

Measures Commoners Are Taking to Empower Both the Public and the Private Sectors

We are confronted with the breakdowns of three interconnected global systems: the economy, the environment and society.

These breakdowns are a result of the combined actions of all people. Therefore, they cannot be tackled effectively without the full participation of the people – in partnership with governments and corporations (the public and private sectors respectively.)

Faced with escalating crises, where the public and private sectors have sought to work together while people were increasingly marginalized, people have started to work together in diverse forms of commons. These commons seem to be coming to grips with the pending crises by dealing with their root causes.

We are calling on Governments to create an international (High Level or UN) Panel of Experts to develop a step-by-step plan for the creation of a worldwide all-win commons-based economy and global community which might, for instance, take among others, the form of a Second Chamber within the United Nations. This panel would consult with Governments, and relevant IGOs, CSOs, Major Groups and other stakeholders.

Why a Commons-Based Global Economy Holds the Key to Empowering the Public and Private Sectors

Governments (which we can refer to as the Public Sector) are constrained by the limits of their jurisdictions while the interlocking crises they must deal with are both global in scope and express themselves quite differently in diverse localities. For these reasons, **solutions must ultimately come from the citizens who are part of the many diverse communities and whose working relationships and interpersonal friendships connect them to people across national and other boundaries.**

Governments must therefore work, not only with their own citizens and all other governments, but with people worldwide if they are to be effective.

The Private Sector is unable to solve global crises because it has a paramount need to make a profit for the stockholders who fund the many varied corporate entities. Unfortunately, this sector has so often profited **at the expense** of people and the wellbeing of the planet that a greatly increasing percentage of people are rapidly becoming economically marginalized. As a result, in both developed and developing countries alike, they are taking to the streets in protest against corporate greed and social inequity.

Where people cannot afford to buy goods and services, markets dwindle and business suffers. Corporations rely on both the prosperity and the goodwill of people to function.

Almost magically and in a profound demonstration of the human will to rise above failure, people are increasingly taking things into their own hands to overcome the limitations of the Public and Private Sectors. For many years now – and largely working independently of each other – they have been forming the beginnings of a Commons Sector which holds the promise of enabling good governance and socially responsible business.

A commons has three basic characteristics:

- 1) It consists of communities or loosely connected networks of people (called *commoners*).
- 2) These commoners manage the fruits of nature and society that they need to survive and thrive (*commons goods*) such as fishing grounds, security, information and culture.
- 3) They manage these goods using open, transparent, participatory, inclusive forms of decision making so that the interests of all stakeholders are ensured. This is termed *commoning*.

The underlying idea that enables diverse commoners to function in harmony is a belief in, and dedication to living according to the **all-win principle**:

Since each of us and nature are parts of one integrated whole, the wellbeing of all people and all of nature are essential to us all.

Cooperating in this way, they are forming harmonious building blocks for a commons-based global economy.

Shifting to a sustainable, commons-based “green” economy

As mentioned in our earlier emails, there are already thousands of communities where people are living sustainably in a form of commons. These include many indigenous communities worldwide; approximately 15000 Sarvodaya communities; hundreds of Eco-Villages; Transition Towns; GEO-Cities – a project of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); and the many cooperatives which already have more than one billion members. (Please see: <http://www.sarvodaya.org>; www.ecovillage.org; www.transitionnetwork.org. http://www.grid.unep.ch/activities/assessment/geo/geo_cities.php; as well as E/2010/NGO/29 and E/2011/NGO/126). These can be obtained by writing for information (See below)

Community members develop and use environmentally friendly technologies that embrace architecture, waste management, agricultural techniques, water conservation and other aspects of community life. They have a direct stake in caring for the fruits of nature and society in their care and are therefore acutely aware of the consequences of their actions.

Thanks to this sense of being responsible, they restore and regenerate the state of the environment in their immediate surroundings. Also, because all community members are the beneficiaries of the labour of the community as a whole, these commons are agents of both social cohesiveness and economic development ***from the grass roots upwards***.

By increasing the health and productivity of their natural environment and the wealth of their own members, commons groups foster the two components on which all economies depend. They thereby increase both the goods and the health of the markets that are indispensable to business.

Their transparent, inclusive and participatory approaches to decision making enable personal fulfilment. Thus they create a much needed antidote to an economy fuelled by greed. At the same time they develop people's capacity to play a constructive and supportive role for good governance, thereby providing governments with the very support without which they are unable to properly govern the areas under their jurisdiction.

The technologies, the participatory forms of decision making and the way commons groups manage their natural and social resources on a daily basis are the basic characteristics that set them apart from the faltering mainstream of our society (although many communities that fall into this category might not use the term, "commons," to describe themselves).

Working in this way and using other unique inspirational practices, commons groups worldwide are forming a solid foundation for a future sustainable green economy – and not only in the locales in which they operate. Their methods and techniques can easily be transferred and adapted to most other parts of the world, both to cities and rural communities.

In our two other briefs (*Measures to Shift to a Sustainable Commons-Based Economy* and *Measures to Eradicate Poverty*), we detailed many other concrete examples of commons approaches that are helping to provide much-needed solutions to problems that are occurring worldwide. These cover the widest-possible spectrum and include areas such as agriculture, food production, land, waste and water management, peaceful conflict resolution, informational, educational and cultural needs, the use of local currencies to regenerate flagging local economies; and providing security, insurance and banking.

These commons have largely come into being as a way of coping with the need for goods and services that are required by all to survive and prosper but which are being placed beyond the reach of a rapidly increasing proportion of the world's people.

In addition, because many of these commons are not limited by national, social, cultural, religious – and now, increasingly, economic – boundaries, they are empowering and enabling understanding, communication and collaboration between the commons communities that is proving to be indispensable to the well-being of nature and all people.

In other words, we are *all* benefitting from their efforts!

The Power of the Commons as a Tool for Social Change

The Internet's **social media** such as FaceBook and Twitter (both for profit organizations and therefore not commons) are providing powerful tools for the formation of online commons communities and the organization of spontaneous new commons. These have played a decisive role in alerting governments and corporations when these two sectors are not working often by means of massive largely peaceful demonstrations. These dramatic events have emphasized that governments cannot govern without the support of their citizens and businesses cannot survive without the prosperity and support of their customers.

The thousands who in recent spontaneous gatherings harnessed social media to demonstrate peacefully against power politics and corporate greed acted as commoners in their decision making. Where they succeeded in maintaining commons approaches, they demonstrated the power of the commons ideal to create incisive global change toward forms of societies that work both for the “one percent” and the “99 percent.”

At the same time, where these demonstrations have made it hard for both governments and businesses to function, it is abundantly clear that the rate of breakdown of the environment, the economy and society increases rapidly where commons communities are not working harmoniously with well-functioning governments and businesses.

It is important that governments and businesses think beyond taking measures primarily by themselves in response to our common global problems. Instead, they must recognize the indispensability and huge value of input by and cooperation with the world's citizens.

The Commons, the Public and the Private Sectors are interdependent and must therefore work together in such a way as to empower one another.

We have the means to reverse the breakdowns in the areas of the environment, the economy and society. Yet we can only be successful to the degree that the Commons, the Public and Private Sectors work together synergistically to inspire the negotiations leading up to Rio+20, the content of the Outcome Document of Rio+20 and the planning and financing of a subsequent shift to a commons-based global economy that has the benefit of input by and support of all stakeholders.

Signatories:

- *The Association of World Citizens*
- *Commons Action for the United Nations*
- *The All-Win Network*
- *Human Affect*
- *Earth Rights Institute*
- *Climate Change Network Nigeria*
- *AlianzaClimate*
- *The Institute for Planetary Synthesis*
- *Global Commons Trust*
- *Kosmos Associates*
- *Campaign2015+International*
- *Union for Land Value Taxation*
- *CAFSSO-WRAG for development Nigeria*

For more information and for copies of the documents mentioned above, please contact:

Dr. Lisinka Ulatowska, info@worldcitizensaction.com; and

Rob Wheeler robwheeler22@gmail.com.