cutting, systemic issue rather than a technical problem, we can find and focus on the solutions that solve multiple problems at once and deliberately create benefits for a variety of stakeholders.

02

The scale of the problem requires everyone to be part of the solution.

Every person, every industry, every geography is involved in contributing to the climate crisis, which means that we need solutions for every part of our lives. Every person has the power and responsibility to play a role. Not everyone needs to trade in their profession to become an environmental leader but all of us can think differently about our role in the climate movement and how we can bring sustainability into the systems with which we interact daily – as teachers, as farmers, as pharmacists, as taxi drivers. One of the most important tasks is therefore helping people find the role they can play and making sure no one is left out of this process – particularly those who the traditional environmental movement has tended to overlook, leave behind, or shun. Approaches that deliberately enable the disenfranchised to be part of the solution, and that empower those who will be the worst and soonest hit by the impacts of climate change are particularly important.

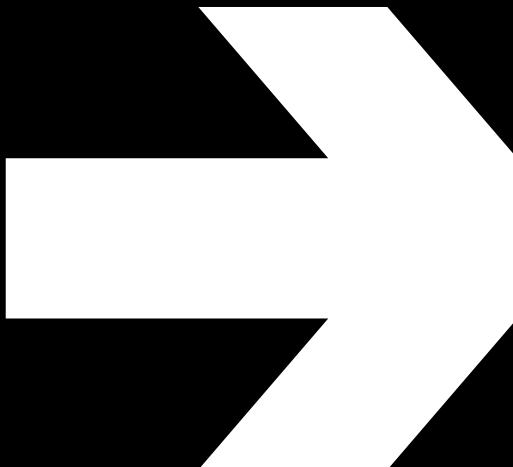
03

Our decision-making structures need to be updated – specifically the economic architecture.

This separation between humanity and nature has come to underpin our global economic system. A system which sees nature as a "resource" to be extracted and used to fuel profit and growth – provides us with the default framework for billions of decisions every day. The positive social outcomes that this industrialization of nature has created, such as prosperity and human development, have seen growth subsume all other objectives of an economy, and become our only indicator of success. This reduction of growth = progress may have been manageable when introduced on a planet with less than 2 billion people, but on a planet approaching 8 billion it is flawed and existentially dangerous. The decisions we take in service of the pursuit of growth now pervade every aspect of modern life. From individuals deciding how they live, work, consume, and find self-worth, to companies deciding how to design products and invest capital, to government policies around taxation, regulation, social welfare and even education. What would an economic system look like that focused simultaneously on human well-being and planetary health rather than solely on financial growth? Rather than systems that prioritize the needs of capital, what if the system prioritized the needs of people and the rest of the planet, tapping into the same human drive and ingenuity, just in service of a different goal?

We see examples around the world of how people are addressing the vast and urgent environmental challenges we face using these three approaches simultaneously: the fossil fuel divestment movement led by college endowments and pension funds; the uptake of regenerative agriculture; the empowerment of local fishing communities to become ocean conservationists, while also increasing their livelihoods; the increase of "circular" business models, maximizing the value of materials for longer; and of course, alternative economic theories like doughnut economics or degrowth. The rise of so many varied responses shows that we are in a moment ripe for change.

METHODOLOGY



This report is a result of a qualitative analysis of 22 in-depth interviews conducted with Ashoka Fellows from around the world between July – September 2020. The interviews focused on the vision of the social entrepreneurs for the Planet & Climate field, on their experiences in the field so far, their challenges and barriers, as well as the fundamental changes that they see necessary in order to create a rebalanced relationship with nature. We interviewed social entrepreneurs working in different climate sub-fields and in different geographical contexts, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex realities that different communities face.

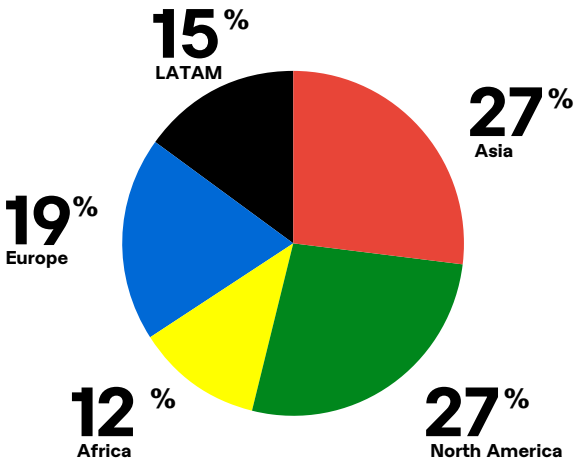
The interviews lasted on average one hour each, were transcribed and then inductively analyzed through open coding. The insights in this report are a result of an iterative process of analysis among the research team, coupled with additional insights and knowledge from secondary data (such as other reports, articles, books, debates in the field) and other conversations of the Planet & Climate team with experts in the field. The expertise of the team itself also played a big role in making sense of the analysis results through this iterative process.

The analysis and results were also informed by the survey conducted with 191 Ashoka Fellows globally about their work in the field of Planet & Climate. For more details of the survey results, see the section “What we learned from 191 Ashoka Fellows working on Planet & Climate” in the beginning of the report.

→ Interviews At-a-Glance

26 global interviews, working with a variery of approches to climate change.
50% Male, 50% Female

Geographic Distribution
based on Fellows Headquarters Location



A list of the 22 Ashoka Fellows interviewed for this study can be found below:

Name	Organization	Country
Alasdair Harris	Blue Ventures	United Kingdom
Alexander Eaton	Sistema Biobolsa	Mexico
Allan Savory	Savory Institute	Zimbabwe
Amory Lovins	Rocky Mountain Institute	United States
Claire Grolleau	Ecolo Crèche	France
Cynthia Ong	Forever Sabah	Malaysia
Enrique Lomnitz	Isla Urbana	Mexico
Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka	Conservation Throug Public Health	Uganda
Gonzalo Muñoz	TriCiclos	Chile
Harish Hande	SELCO	India
Juliana Gutierrez	Low Carbon City	Colombia
Kinari Webb	Health In Harmony	Indonesia
Nerlian Gogali	Institut Mosintuwu	Indonesia
Manu Gupta	SEED	India
Mélanie Marcel	SoScience	France
Nicole Rycroft	Canopy	Canada
Regi Wahyu	HARA	Indonesia
Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin	Regenerative Agriculture Alliance	United States
Shannon Dosemagen	Public Lab	United States
Sue Riddlestone	Bioregional	United Kingdom
Tristram Stuart	Feedback	United Kingdom
Wietse van der Werf	Sea Ranger Service	Netherlands

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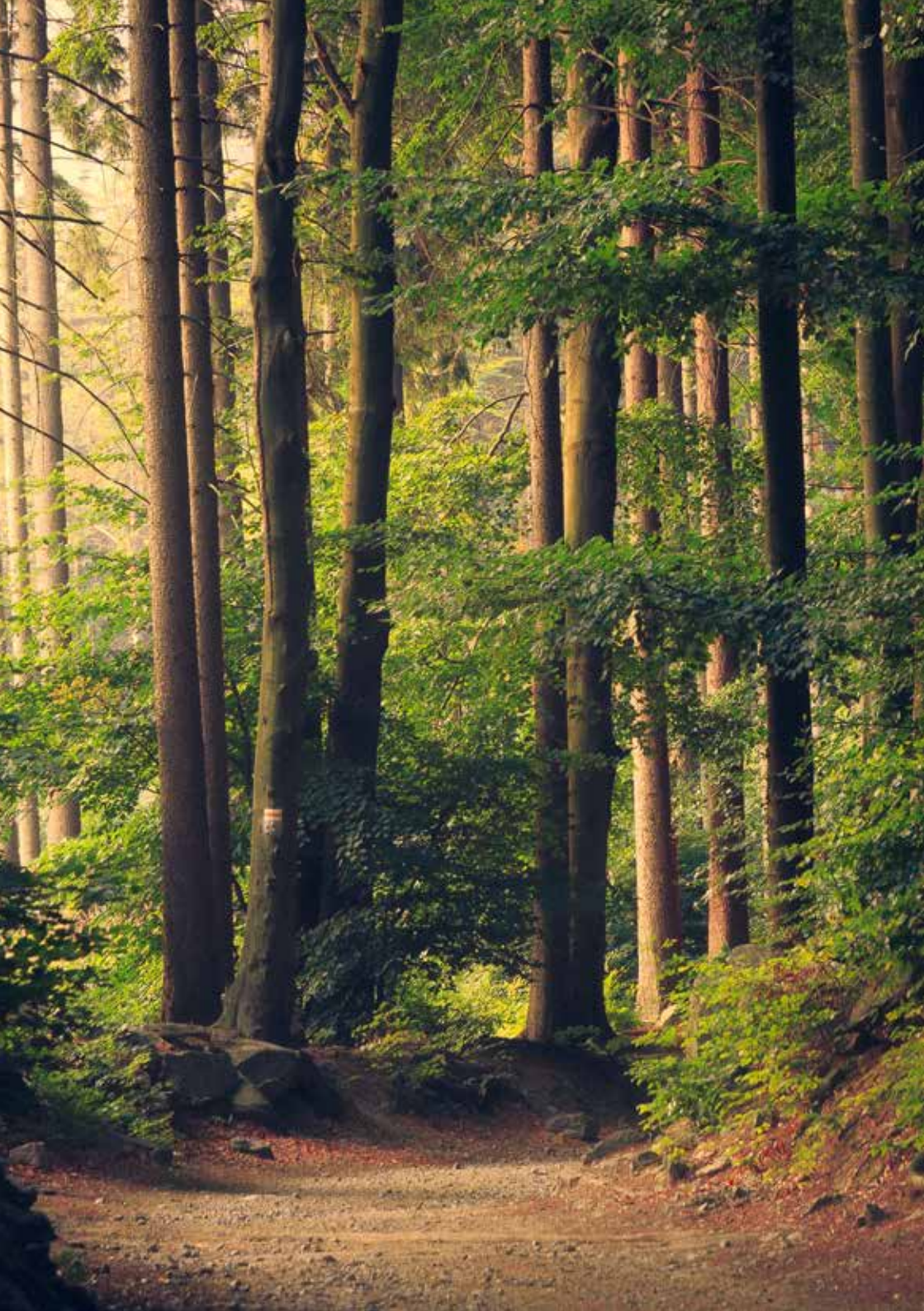

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