

ABSTRACT PAPER:

Peoples Sustainability Treaties: A Platform for a Common Narrative, Agenda and Movement

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(For the proposed special session on "Alternative Imaginaries: Buen Vivir, Radical Ecological Democracy and Degrowth")

The prevalent model of development has not only failed to lift a large section of humanity above unacceptable levels of poverty, but has also greatly increased the inequities between the wealthy and the poor, and led directly to the ecological unsustainability we see around us. Resource extraction has historically taken place in the global South, with the benefits of these largely accruing to the global North; while abject poverty persists in the former, the latter are characterised by wasteful consumerism and the diseases of affluence. This growth based development model is fundamentally flawed, in that it is predatory of both nature and people, ecologically unsustainable, and socio-economically inequitable.

In this context, a radically different vision of human well-being, one that is in tune with nature and respects other species, promotes socio-economic equity amongst all people, enhances the cultural, material, economic, social, and political opportunities of all, and empowers each person and community to take part in decision-making affecting their lives.

The world needs profound transformations in the fundamental values and organizing principles of society; new values ascend that emphasize human solidarity, affinity with nature, and quality-of life. This new paradigm seeks to change the character of planetary civilization, validating cultural cross-fertilization, economic connectedness, and the rights of communities to meet global responsibilities in diverse ways. Any alternative economic system should promote a vision of a networked system of decentralized, community based, sustainable economies in a diversity of settings, which stands on a foundation of integrity, accountability and equitable distribution. Such a nested system of sustainable economies should be connecting economies across the world.

Despite unprecedented growth in the global economy since 1992, governments are trapped in making insatiable demands for still more unsustainable growth and rising inequity to remedy problems that economic globalization itself has caused. The post 2015 agenda and the SDG agenda needs to find convergence towards providing the world a new common agenda for a sustainable 21st century. Such an agenda building exercise needs new common partnerships.

The challenge is to recognize the legitimacy of the global polity as an outer layer of the nested system of affiliation that reaches across regions and places, and to build the processes of democratic global governance for implementing the global transformation and managing our collective affairs on this planet. Thus the need for a Global Peoples Movement emerges.

Towards this objective, the Peoples' Sustainability Treaties (PSTs) were initiated by civil society organizations to develop collective agreements for sustainable futures beyond Rio+20. The PSTs are evolving a new narrative and agenda towards the transformation to a sustainable world order, providing a common platform for a collective global people's movement to emerge. The PST process leads us to a deep investigation in which social and natural science perspectives such as distributed and collective leadership, resilience, the 'commons', and subsidiarity come into play in these alternative frameworks of well-being of all.

In a new common narrative and agenda PST proposes that, **Equity** is the overarching demand and must be the foundation of the collective global response; equity within generations, equity across generations, and equity between humans and nature. For this we need to revert back to making individual and societal decisions based on equity and ecological factors and not merely on monetary factors. A different sort of economics, a new approach to learning and education as a process, a revised understanding of ethics and of spirituality then become the ways in which we can work toward a more Equitable society; one that recognizes our integral relationship with the natural world.

Localizing our systems of economies, decentralizing governance, and advancing sustainable lifestyles and livelihoods becomes the new social order of sustainable societies. Localism is the theme emerging across the board which is linked to the principles of devolution, of decentralization and of subsidiarity, turning localism into a world-wide movement becomes the key to unpacking many of the complexities we face, whether in the case of sustainable consumption and production or in the case of radical ecological democracy. Protecting the rights of Mother Earth and of humans, transforming our governance systems through radical ecological democracy, respecting cultural diversity, and strengthening sustainable economies is the way towards sustainable futures for all. It is thus essential that we create a more effective, responsible and democratic system of global governance.

A **Global Peoples Movement** is the collective response towards transitioning to a sustainable world. All sections of society must thrive to converge upon their visions and convictions and find common ground for collective action that can bring about the transformation required to ensure the wellbeing of all on the planet—humans as well as nature. Such a global people's movement would catalyze for a peaceful and prosperous new world that generates widespread happiness and contentment – thus propagating widespread practices of mindful intentional action. For this, a new sense of ethics, values and spirituality must be seeded within current and future generations through a redesigned system of learning, education and enlightenment.

The PST synthesis report to Rio+20 (2012) states, It is clear that humanity, embedded within our planetary system, is approaching a level of self-awareness and of consciousness that might well permit our global, regional and local democratic institutions to reflect, for the first time, the conditions necessary for an honest occupation of the twenty-first century. As our civilization enters this new planetary phase, we become increasingly aware that we face unprecedented threats and challenges. But our growing awareness of our surging interdependencies makes

possible as well the radical transformations toward a shared destiny. We recognize that a failure on our part to close the ominous gap between the requirements and challenges imposed by this new phase in our “full world” planetary development, and our abilities to evolve beyond the constraints imposed by entirely obsolete ways of thinking can, at the very least, prove catastrophic to our planetary system. This calls for a Sustainability Transition, one that envisions a profound and historical transformation in the world-views and values that shape the organizing principles of human society. These necessarily new ways of thinking, and the urgently needed transformation in our values, attitudes and beliefs, must emphasize human solidarity, affinity with nature, and a dramatic re-emphasis on the idea of a decent quality-of-life for all. This emergent and in some ways radical new paradigm must transmute the very character of planetary civilization as we know it, and, in doing so, validate cultural cross-fertilization, economic connectedness, and the rights of communities to meet global responsibilities in a diverse array of ways.

In the formation of a global peoples movement, one that might simultaneously build upon the globalization of the grassroots and the localization of the planet, we need to think constructively about ways in which we might articulate an agenda for action that more coherently spells out the needs of humanity and of the planet, as perceived by civil society. The PST process is intended to lay the foundations of just such a conversation, one that might shed light on a new set of values and priorities which might shape the conversation that will articulate the parameters of a globalized citizenry. The process will, at least in part, have served its purpose if it is successful in moving civil society organizations and global citizenry along a path toward deeper, more meaningful and more constructive engagement with global governance. In this, it is hoped, the PST process will help actualize the much needed sustainability transition and the burgeoning global citizens movement.

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About the Author:

Uchita de Zoysa is a thinker, writer, speaker, strategist and frontline leader in mobilizing civil society and stakeholder alliances for shaping policy for the global sustainability movement. He is the author of several books including the “It has to be CLIMATE SUSTAINABILITY”. He edited the 'Asian Review on Sustainable Consumption', was a member of the committee drafting the 'The NGO Alternative Treaties for Earth Summit 1992' and a co-author of the “Oslo Declaration on Sustainable Consumption”. He is the Executive Director of the Centre for Environment and Development, Chairman of Global Sustainability Solutions and Global facilitator of Peoples Sustainability Treaties.

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