

# Measures to Shift to a Sustainable Commons-Based Global Economy

*Suggestions for the Post 2012 UN agenda from Commons Action for the United Nations and the Major Group Commons Cluster, a network of ECOSOC-accredited CSOs.*

It is urgent that we shift immediately from an economy at war with nature to one based on a *commons* approach. As mentioned in UN documents E/2010/NGO/29 and E/2011/NGO/126, the strength of such an economy would be measured in terms of the well-being of nature, all people and their communities.

*For people, community and nature are the very building blocks of every economy.*

This is one of several briefs, suggesting measures we can take to bring about this shift.

**We call on Governments to create a Panel of Experts (High Level or from the UN Secretariat) to develop a step-by-step plan for the implementation of a commons-based economy. This panel would consult with Governments, relevant IGOs and CSOs, Major Groups and all other stakeholders to ensure the greatest possible support for their work.**

**Examples where such a commons approach is already being implemented include:**

- many of the approximately 1500 Sarvodaya communities, thousands of ecovillages, transition towns, cooperatives (1 billion people are already officially members), and indigenous communities. All of these groups use forms of collaborative decision making, planning and implementation by community members. As well, the benefits from such processes are equitably shared by all members of the community. (For more information: <http://www.sarvodaya.org/>; [ecovillage.org](http://ecovillage.org/); [transitionnetwork.org](http://transitionnetwork.org/))
- the Participatory Budget Process that was initially developed in Porto Alegre;
- the participatory local Agenda 21 sustainable community planning processes, where interested stakeholders help in developing a plan for the community to become as sustainable as possible.

**The Commons Abundance Network (CAN) is an initiative of the Commons Cluster and many other NGOs and individuals. It has been created to empower the diverse commons worldwide to learn from one another, network and act in unison from local to global levels. Its ultimate aim is to help build a strong foundation for a commons-based economy at all levels centred on the well-being of all people and nature.**

**Seven Characteristics of a Global-Commons Approach to Sustainable Development**

1. **Commons Goods**: those fruits of nature and society that everyone needs to survive and thrive. These include: the atmosphere, oceans, forests, biodiversity, all species of life, natural systems, and minerals; food, water, energy, spiritual and healthcare; and, information, art, culture, society, technology, free news media, trade and finance systems.
2. **Commoners**: Groups of people who share the resources (users, producers, managers, providers).

3. **Commoning**: inclusive, participatory and transparent forms of decision making and rules governing access to, and benefit from these commons resources.
4. **Boundaries**: specifying community membership and the extent of the resource.
5. **Value**: created through the preservation or production coming from these commons goods and resources.
6. **Recognition** that the Earth is a living system of interconnected components on which all life depends. (UN Resolution 65/164 on Harmony with Nature.)
7. **Adoption of an all-win approach to life that takes into account the well being of all people as well as nature**, as opposed to the win/lose and human-centred win/win orientations.

The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) provides a course on the commons and goes into more detail about the work in this area by Elinor Ostrom who was awarded the 2009 Nobel Prize in Economic Science.

<http://www.cooperationcommons.com/node/361>

A global, commons-based approach to a sustainable economy has the following important advantages:

1. It fosters responsibility for the switch to sustainable-living *from the grassroots up*. All stakeholders are directly involved in decisions regarding the natural and social resources they, themselves, need to survive and prosper.
2. It enables Governments to build on thousands of sustainable-living initiatives which can begin to form the basis for a sustainable green economy that is supported by their peoples.
3. It also would help to forge collaborative working relationships with the rapidly increasing number of demonstrations against corporate greed and social inequity that are occurring around the world.

### **Measures to Bring About a Shift to a Commons-Based Global Economy**

1. Shifting from present economic indicators measuring production and consumption to ones measuring the well-being of people and nature. These indicators could include those mentioned in the UN Human Development Reports from 1990 onward; and, in other UN contexts, those mentioned in Germany's Yearbook, Bhutan's Happiness Index, etc.
2. Extending GA resolution A/HRC/18/L.1 declaring the human right to clean drinking water and sanitation to clean air and other fruits of nature and society that each person needs to be able to survive and thrive (including the Internet).
3. Recognizing in national constitutions that, beside individual people and corporations, Mother Nature has rights. Infringements on these rights should be prosecutable under universal jurisdiction, as is already the case in Bolivia and Ecuador.
4. Recognizing that ecocide is a crime against peace and life, like genocide – except that ecocide relates to harm done to nature, including animal and plant species. Ecocide should be prosecuted under universal jurisdiction. ([www.treeshaverightstoo.com](http://www.treeshaverightstoo.com))
5. Creating a World Environmental Court.
6. Establishing – where appropriate – common property rights held by local communities over resources on which they depend. This would include forests, grazing lands, bodies of water, groundwater, and fisheries. This can ensure that the people who have a long-term stake in the preservation of these resources would have control over them,

- obtain benefits from them, and internalize any externalities caused by individual community members into the decision-making of the community as a whole.
7. Encouraging the creation of Social Charters to affirm the sovereignty of human beings over their means of sustenance and well-being arising through a customary or emerging identification with an ecology, a cultural resource area, a social need, or a form of collective labour. These charters are covenants and institutions negotiated by commons communities for the protection and sustenance of their resources. They use a commoning approach to ensure that community access to — and sovereignty over — their own commons is maintained and that the interests of all stakeholders are represented.
  8. Encouraging the creation of commons trusts, legal entities responsible for protecting shared assets, inherited from past generations on behalf of current and future generations.  
Community rules can be set up to prevent resource overuse while ensuring fair access and to.
    - a. decide on a non-monetized metric to evaluate the sustainability, quality of life and well-being of a commons and its community of users and producers,
    - b. apply this metric to the preservation of the resource by creating a cap on its usage,
    - c. monitor resource creation, usage and restoration according to this cap to determine whether or not the trust may rent a portion of the resource for extraction or production by the private sector or the state,
    - d. stimulate and protect the co-production of a replenishable resource because they use measures other than scarcity-based pricing to value these common goods, and
    - e. allow the private and public sectors to continue to focus on profit, investment and budgetary appropriations, while the commons becomes a primary means of generating social innovation and stabilizing the principal of commons reserves to maintain the diversity and sustainability of the overall economy.
  9. Applying the precautionary principle, including with respect to geo-engineering.
  10. Internalization of the full life-cycle and true environmental costs of production and consumption in order to address the causes rather than simply the symptoms of environmental degradation. (See also the Cradle to Cradle certification system: [www.c2ccertified.org](http://www.c2ccertified.org))
  11. Implementing a global footprint to assess economic performance in all sectors and at all levels, including corporations. (See also: [www.footprintnetwork.org](http://www.footprintnetwork.org))
  12. Elimination of fossil fuel and other subsidies which distort the market.
  13. Recognizing the importance of international agreements such as the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Geneva Conventions, International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights, Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Kyoto Protocol and associated Work plans, Agenda 21, and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. Each of these promote democratic participation in planning sustainable development.
  14. Implementing the all-win principle in all governmental decision-making. This recognizes that, since all people and all of nature are parts of one integrated whole, the well-being of all people and all of nature are essential to us all. (See also [www.worldcitizensaction.com](http://www.worldcitizensaction.com))
  15. Instituting open source and General Public Licenses – commons-based alternatives to Intellectual Property Rights. The latter have begun to reduce humanity's capacity to adapt to emerging issues and global challenges. The extension of their applicability is also used now to hamper progress and further enclose the commons and should not be accepted or permitted. (See also: <http://onthecommons.org/about-commons>; [www.opensource.org](http://www.opensource.org) and [www.gnu.org](http://www.gnu.org))

16. Establishing a commons-based approach to education at the bottom of the pyramid – i.e., children in all nations – to ensure that commons principles are instituted for future generations. This basic human right of education in the formative years is included in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.
17. Creating a system whereby all people can care for and manage their impact on Earth's Systems. The legal aspects and metrics that might be used are at present being developed (see [www.earth-condominium.org](http://www.earth-condominium.org).)

**Signed:**

*Association of World Citizens; Institute for Planetary Synthesis, Global Commons Trust, the All-Win Network, Commons Action for the United Nations, the Earth Rights Institute, Kosmos Associates, Inc.; International Association for the Advancement of Innovative Approaches to Global Challenges; Climate Change Network, Nigeria, PeterEarth.org.*

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