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# WORLD SUSTAINABILITY FORUM

Changing the world for good

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Madrid, Rome, Santa Fe

... engaging the foremost leaders to  
accelerate a just transformation to  
sustainable development

# The World Sustainability Forum

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## 01 Preamble

The Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development call for a transformation to sustainable development. Fundamentally changing the context for decision-making, it admits the possibility of democratic multilateralism yet is opposed by forces both wilfully malign and tragically banal.

In recent years and months we have witnessed a further unravelling of the international multilateralism that is essential not only to arrest the COVID-19 pandemic, but for the greater challenge of a just transition to sustainable development. The inconsistencies, inadequacies and contradictions of multiple interlocking systems – from health and finance to energy and education – were exposed in the context of global systemic crises that now envelope us. The pandemic is a harbinger of dramatic shifts in the months and years to come. To assume otherwise risks jeopardizing the moral authority and legitimacy of our governance systems. [1]

The pandemic struck at a time when the multilateral system was already subject to a sustained assault. It exposed our shared vulnerabilities and a deficit of moral leadership and imagination at the highest levels. [2] Moral leadership, acting on insight and vision has been replaced by the banality of managerialism. We live in an Orwellian world where leadership accepts “the most flagrant violations of reality, because they never fully grasped the enormity of what was demanded of them, and were not sufficiently interested in public events to notice what was happening. By lack of understanding they remained sane”. [3]

Blocking far-sighted analysis and innovative thinking, managerialism means governance systems are ill-equipped to navigate the multiple disruptive threats with the capacity, insight and commitment requisite to the risk. By and large, our governance systems, behaviours, and mind-sets are not yet calibrated for the transition. For the intellectual landscape is littered with out-of-date ideas that continue to dominate long after they have ceased working. These institutionalised zombie orthodoxies march relentlessly on, enforcing conformity, exacerbating economic inequalities, and throttling our dreams. They contribute to a legitimisation crisis, political rupture and existential risk. [4] With fatal and long-lasting consequences, the pandemic has exposed the reckless and cavalier approaches of posturing popularists who take pride in their contempt for science and truth, use the crisis to secure authoritarian power, and methodically undermine the international order. Others nostalgically advocate new plutocratic alliances which only serve to further undermine a global rules-based approach and exacerbate democratic multilateralism.

Each year, mitigation scenarios that explore policy options for transforming the global economy are more optimistic – and less plausible. Policy-makers and business leaders, in their magical thinking, imagine that there is time for an orderly economic transition within the current short-termist political thinking and business-as-usual. If we are to create a future resilient to crises, we need to make long-term structural changes that will require uncommon courage and moral leadership.



The world not imagined is the one that now exists: a world of pandemic; looming financial instability; of a global legitimisation crisis and of a sustainability crisis that extends far beyond climate emergency to include all the fundamentals of human existence and most significant planetary boundaries.

At the risk of a failure of epic proportions, the performances we have witnessed cannot be the model for the greater challenge of sustainable development. A rules-based democratic multilateral system is the world's insurance policy against existential threats from pandemics to climate emergency and nuclear weapons.

## 02 Mission, Vision and Ethos

Born of the efforts of visionary leaders, the mission of the World Sustainability Forum is to engage the world's foremost political, business, cultural and other leaders of society to accelerate a just transformation to sustainable development. Development should be integral, that is, not limited to merely economic aspects but instead, and most importantly, include social and cultural factors. The fundamental mission of the Forum is to help pave the way for a new era of the people.

Our vision is of a world where people live in peaceful coexistence, conscious of their common humanity and their shared responsibilities for each other, for the planet and for future generations. As the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, more than ever, the world needs this science-business-policy forum.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change as adopted in 2015 are tangible proof of the benefits of multilateralism in finding global solutions to global challenges. Their implementation offers a pathway to a world where poverty, inequality and conflict will not blight the life chances of millions of people who are currently denied the opportunity to responsibly enjoy their fundamental rights and freedoms. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Agreement requires all relevant stakeholders to understand and engage with the scientific realities that underpin the relations between man and the biosphere.

Realised through a systemic approach to strengthening human well-being and capabilities, we must enable a just transformation. The public and private sectors, international organisations and academic institutions, together with scientific and technological expertise must be urgently brought to bear and deliver impressive results. As the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated, the determining factors are ethical leadership and political courage to overcome the multitude of challenges facing the world today. From conflict and climate change to the future of work, the need for ethical leadership and political courage in the face of rising tensions, social divisions and xenophobic nationalism has never been greater.





## 03 Governance

### Board of Directors and Managing Board

The Forum adheres to the highest governance standards. Its Board of Directors – the Forum’s top governing body – consists of global leaders from government, business, civil society, and academia. The Forum’s Managing Board – the main operational body – also reflects the best from each of these sectors. Directors do not represent any personal or professional interests.

### Leadership

The Forum is chaired by a president and chief executive officer. Articulating its mission and vision the Board of Directors oversees the Forum’s work in accelerating a just and prosperous transformation. The leadership and staff of the Forum comprise exceptional individuals from all walks of life and several nationalities. This global depth and experience ensures its ability to fully support our global membership and their engagement on global issues.

Membership in the Board of Directors and the creation of a standing committee of advisory patrons is being expanded.



## 04 Partner Organisations



## 05 Role

Advocating democratic multilateralism, the World Sustainability Forum shall empower leaders of the global North and South for a just and prosperous transformation. With the pace of change accelerating, even the most progressive governments, businesses and organisations struggle to meet the world's technological, environmental and social challenges when responses are grounded in 19th Century thinking.

Solutions-focused; convening leaders from across sectors to accelerate action with measurable outcomes the Forum translates SD politics, economics and policies into action. We build broad-based coalitions to accelerate the transformation. We work with our partners to implement transformational changes.

The Forum is a trusted platform for all stakeholders of global society to integrate and synergise their efforts to accelerate a just transformation to sustainable development. Only through the power of collaboration can we successfully solve our shared global challenges.

## 06 Relevance

Our world is an interconnected system straining under the burden of its emergent complexity. We see numerous factors combining to make the global environment more unpredictable and difficult to navigate. In global governance, we see the post-World War II balance between nation states and the institutional framework that worked to manage it disintegrating. In its place, we see the emergence of new geo-economic competition, new regionalism and new actors. Meanwhile, technological change is disrupting our economies and changing the nature of our globalized world in ways both unpredictable and complex. We may witness more technological disruption in the next decade than we have seen in the past 50 years necessitating the institutionalisation of technology fit for the future.

Advances in all the sciences – from robotics and genetics to communications and the social sciences – will leave no aspect of global society untouched. Around the world, a young generation is demanding to be heard. Young people increasingly see decisions being made at the expense of their future. Each of these factors and many others require a new kind of institution – one with the adaptability, the entrepreneurialism and the trust of all stakeholders – that can bring together leaders who have the power to make change, to achieve mutual understanding and empathy, to come to common agreement and, where appropriate, accelerate the transformation agenda.

The Forum provides a platform for leaders from all stakeholder groups from around the world – enterprise, academia, government and civil society – to come together.

## 07 Communities

The World Sustainability Forum is uniquely positioned to engage a diverse community of stakeholders to accelerate a just transformation.

### *Academia and Science*

The world's leading experts engage through our Councils. Global research universities and academies make up our Global Academic Leaders Forum.

### *Governments and International Organisations*

Engaged through joint projects and cooperation agreements.



### *Business*

A group of 1,000 leading global enterprises is engaged as Partners. This group is further strengthened and diversified through our special communities of emerging global enterprises, technology pioneers and startups.

### *Civil Society*

The leaders of globally active NGOs, trade unions, cultural leaders and other civil society institutions are integrated into all our communities and advisory councils. This is reinforced by our community of social entrepreneurs, working on models of social innovation.

## 08 Focus Areas

As assumptions about the world's socio-economic operating system are overturned, international balance of power shifts, and scientific and technological breakthroughs promise to transform economies and societies. The Forum helps leaders from all walks of life resiliently respond to disruptive change and systemic crises.

Forum members and partners benefit from tailored engagement based on their corporate strategy. The deeper an organisation's engagement, the greater is its ability to shape the Forum agenda.

*Community Engagement:* The Forum cultivates a network of communities that extend beyond each member's immediate peer group to enhance collaboration. Community engagement means connecting with young leaders and innovators, technology disruptors or entrepreneurs.

*Knowledge and Innovation Ecosystems:* The Forum supports the development of dynamic, long-term partnerships among businesses (including SMEs), policy makers, and research organisations to form dynamic global partnerships, and create favourable environments for creative thought processes and innovations to flourish. These are Knowledge and Innovation Ecosystems (KIEs) and each is dedicated connecting stakeholders within and across industries and regions with core thematic issues so they can collaborate on delivering positive change. KIEs include: Healthcare; Energy; Regenerative Economy; Advanced Technologies; Finance, Work and Well-being; Peace; and Education.

*Regional Engagement:* Involvement at regional level offers extensive insights into a region's dynamics, markets, policy-making and business communities.

Each World Sustainability Forum community comprises select partner enterprises that are shaping and transforming their industries in strategic and socially responsible ways. The sustainable development governors' community comprises chief executives and chairpersons who provide leadership, define the sustainable development agenda and accelerate the transformation.

The sustainable development communities provide a platform for chief executives and senior executives with strategic, business or regional responsibilities to shape the sustainable development and develop insights through Forum-hosted programmes and communities.



## 09 Unique Features

Future-facing, systemic, global and impartial, the World Sustainability Forum is an international organisation for public-private cooperation committed to accelerating a just transformation. The Forum is the only global organisation bringing together the world's heads of state, ministers and policy-makers, chief executive officers, experts and academics, international organisations, youth, technology innovators and representatives of civil society with the aim to accelerate a just transformation.

The Forum is:

*Impartial:* It has neither ideological nor commercial interests. This does not mean that the Forum is neutral. It is committed to accelerating a science-based transformation to sustainable development in ways that are just, objective and measurable.

*Global:* We bring attention to challenges that affect the transformation of global society. Because the world is a complex adaptive ecosystem, we believe that no issue is isolated – there are always effects and interdependencies, which we systematically and rigorously take into consideration.

*Systemic:* We actively invite perspectives from all interested parties. We believe that the challenges of the transformation to sustainable development can only be achieved through engagement with all members of global society.

*Future-Facing:* We focus on the long term, not the emergencies of the day. Success is measured not only in terms of immediate results – we understand that real progress takes time and fortitude.

## 10 Theory of Change

The Forum embraces a theory of change recognizing that:

- By developing individual relationships with global leaders, the Forum can influence them to strengthen their commitment to ethical leadership and democratic multilateral cooperation.
- The Scientific community guided by democratic principles should counsel leaders concerning the actions to be taken, not only as advisors, but also to provide foresight; with knowledge to foresee and foresight to prevent.
- The Forum's global reputation will influence the terms of debate around protecting and strengthening democratic multilateral institutions necessary for a just transformation.
- The Forum's relationships with leaders will be decisive in persuading them to maintain a high level of ambition in the transformation.
- The Forum's moral authority will create the space for science-based advocacy at the highest levels while challenging false narratives.
- When the Forum promotes science-based ideas, they will be listened to, and those ideas will gain traction more quickly.
- The Forum's advocacy shall inspire and strengthen coalitions and organisations working to accelerate the transformation to sustainable development.
- The Forum's interventions shall inspire and encourage world leaders to initiate, support and accelerate a just transition to sustainable development in their enterprises and countries.





## 11 Impact

Accelerating the transformation, the Forum's strategy is simple and effective: bring together the most relevant leaders from all sectors of global society North and South, and identify the best ways to address the world's most significant challenges.

The Forum is the catalyst for global initiatives, historic shifts, sustainable development breakthroughs, new economic thinking as well as projects and collaborations.

Our work can help:

- Enhance trust and support in the international democratic multilateral system.
- Encourage the resolve of world leaders to demonstrate ethical leadership on major global issues.
- Strengthen others' efforts to end the threat posed by nuclear weapons.
- Enable discussions which emphasise a just transformation that benefits everyone.
- Voices and actions of transformation champions that they are brought to the fore of the international agenda, creating the political space for more ambitious action.
- Incubate and support science-based and innovative ideas to help create systemic change to support socio-economic systems fit for the future.
- Ensure decision-makers and influencers are more aware of science-based best practices and motivated to implement them.

## 12 Communications and Engagement

We communicate and engage on a broad range of levels – from private diplomacy through to public advocacy. We draw on our reputation and expertise to build and amplify partnerships that can deliver real-world impact.

The Forum's communications and engagement strategy has three closely connected goals:

1. To influence leaders and expand political will towards actions that accelerate a just transformation to sustainable development.
2. To inspire and connect others whose work is aligned with the Forum's mission, vision and KIEs, to amplify its voice and efforts, and to catalyse effective actions.
3. To strengthen the legitimacy, credibility and reach of the Forum's voice.

The Forum seeks to reach out to influencers, opinion-formers, and national and international decision-makers to help bring about the transformation. It shall engage with wider audiences to exert influence or rally support around the institutional changes that are fit for the future. We will seek to raise our individual and collective voice as the Forum – not only to influence and inspire leaders from the grass roots to the world stage, but also to amplify and support those accelerating the transformation.



## 13 Collaborative Programmes

We are living in a complex and fast changing world with interconnected problems and emergent challenges. In this context, enterprises are undertaking initiatives to understand the scope and scale of these problems, search for resilient solutions and take action that assures their viability. But how do your organisation's efforts address these challenges and feed into interconnected global systems, or attract wider public attention for more impact?

The Forum offers programmes to integrate and aggregate these efforts. Our institutional role and strategic partnership framework agreements with United Nations agencies and partner organisations helps us channel impact more effectively.

Each programme is directed by public and private-sector leaders who provide insight into key drivers and interconnections between particular issues. Each programme is supported by leading experts from our Global Future Councils.

To ensure sustained progress, initiatives and projects are defined in one of three ways: fully Forum-developed and resourced; jointly developed and resourced by a consortium of stakeholders; and fully led and resourced by third-party "champions," yet always contributing to the common vision. The Programme approach was designed to foster closer global cooperation, supporting international organisations that advance progress in specific areas, while embedded into our global efforts.

## 14 High-level Interaction

To achieve its mission, the Forum leverages its convening power to engage the most relevant and knowledgeable leaders into peer-level dialogue to accelerate the just transformation.

We bring together our stakeholder communities for our Annual Meeting in Toronto. The meeting takes place in June each year and is the world's foremost summit for shaping global, regional and industry sustainable development agendas.

A second Annual Meeting, focused on entrepreneurship and innovation, takes place in Singapore.

In addition, the Forum organizes a Sustainable Development Impact Summit on alternate years in Mexico City, Dubai and Cape Town. These summits focus on enhancing global public goods and seeking innovative solutions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. To advance cooperation and explore more specific contexts, the Forum also hosts meetings in other key regions and countries around the world.

Powered by scientific insights, regional meetings and national strategy days provide focused engagement on the issues dominating regional and local agendas. An ongoing programme of workshops, seminars and meetings on issues relevant to each Programme provides opportunities to further drive action.



A number of Forum communities, (such as the Global Future Councils) are structured as “insight ecosystems” and supported by the Forum's knowledge platform. The Communities are designed to cultivate a systemic understanding of and approach to major issues and how these issues affect other global, regional or sustainable development-specific challenges.

The Forum brings together decision-makers from across global society North and South to work on projects and initiatives that accelerates the transformation. Through collaboration between stakeholders with varied perspectives, our projects deliver concrete and resilient outcomes and make a positive impact at all levels of society.

Our portfolio of projects is aligned around the world's transformation challenges and regional issues in the local context. They are designed to make meaningful and viable change.

The Forum has unrivalled expertise in convening leaders from its communities. This allows for year round engagement opportunities and interactions that span industry sectors, scientific disciplines, cultures, and geographies.

## 15 Knowledge Platform

To support our role in setting priorities and connecting decision-makers, the Forum mobilizes world-class research capabilities, with a state-of-the art Sustainable Development Research Network (SDRNet). The Forum, through its KIEs, engages progressive and innovative enterprises, academics, and public officials to create strategic intelligence to help leaders understand and anticipate the forces transforming industries, businesses, global governance and societies. The Forum maps these integrated insights to create a systems analytic tool built on expert knowledge. SDRNet sustains ongoing interactions and conversations through research. Knowledge is curated with the aid of transparent artificial intelligence algorithms. The Forum's media and public engagement amplifies these efforts by raising awareness and furthering opportunities for dialogue.

## 16 Partnership Opportunities

The Forum offers three classes of partnership: Strategic, Associate and Ordinary.

### Strategic Partner

The Forum's Strategic Partners represent leading global enterprises, each providing essential leadership to support the Forum's mission of accelerating the transformation. Only enterprises with demonstrated track records of good governance and alignment with Forum mission and values are invited to join this group. Their economic and social significance means that Strategic Partner enterprises play a critical role as global citizens. They further the Forum's mission and shape the future through extensive contribution to developing and implementing Forum projects and championing public-private dialogue.



Strategic Partners enjoy broad experience engaging with a minimum of five Programmes. Access to Forum networks and experts allows participation in strategic decision-making on the most important sustainable development issues. The Strategic Partner's chief executive officer or chairperson is typically the driving force in Forum communities, events and projects, and is personally involved in decision-making and shaping many Forum initiatives. The most senior executives also participate on steering boards and in advisory groups, where relevant.

World Sustainability Forum Strategic Partners represent 100 leading global enterprises from the global North and South, each providing essential leadership to support the Forum's mission of accelerating a transformation. Only the most recognized enterprises with demonstrated track records of good governance and alignment with Forum values are invited to join this group.

#### *Associate Strategic Partner*

Associate Strategic Partners include the world's leading businesses, and are actively involved in shaping the future of industries, regions and systemic issues. These enterprises believe in corporate global citizenship and are committed to enabling transformative change.

Associate Strategic Partners engage with up to four Programmes. Access to Forum multi-stakeholder networks and experts allows participation in strategic decision-making on the most important sustainable development issues.

Associate Strategic Partners are represented at Forum communities, events and projects by the chief executive officer, chairperson or other board-level executives. These executives are personally involved in decision-making and shaping the Forum's initiatives.

#### *Ordinary Partner*

World Sustainability Forum Partners are world-class enterprises with a strong interest in developing systemic solutions to key challenges. They are the driving force behind Forum Programmes.

Partners may engage in up to three Programmes. Access to Forum networks and experts provides Partners with visibility and time-sensitive insight into strategic decision-making on the issues most important to them. Partners are represented in Forum communities, events and projects by the chief executive, chairperson or other board-level executives. These executives are personally involved in decision-making and steering of initiatives.

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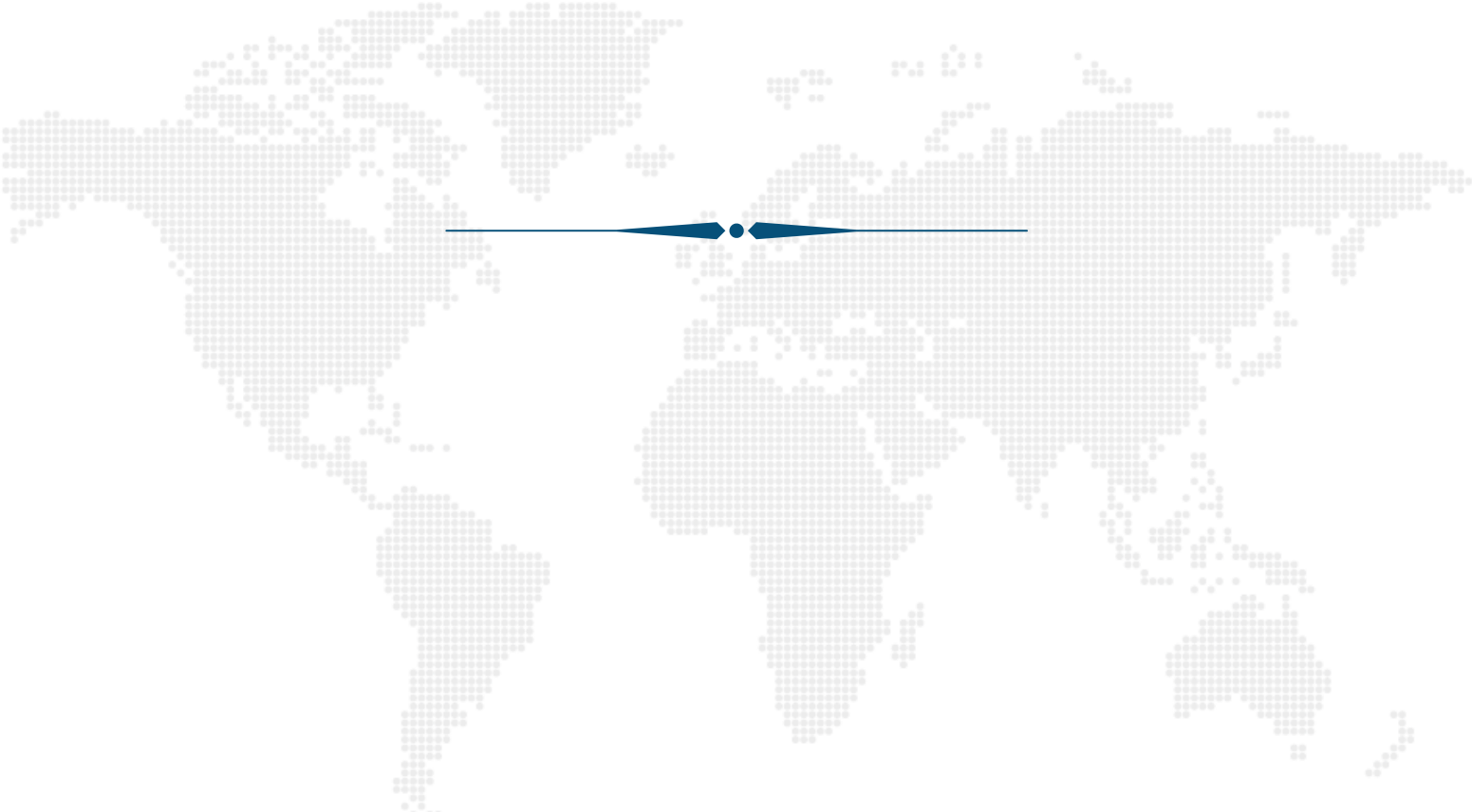
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## 17 Endnotes

1. A government may be said to derive its legitimacy and hence its authority from the people, and thus has a fiduciary duty to act in accordance with the interests of all the people with integrity, fairness and accountability.
2. Ordinary and trite, managerialism methodically disconnects day-to-day activities to their eventual consequences. It is characterised by “a curious, quite authentic inability to think” (Ardent, H. 1992, Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil. (1963) Penguin Books: NY, NY).
3. Orwell, G. 1949, Nineteen Eighty-Four. A Novel, Secker and Warburg, London.
4. An existential risk to civilisation is one posing permanent large negative consequences to humanity which may never be undone.



The World Sustainability Forum is an international non-governmental organisation with secretariates in Madrid, Rome and Santa Fe.

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