**Solutions for Environment, Economy, and Democracy (SEED):
A Manifesto for Prosperity**

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The Human Condition in the 21st Century
The quality of life of growing numbers of people on the planet is threatened by a set of systemic problems: dependence on fossil fuels, pressures for unrealistic levels of economic growth, inequitable distribution of wealth and income, the excesses and hidden costs of consumerism, and the undue influence of global corporations over working conditions, social well-being, and governing institutions. Growing economic inequality produces poor health and precarious life prospects for majorities in the Global South and for increasing numbers in the North. Billions of people in the Global South face food and water shortages, which, in addition to political corruption and climate change, contribute to failed states, wars, and migration.

Not only does the current economic regime fail to provide prosperity for enough people, but also the addiction to economic growth—driven by business, governments, and consumers—is killing the life-support capacity of the Earth. We are currently undergoing the sixth great species extinction in the history of our planet, and the first one caused by a species: humans. The most direct means of promoting greater prosperity for people on a more thriving planet is to change the current economic model to one that favors sustainable production and consumption, and equitable distribution. Indeed, the environmental

movement could better attain many of its goals by advocating for sustainable economics over the current menu of environmental policies. Similarly, but on a smaller scale, the debates within the CHI sustainability community about how to move toward genuine sustainability could benefit from such an economic focus as well [0]. Meanwhile, many democracies have trouble addressing either economic or environmental justice issues, in part because political parties have been captured by business interests, and because professional politicians have lost touch with many younger citizens who prefer direct action to tired ideas and empty promises [0].

A shift to a people- and environmentally friendly economic regime will involve politics, which means returning democracies to the people and holding policymakers accountable to popular movements aligned around an agenda of solutions to pressing problems of the environment, economy, and democracy (SEED). We propose to build such a global thought network by engaging currently scattered local and national movements around the prospects of building common narratives and action plans. The logic for developing the SEED thought/action network is outlined in the second half of this article, along with an invitation to participate.

Narratives for Prosperity

If democracies are to lead the way in finding new models for human well-being within environmental limits, nothing short of a renewal of politics and economics is required. Political systems once regarded as mechanisms for solving problems are now widely regarded as part of the problem. And the growth-centered models coming from most economics departments must be countered by well-developed alternative economic theory that has been available just outside the mainstream for decades [0,0]. Beyond promoting models of sustainable economics, it is time to challenge the prevailing magical thinking that deregulated markets somehow possess intelligence, create the best outcomes, and make people free. Similarly dubious assumptions about the virtues of GDP growth, no matter its form or distribution, continue to be recited by economists, media pundits, and leading politicians. Many social democratic and labour parties have been hollowed out by the lure of neoliberalism, abandoning their legacy of forging better social contracts between businesses and working people.

Adding to these problems, consumerism has become the most widely shared cultural scheme on the planet, crossing boundaries of ideology, religion, race, gender, and class. Advertising exhorts people to buy things they do not need and often cannot afford. The advertised attractions of consumer lifestyles distract

attention from the unsustainable realities of a broken system: consumer debt, emotional stress, poor labor conditions, displacement of other social values, and continuing dependence on fossil fuels for producing and distributing goods that are designed to go out of fashion.

The current dystopian vision—built around speculative markets, growth at any cost, better representation for the rich, and equating the interests of corporations with the well-being of people—is surely not the best that contemporary civilization can offer. Rather than allow these chaotic systems to produce greater dysfunction, the present moment can become an opportunity for creative solutions. It is time to think about what kinds of economic production and consumption are most desirable, and how they should be distributed. Economic growth based on speculation must be replaced by investments that produce greater social well-being. More equitable economic formulas must also be held accountable for addressing resource depletion and declining environmental quality.

Creating social, cultural, and economic systems that put people, communities, and the planet first requires reimagining the simple elements of the good life. What helps people prosper? The basic elements of prosperity include food, shelter, health, education, security, leisure, participation, creative expression, and freedom from violence and oppression. The challenge is to find new political and economic models that focus on such basic human values, and to organize politics to deliver these results.

It is time to bridge these three critically related areas of democracy, economics, and environmental policy with a broad agenda for change that combines input from academics, activists, civil society organizations, parties, and concerned citizens.

What Is to Be Done?
If a manageable transition to a more widely shared prosperity within planetary boundaries is to occur, political movements and emerging parties must balance resistance with positive advocacy of broad political, economic, and environmental agendas. The desired result is a new social contract that better serves owners and workers, citizens and governments, and consumers and the planet. Business must play a central role in this transition, recognizing that long-term stability based on shared prosperity is of greater value than pursuing short-term profits in turbulent markets.

If the economy does not work well for most people, and it is threatening the planet's life-support systems, then it seems time to consider how it can work better. There is no shortage of good ideas. Indeed, a large collection of promising thought emerged during the 1960s and 1970s addressing such issues as: the poisoning of the planet, the need to design systems for a finite planet, the conflict between unmanaged growth and the environment, and basic principles of sustainable economics necessary to live within these realities.

There are also large bodies of literature showing that conventional measures of economic prosperity such as GDP do not necessarily provide good human outcomes. Economic policies and investment incentives should instead be calculated according to social and environmental outcomes: health, education, nutrition, shelter, leisure time, work that puts people above the poverty line, opportunities for people to develop their potential, and restoration of thriving natural environments. What is the path toward these outcomes?

Solutions for Environment, Economy, and Democracy (SEED)
Many citizens grasp the complexity of the problems facing civilization, and understand the many arenas—local, national, transnational, north, and south—in which issues must be addressed. It is time to move beyond Twitter revolutions that produce massive expressions of anger and hope, and develop new technology platforms. These platforms would reflect political models that address interrelated issues and would scale across different geographical and cultural boundaries. This is a proposal for developing idea networks that engage citizens, activists, business interests, scholars, and politicians in rethinking their visions of prosperity. The challenge is to develop more holistic thinking that feeds more flexible political organizations, such as hybrid movement-parties that aim to make change locally while linking their efforts nationally and globally.

Finding these pathways to sustainable societies for people in different circumstances depends on creative ideas generated by diverse knowledge communities. Those ideas must be communicated in compelling ways using narratives and memes that travel across social, cultural, and political boundaries. Smart technology and social media networks can help people create, curate, and share creative thought and action on a variety of issues.

Our goal is to bring scholars, NGO practitioners, activists, and party leaders together to reinvent a politics for the current era, in which many citizens have grown increasingly skeptical about parties, elections, and governments. Membership and voting support for traditional center-left and center-right parties

have been in decline. Far-right parties are on the rise nearly everywhere in the democracies, attracting voters who respond to reactionary nationalist and racial discourses. At the same time, progressive movements and parties are experimenting with the logic of connective action [0] that uses technology to flatten hierarchies and engage citizens in dialogue. However, these large action networks generally emerge as technology-equipped crowds that occupy public spaces and tend to be chaotic and short lived. What technologies would help such networks of concerned citizens stabilize and interface better with democratic institutions?

A key element is currently missing from this political picture: a widely accessible information/action network for generating and sharing ideas across diverse and geographically dispersed publics. While there are many intellectual spaces filled with good ideas, they do not add up. The SEED network must strive to develop intelligent open source, noncommercial, secure technology to put people with good ideas together in an environment that helps them bridge differences, distill thinking, and develop focused practices. This network must have the capacity to assess successes and failures, and to develop organizational models that interface effectively with democratic institutions.

There are opportunities in this historic moment if broad thinking meets smart political organization. The question is whether compelling ideas can bridge the critical areas of environment, economy, and democracy, and offer inclusive participatory opportunities for people who are currently divided by tired ideology, geography, and dysfunctional politics.

A Proposal for Developing a SEED Network
A SEED network can be built upon open source and expandable technology that lightens the burdensome work of everyday democratic deliberation by helping to identify and bridge differences, and distribute creative visions that engage individuals, movements, civil society organizations, and parties. This core platform must make it simple and inviting to develop collaborative ideas, identify and bridge topics, build agendas, and develop the organizational capacity to put those ideas into practice.

We currently have an interim website for the project, built using off-the-shelf, open source software. Our plan is to replace this with a smart technology platform to support and grow a broad intellectual network for sharing ideas and resources in the core areas of SEED. The platform will enable the semi-automated tagging and curating of content, along with prompts for people to

engage with the contributions of others and highlight differences. Contributions that bridge multiple existing topics, as well as popular resolutions of differences, will rise to become the most featured and shared content. At the same time, we will begin introducing proposals from the network into broader intellectual and policy circles.

As we continue development of the platform, we will also expand the network to include more practitioners from parties, NGOs, movements, and other civil society organizations, with emphasis on expanding membership in the Global South. These practitioners will become equal partners in evolving the idea agenda, as well as offering pragmatic input about obstacles and opportunities for implementing elements of the agenda. The platform should become an organizing hub for a set of chartering principles for a sustainable, equitable prosperity within environmental limits, with the aim of moving these principles into political arenas at all levels, from local to global.

We also plan a significant research component that examines the diffusion of the SEED agenda by political parties, movements, and media networks that reach broader publics, including the assessment of successes and failures, and the promotion of models that work. At the same time, on the practical side we hope to see increasing recognition by prominent leaders in different sectors of economics, environment, politics, faith communities, business, and popular culture, as well as the translation of effective ideas and models for action into diverse social, cultural, and political settings.

Please visit the project website at https://seed.uw.edu for further information or to add yourself to the project mailing list; subsequently, this same URL will be the entry point for the smart platform as it is developed and deployed.

The path to a renewal of politics and economics—to a system that lives within the limits of the Earth—will be a difficult one to follow. Success is not at all guaranteed, but the alternative of continuing business as usual will lead to a dystopian future indeed. At the same time, many people clearly understand various aspects of these problems and want to address them. The time is ripe for developing a viable alternative. We invite your reactions and welcome your engagement.

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