



**Connected Humans**  
**Professor Jacqueline McGlade**

13 October 2020

COVID-19 continues to be a terrible global crisis. With it, we have seen significant shifts in working practices, we have seen important losses in our social safety nets, with increasing levels of poverty, loss of jobs especially in the informal sector, closure of schools and universities, with the loss of learning experiences and increasing levels of domestic and gender-biased violence on the ground. From our different experiences – whether in traditional or high-tech societies - we have simultaneously understood the critical role of connectedness in our mental wellbeing and overall health.

The pandemic is also happening at a time of climate change, overuse of many of our planet's resources and where increasing levels of civil unrest have been seen in response to democratic losses and racial antagonism. Where the meaningfulness in our lives is as important as the economic wealth we are often striving to achieve.

The UN has observed in its latest report from UNDP, that the pandemic has revealed a world where millions of people are experiencing untold misery and suffering, as the virus overwhelms our bodies and economies. Rich and poor, the pandemic has forced us to reconsider almost every aspect of how we live.

And yet, as in previous crises Covid also presents an opportunity and an obligation to rebuild our global society to adapt to changing conditions. Thinking about a world beyond the pandemic, the question is: what kind of change trajectory do we want? What kind of economic recovery do people want to see?

The SDGs do not necessarily give us a good basis from which to start. In the pre-Covid period, all the environmental pillars were falling behind on their targets –water, climate, land, and sea. In response we have seen a significant push to restore the momentum towards biodiversity with a UN summit and commitments by more than 70 countries to deliver biodiversity net gains within the next decade<sup>1</sup>, and despite the delays to the Climate Conference of the Parties to 2021, countries are still focussing on drawing down emissions. The UK has its own processes in this regard, as set out in the Climate Bill, the Environment White Paper and schemes such as Environment Land Management, to go alongside shifts in land use associated with food production and agriculture. What will of course make delivery of these targets far more complicated is the need to square them off with Brexit coming into effect, with its heavy administrative burdens – for example it is estimated that there will be an additional 215 million customs declarations per year after 2020 that will no doubt affect the generation and movement of produce.

But perhaps more crucially, the Covid pandemic has underlined the need for a sense of purpose and values to be strongly embedded in recovery plans. We should not lose the sense of caring and community support that has emerged. We should not lose sight of the ways that nature has re-entered the lives of many people through birdsong, wild animals walking down our high streets and the reductions in air pollution. What is genuinely needed is a sense of agency in our everyday lives.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/pga/75/united-nations-summit-on-biodiversity/>

Research at the Institute for Global Prosperity strongly supports the need for the power of voice to be realised – enabling people across the nation to take root in political decision-making – whether it is through the workplace or online communities.<sup>2</sup>

### **Working environments**

With the pandemic in full force we have seen radical shifts in working patterns. Millions have found themselves staying in quarantine or working at home. For those who have been fortunate enough to have access to Wi-Fi or internet connections and equipment, this period has been one of adjustment with extensive online meetings providing a new connectedness. Some businesses, including several Silicon Valley giants, have announced that they will allow employees to work from home permanently. In the US, only a quarter of the workforce is still working from their business' premises. Less than a quarter are saying that they would voluntarily retune to their job's premises.

Then there are the millions who have to go outside the home to find work or to operate in the informal economy, exposing themselves not only to the disease but also to the intransigencies that curfews and other government controls have put in place. Not only do we need investments in infrastructure but also a change in the value that government policy-making puts on the way and where we will live our lives and the kinds of jobs that we can expect in the future. It is a fallacy for governments to consider that the public are simply the problem and just need to be nudged in the right direction to change behaviours. There needs to be a greater recognition that people's roles have changed. For example, it is clear that tasks such as cleaning that were considered menial and low skilled before the pandemic have become by necessity, highly skilled with multiple requirements and procedures to be followed very precisely. Front-line workers, such as those in the health sector, also need to travel safely and efficiently to their workplaces.

Looking from the perspective of a human-centred approach in the recovery plans of countries and with more than 93% of countries with some form of lockdown in place, it is key to see what kinds of investments might be needed<sup>3</sup>. Researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) compared the ease of transitioning to remote work in 30 countries<sup>4</sup>. Developed countries with higher levels of internet access, a mix of occupations, and pro-worker policies naturally fared the best; these include Belgium, Canada, Estonia, Luxembourg and Sweden. For example, Luxembourg, which finished first in the rankings, has the highest internet penetration rate of any country in our sample, and it ranks fourth in share of the labour force with experience working from home. For a developed country, Luxembourg also does very well in terms of its occupational mix, due to a high share of scientists, engineers, and business and administration professionals. Sweden ranked second, in part because a very large share of the country's working population already works from home at times (29.4%, higher than in any other country in our sample). Sweden's strong labour unions, pro-worker laws, and social policies are also potential factors that give employees a higher degree of labour flexibility. Estonia's employment mix is slightly more suited to social distancing than Sweden's, and its internet quality and share of workers who have experience working from home are above average. Estonia is well known for its success in moving many government services online.

The United States ranked 11th and illustrates the trade-off that rich countries experience. Among the 30 countries in the analysis, it finished about average in terms of internet quality and share of households with children, and a large share of the workforce already works from home occasionally

<sup>2</sup> Woodcraft, S. and Moore, H. (2019) <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10066854/>

<sup>3</sup> International Labour Organisation

[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_749399.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_749399.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Bana et al. 2020 <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/ranking-how-national-economies-adapt-to-remote-work/>

(the second most in our sample). However, it ranks last in occupational mix, with a larger share of jobs in the U.S. requiring physical proximity to other people.

Developing and middle-income countries such as Brazil, China, and Nigeria face the most obstacles, including low internet quality and large, intergenerational families that can make it challenging to work at home. Nigeria ranked last, and Pakistan was next to last. Both were held back in their rankings by a very large share of households with young children and poor internet quality. Brazil and China were also near the bottom.

China ranked 25th. Like many middle-income countries, its occupational mix tends to help it in the rankings (it finished in sixth place along this dimension). However, China is held back by lower internet access and quality (where it finished 18th) as well as having many intergenerational households; China has the third-highest percentage of households with a child under the age of 15, a factor that can pose challenges for people trying to work at home.

These developments will have profound implications for the economy, inequality, and the future of big cities including links to other centres and the underlying trade and transportation systems. Because cities tend to have a higher share of workers who specialize in personal services than suburban or rural regions, they are more susceptible to disruptions. Similarly, regions that specialize in industries that feature occupations requiring close physical proximity and easy international travel, such as tourism, are more vulnerable than regions with more balanced economies.

One way that governments can help then is by discouraging regional overspecialization and overconcentration. For example, economic development programs have often emphasized urbanization or a region's comparative advantages. These steps are often essential for economic growth, but COVID-19 has shown how precarious such growth can be.

### **Connectedness, Belonging and Human Resilience**

But most crucially is how best to establish a human-centric recovery process, one with meaningfulness and values at its core. We can see in communities that are used to isolation, that the pandemic has not affected daily life to same extent as in places with highly mobile populations. Other places, such as New Zealand, where there are also high level of connectors and belonging have also shown strong resilience. But this is not the case for the majority of people.

We can now analyse the mood of the world surrounding the pandemic and the effect it is having on our emotions and social capital. Using a series of semantic tools and web intelligence to track millions of social media and news feeds, couple to Plutchik's emotions wheel <sup>5</sup>, we can identify five emotions particularly characteristic during this prolonged period of confinement: *Anticipation*, *Vigilance*, *Fear*, *Anger* and *Sadness*. The time series data of the Corona Mood Barometer shows clear peaks in these emotions, aligned with the most striking events back in May.

The trend chart plots the mood deviation from the average since the first cases were reported among the residents of Wuhan City in January (measured in hourly intervals with a 24-hour moving average to smooth the trend line). This specific form of computation highlights the most characteristic events during May 2020.

The low fluctuations in Fear and Anticipation indicate that these emotions already had a strong presence in the first quarter of 2020:

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.weblyzard.com/corona-mood-barometer/>

“Anticipation” is closely linked with the global race for effective COVID-19 treatment options such as Remdesivir and Hydroxychloroquine or potential vaccine candidates such as Moderna’s mRNA-1273.

“Vigilance” shows phases of slow decline, interrupted by official interventions or events – in the case of the changed UK government slogan “Stay Alert” (from the previous “Stay at home”), for example, or during the mass protests in the United States towards the end of the month that triggered a strong increase across several emotional categories.

“Fear” remains on a rather constant level, with notable increases in mid-May when discussions about a second wave intensified and White House officials were tested positive for coronavirus, and towards the end of May due to fears of increased transmission of the virus during the mass protests.

“Anger” exhibits several pronounced peaks on account of disagreement with stay-at-home orders and the management of the pandemic by governments and official health organizations such as the CDC. In the UK, the breaking of lockdown rules by Dominic Cummings, chief adviser to prime minister Boris Johnson, incited public anger, while Hong Kong saw major rallies against Beijing’s new national security law.

“Sadness” increased during the 75th anniversary of VE Day, remembering the fallen of World War II, which coincided with coverage about the US unemployment rate being at the highest level since the Great Depression. Further peaks relate to the grim milestones of 300,000 global COVID-related deaths (May 14) and 100,000 in the US (May 27), as well as a plane crash after reopening the Karachi airport with almost 100 casualties.

What we see from these types of analyses is that social distancing and separation are affecting our emotional resilience and mental health. They are pushing vulnerable people already deeply affected by economic and environmental crises into further uncertainty and poverty, and exposed and widened existing cracks in our systems to reveal their fragility. If ever a moment called for understanding the concept of resilience, it is now.

Resilience is the ability to adapt to adversity or a stressful life event. Research on resilience has a rich history, dating back to the 1950s, with studies now focussing on a wide range of issues from how we adapt to traumatic events such as natural disasters to children growing up in high-risk environments<sup>6</sup>. Trust and acceptance are all key elements of resilience.

Interestingly, during the period of the pandemic in research at IGP, I have seen that our trust in scientists and researchers growing. This is important because the pandemic has introduced a level of scrutiny and rigour in public debate about evidence and numbers such as “r” the replication rate of the virus in the population. In the years before much of science was lost in waves of “fake news” and claims of hoax theories and political obfuscation. The additional exposure to knowledge has also allowed discussions about meaning to emerge – these have been helping to expand our understanding and knowledge of what we value and care about.<sup>7</sup>

The other positive outcome of the pandemic has been the multiple ways by which communities have come together to care for others and in solidarity.<sup>8</sup>

Re-imagining belonging is a part of how going forward we can consider what a values-led recovery looks like. Belonging comes from *longen* the old English word to go – to go along with to relate to.

<sup>6</sup> Holling, C.S. (1973) <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.es.04.110173.000245>; Larson, M. and Luthans, F. (2006) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/10717919070130010701>; Liedtka, J.M. (1996) Collaborating across lines of business for competitive advantage. *Academy of management perspectives* 10 (2), 20-34

<sup>7</sup> Yeoman, R. (2020) *Ethics, Meaningfulness, and Mutuality*. Routledge Studies in Business Ethics.

<sup>8</sup> K.Bellizzi (2020) <https://theconversation.com/developing-resilience-is-an-important-tool-to-help-you-deal-with-coronavirus-and-the-surge-in-cases-140412>

It is mutable, changeable and suggests travelling together. Belonging can also be temporary and episodic and in flux. What it does is give a sense of agency to shape the circumstance of one's life. Today everyone comes from somewhere, lives somewhere and has connections to many places. Simone Weil, writing at the height of World War II in some of the darkest hours of the struggle against fascism, arrived at a similar conclusion in her magnificent book *The Need for Roots* (1943). About the reconstruction of France, she wrote that "To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul."<sup>9</sup>

Weil's method for rerooting humanity is to identify fundamental human needs and devise ways of fulfilling each of them, detailing necessary social reforms. Weil defines rootedness as the "real, active, and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future" Weil is candid in admitting that it's difficult to derive a general principle which tells us when we've discovered a need; but she quite rightly says that the needs of the body are obvious, that the needs of the soul are identifiable by introspection and careful thought, and that one hallmark of all needs is that they have limits. She takes it as morally axiomatic that biological needs generate obligations and social rights. It's evident that all people need shelter, food, water, heat, clothing, healthcare, and other essentials to maintain themselves, and Weil says this creates a duty for society to provide them. But she also talks about 'the needs of the soul'. Gently pushing back against materialists who might neglect such needs, she reminds us that "Everyone knows that there are forms of cruelty which can injure a man's life without injuring his body. They are such as deprive him of a certain form of food necessary to the life of the soul". As Simone Weil says, to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul.

### **Social Capital Theory and Application**

Today, we can understand that belonging, rootedness, meaningfulness, resilience and ability to cope with dramatic changes is a reflection of our social capital – the networks we live within, the relational, structural and cognitive aspects such the norms and behaviours – that we live by.

We are seeing evidence and emerging insights about connectedness that are changing many of our previous assumptions. For example, it can be shown that solving pervasive problems of air pollution and energy, land use degradation and improvements in prosperity have as much to do with material wealth as with social capital. It is also apparent that strong social networks, shared norms and behaviours can increase resilience- Professor Michael Marmot and Richard Wilkinson have captured this beautifully in multiple papers and popular books<sup>10</sup>.

Social assets such as connectedness and belonging are widely undervalued. For example, rural island communities are generally regarded as the most vulnerable groups affected by climate change. This perception arises due to them being in less developed areas with high levels of exposure to stressors, while reportedly lacking the means to cope with these stressors. An alternate means of determining actual vulnerability or resilience using social assets will enable us to understand how communities pursue diverse livelihood strategies which ultimately serve to reduce their vulnerability. For example, in a recent study of social capital in communities on the Solomon Islands<sup>11</sup> indicated a higher than expected overall social capital vulnerability score of 0.379, where 0 indicates the lower vulnerability than expected. Community cohesion decreased vulnerability the

<sup>9</sup> Weil, S. (1943) *The Need for Roots*. (see *The Need for Roots*, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1952 edition, p.41).

<sup>10</sup> Marmot, M. and Wilkinson, Richard G. (2003). *The Solid Facts*. Copenhagen: World Health Organization, Regional Office for Europe. ISBN 9780585492520.

<sup>11</sup> Malherbe, W. et al. (2019). Social capital reduces vulnerability in rural coastal communities of Solomon Islands. *Ocean and Coastal Management* 191 (2020) 105186

most within these communities, followed by gender equity, leadership, equal access to services and resources and decision making. The results indicated a high degree of social capital in Solomon Islands communities, and therefore its importance as an inherent measure for households to cope with both climate and non-climate related stressors.

In my own research, I have found that social assets such as connectedness, belonging and the power of voice key to determining the success of interventions such as modal shifts in energy, in farming practices and coastal retreat. The conclusion that I have come to after more than 40 years of working in the field, is that climate change and other hazards directed policies, such as for pandemics, need to be developed based on a fuller understanding and recognition of the values of human life. To adopt a values-led approach to the pandemic recovery is as essential as the development of infrastructure – not only does it give meaningfulness to people in the lives and work but will also help to reduce vulnerability and increase sustainability and resilience.

The difference that values can make is becoming more and more evident in the way we farm our land. Regenerative agriculture<sup>12</sup> can be characterised as having dense micro- meso- and macro-relational networks (local, national and global), high levels of interpersonal trust and reciprocity; distinct shared values, connections, affective bonds and social support; high civic norms and collective goals; low density and weak ties in institutional networks and lowered risk levels in terms of climate scenarios.

Conversely, in conventional agriculture there are medium macro- relational networks (global); strong meso- relational networks (national); medium - low levels of interpersonal trust and reciprocity; medium- weak shared values, connections, affective bonds and social support; medium - low civic norms and collective goals; high density and strong ties in institutional networks, and raised risk levels under future climate scenarios

### **Building a better, sustainable and just world**

Success in the future hangs on our success today in dealing with pandemics and other environmental crises. There are three main ways in which this can happen – through leadership, evidence and social norms and behaviours.

### **Leadership matters**

Looking across the last century, book-ended by the Spanish flu pandemic and the COVID pandemic, we can plot a course of changing fortunes triggered by the ways that government dealt with crises.

For example, the two post-war restructuring strategies were very different from one another. The Treaty of Versailles attempted to reset society to the conditions before the war. Germany was held responsible for starting the war and the treaty imposed harsh penalties, including reparations payments, loss of territory, and forced demilitarization. The Treaty humiliated Germany while failing to resolve the underlying problems that had led to war in the first place. The economic chaos and public resentment it caused within Germany helped fuel the rise of the Nazi Party, which ultimately led to WWII.

The post WWII reconstruction of Europe, Japan, and the global economy, by contrast, included massive foreign aid programs aimed at supporting and rebuilding the defeated Axis powers in a more democratic, resilient and stable way. It also included the creation of the United Nations, the World Bank, and other global institutions aimed at ensuring peace, stabilizing trade, full employment,

<sup>12</sup> Lunn-Rockliffe, S. et al. (2020) [https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/igp/sites/bartlett/files/igp\\_ra\\_for\\_africa\\_report\\_2020.pdf](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/igp/sites/bartlett/files/igp_ra_for_africa_report_2020.pdf)

and promoting economic growth globally. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was enshrined as the key measure of progress toward these goals. This approach was the opposite of the vindictive Treaty of Versailles and led, in the end, to 70 years of relative peace and prosperity (the cold war and regional conflicts notwithstanding).

The post WWII reconstruction enabled a radical restructuring of the world. It swept in many of the ideas included in Franklin Roosevelt's proposal for a "Second Bill of Rights," proposed during his State of the Union address in January 1944, after the tide of WWII had turned in the Allies' favour. Roosevelt argued that the first US Bill of Rights had "proved inadequate to assure us equality in the pursuit of happiness". His remedy was to declare the need for an "economic bill of rights". His text still resonates today:

"We have come to a clear realization of the fact that true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. "Necessitous men are not free men." People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made. In our day these economic truths have become accepted as self-evident. We have accepted, so to speak, a second Bill of Rights under which a new basis of security and prosperity can be established for all—regardless of station, race, or creed.

Among these are:

- The right to a useful and remunerative job in the industries or shops or farms or mines of the nation;
- The right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation;
- The right of every farmer to raise and sell his products at a return which will give him and his family a decent living;
- The right of every businessman, large and small, to trade in an atmosphere of freedom from unfair competition and domination by monopolies at home or abroad;
- The right of every family to a decent home;
- The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health;
- The right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident, and unemployment;
- The right to a good education."

In today's setting we can also see how gender also matters. Recent studies of leadership and success with dealing with COVID indicate that the countries with female political leaders have been more successful in curtailing deaths than their male counterparts<sup>13</sup>.

### **Designing Prosperous Futures**

COVID-19 has essentially shut down the global economy. It is still likely to kill many more hundreds of thousands. But it is presenting us with opportunities about how to recover and rebuild.

Do we try to restore the previous system as it was, or do we rebuild in a better, more robust and resilient way?

Even if a simple restoration of globalization, as we had in the 1990s, were possible, a return to business as usual would not be able to address the massive and growing inequality, the frayed social safety nets, the oligarchic control of governments, the rapidly worsening climate emergency, the accelerating loss of natural capital and ecosystem services, and the general loss of system resilience, which have marked the past few decades. Any attempt to simply go back to the way

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<sup>13</sup> Coscieme et al. (2020) Women in Power. *Solutions (in press)*

things were before the crisis will be counterproductive in the end. The world has changed massively in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. We are now solidly in the “Anthropocene” epoch where human global interdependence with each other and the rest of nature can no longer be ignored<sup>14</sup>. If we do not use this horrible crisis to make the long overdue changes needed to build a sustainable and desirable future, we can expect even bigger crisis in the future.

Can we reboot our outdated operating system to one that can account for the new conditions of the Anthropocene?

Roosevelt’s list of rights was a predecessor to the UN’s 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s), which were adopted by all UN member states in 2015. The SDGs include eliminating hunger and poverty, reducing gender and overall inequality, clean energy and water, adequate jobs and housing, good health and education, responsible consumption, urgent climate action and protection of the biosphere, and global peace and justice. For example, the EU Green Deal and the US Green New Deal incorporate proposals that address many of these rights and goals.

To make the transition to a just and sustainable wellbeing economy will require a fundamental change of worldview to one that recognises that we live on a finite planet and that sustainable wellbeing requires more than material consumption<sup>15</sup>. It will mean:

- replacing the present goal of limitless growth with goals of material sufficiency, equitable distribution, and sustainable human well-being; and
- a redesign of the world economy that preserves natural systems essential to life and well-being and balances natural, social, human, and built assets.

The dimensions of the new wellbeing economy include, but are not limited to:

- Sustainable scale: Respecting ecological limits
- Establishment of systems for effective and equitable governance and management of the natural commons, including the atmosphere, oceans, and biodiversity.
- Creation of cap-and-auction systems for basic resources, including quotas on depletion, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions, based on basic planetary boundaries and resource limits.
- Consuming essential non-renewables, such as fossil fuels, no faster than we develop renewable substitutes.
- Investments in sustainable infrastructure, such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, public transit, watershed protection measures, green public spaces, and clean technology.
- Promotion of regenerative agriculture, stronger regulation of factory farming, and a ban on wild animal eating and trading.
- Dismantling incentives towards materialistic consumption, including banning advertising to children and regulating the commercial media.
- Linked policies to address population and consumption.
- Fair distribution: Protecting capabilities for flourishing
- Guaranteed fulfilling employment or income, and more balanced leisure-income trade-offs.
- Reducing systemic inequalities, both internationally and within nations, by improving the living standards of the poor, limiting excess and unearned income and consumption, and preventing private capture of common wealth.

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<sup>14</sup> Steffen, W., Crutzen, P.J. and McNeill, J.R., 2007. The Anthropocene: are humans now overwhelming the great forces of nature. *AMBIO: A Journal of the Human Environment*, 36(8), pp.614-621.

<sup>15</sup> Costanza, R., G. Alperovitz, H. Daly, J. Farley, C. Franco, T. Jackson, I. Kubiszewski, J. Schor, and P. Victor. 2013. *Building a Sustainable and Desirable Economy-in-Society-in-Nature*. ANU Press, Canberra, Australia.

- Establishment of a system for effective and equitable governance and management of the social commons, including cultural inheritance, financial systems, and information systems like the Internet and air waves.
- More progressive taxation, elimination of tax havens, taxing speculative financial transactions, and broader use of common asset trusts and sovereign funds.
- Efficient allocation: Building a sustainable macro-economy Use of full-cost accounting measures to internalize externalities, value nonmarket assets and services, reform national accounting systems, and ensure that prices reflect actual social and environmental costs of production.
- Fiscal reforms that reward sustainable and well-being-enhancing actions and penalize unsustainable behaviours that diminish collective well-being, including ecological tax reforms with compensating mechanisms that prevent additional burdens on low-income groups.
- Systems of cooperative investment in stewardship (CIS) and payment for ecosystem services (PES).
- Increased financial and fiscal prudence, including greater public control of the money supply and its benefits and other financial instruments and practices that contribute to the public good.
- Ensuring availability of all information required to move to a sustainable economy that enhances well-being through public investment in research and development and reform of the ownership structure of copyrights and patents.

### **Wellbeing Governments**

The crisis also demands that we finally act on the longer-term changes to the system needed to achieve the SDGs and create a sustainable and desirable future. The Club of Rome and The Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll)<sup>16</sup> are ongoing initiatives to coordinate and amplify all of these efforts. Under the auspices of WEAll, the Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo) coalition has started with the initial participation of Scotland, New Zealand, Wales, and Iceland and Costa Rica. WEGo is a collaboration of national and regional governments promoting sharing of expertise and transferable policy practices. The aim is to deepen their understanding and advance shared ambition of building wellbeing economies through:

- COLLABORATION in pursuit of innovative policy approaches to create wellbeing economies – sharing what works and what does not, to inform policymaking for change;
- MAKING PROGRESS toward the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in line with Goal 17, fostering partnership and cooperation to identify approaches to delivering wellbeing; and
- ADDRESSING the pressing economic, social, and environmental challenges of our time

### **Growing Planetary Awareness**

The pandemic may have a silver lining if it opens the door for the long overdue transition to a world focused on the sustainable wellbeing of humans and the rest of nature – the world we all want. We can see in the media every day how our connected ness to nature reaches out to issues such as plastics – the growth of PPE waste in particular – and on biodiversity.

Our use of land and the potentially destructive aspects have collided with climate change in the devastating fires across the world. In Australia the impact of fires was not only on property but also on wildlife – so many koala bears and other species were driven from their habitats or perished. IN Columbia, a relaxation in regulations governing slash and burn clearance for agriculture in areas

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<sup>16</sup> <https://clubofrome.org/> ; <https://www.gov.scot/groups/wellbeing-economy-governments-wego/>;  
<https://wellbeingeconomy.org/>

close to national forests, is causing catastrophic losses of pristine areas of wilderness and national parks. In California fires have been burning for months with loss of forests and properties but also catastrophic effects on health through air quality and particulate matter.

Breathing has become the leitmotif of our world. With the virus attacking people's lungs and ability to breathe, the huge improvements in air quality seen over the course of February through to May 2020, as a result of the lockdowns were seen by many as major benefit compared to the economic damages caused. However, the clean air only served to highlight the impacts of the massive fires around the world, largely due to climate change. Face masks, and the phrase "I can't breathe" which catalysed the Black Lives Matter movement, have amplified people's ability to draw breath and live freely no matter who they are.

### **Drawdown and net zero emissions**

Within the build back better recovery plans is a tacit assumption by many governments that our commitment to climate change needs to rapidly move from modest reductions in emissions to active drawdown ending up in net carbon positive economies. We have very little time to do this – perhaps no more than 5-10 years.

Yet to decarbonise our economies will require enormous efforts by all to ensure that some parts of the country and the world are not left behind. We still see for example energy poverty in the UK and this coupled with poor internet connectivity means by default that many will not be able to participate fully in the development of a green, sustainable recovery plan.

It is also clear that place matters in the sense of where and how we will build any new infrastructure. For example, the old views of rural and urban separation, with low paying jobs in the former and high paying jobs concentrated in the latter, are no longer tenable. That sense of belonging also needs to be taken into account is also a matter of great importance.

Using rural spaces for multiple purposes and a diversity of jobs for example in renewable energy, food production, construction, manufacturing as well as living, will mean that access to services has to improve. Some local authorities such as Essex County Council<sup>17</sup>, are very consciously working to raise the levels of participation in ambitious plans for transportation, energy provision, green infrastructure and buildings to reduce climate emissions and increase biodiversity whilst increasing overall prosperity and resilience.

### **New Communities New Connectedness New Sense of Belonging**

Over the course of the pandemic, people have adapted to working and talking through online platforms and social media. Never before has there been such an explosion of virtual connectedness. Changes in digital technologies have continued to alter the geography of our connectedness, because of the lack of personal contact of face-to-face interaction. There is a blurring of the gap between online interactions and that found in traditional relations.

Everyday use of mobile phones and SMS in indigenous communities can serve to maintain and reaffirm bonds of already existing social and community relations. For example, in Australia, social media use is higher among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than the general Australian population; in an analysis of health-related content on issues such as mental health, diet, alcohol, smoking and exercise, being shared among Aboriginal and Torres Strait people through social media networks showed that the social capital generated by supportive online environments was

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.essex.gov.uk/climate-action>

more likely to generate greater traction than confronting and emotion-inducing approaches used in mass media campaigns.

Information technologies can also improve connectedness and meaningfulness in people's lives through learning networks and networks of practice. These are emerging to take advantage of information technology, with the notion that virtual communities can be a low cost way to share information and overcome some of the barriers to good governance and sustainable development by enabling leaders to become more effective. The type of internet use (i.e. deep or shallow) can also determine ecological outcomes. For example, in a study of vegetable growers of two provinces in China, Shandong and Shaanxi, deep use of the Internet had a significant positive impact on rural groups with weak social networks.

Fostering networks of practice across regions and continents has been motivated by the need to reduce the profound isolation that practitioners feel as well as to build their personal knowledge and social capital. However, active networks are based on engaging in joint activities and building personal commitment and trust, so information technology by itself cannot supply these essential ingredients. There is no substitute for face to face contact in the generation and transmission of knowledge that is most relevant to leaders working in the unique circumstances of different ecosystems. An earlier review of experiences reported by large international organizations showed a wide range of both successes and challenges for a network of Latin-American coastal managers and a network of mariculture professionals in East Africa.

The strength of networks based on proximity has thus decreased in many parts of the world because people know few of their neighbours, particularly in medium to high density areas and where there is high residential mobility. The pandemic has shown us how, in the absence of physical meetings, ICT can help to build up of shared values and norms and a sense of belonging.

### **Narratives about connectedness and meaningfulness**

Connectedness affects all aspects of human life and endeavour, from cognitive development and longevity to social cohesion, security and perceptions of risk, justice and equity. It is this that creates meaningfulness. Moving forward, it will be important to create the right spaces for people to re-connect, and to build up the narratives by which to transmit the meanings, values, knowledge and understanding between each other. This is the core of how traditional societies retain not just a sense of place but also belongingness and the line beyond which transgressions take individuals out of the community.

### **Philosophy of Belonging and Earth Stewardship**

In earlier lectures I have outlined and gone into more depth, the ideas behind natural prosperity. It speaks to the philosophy of belonging and earth stewardship, bringing people, place, and planet together. In this lecture I have outlined the importance of a values-led approach to our recovery from the pandemic, one which brings belonging, connectedness and resilience into the core of our thinking. In the next two lectures in the series, I will talk about Place and Planet and uncover how our connectedness to nature and location is already playing a deep role in our wellbeing.

### **Other readings**

<https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

<https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-d...>

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-resolution/109/text>

[10] Costanza, R., Cumberland, J.H., Daly, H., Goodland, R., Norgaard, R.B., Kubiszewski, I. and Franco, C., 2014. An introduction to ecological economics. CRC Press.

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