

Manifesto for Democracy and Sustainability

We cherish sustainability: meeting the needs of people now without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. But today, human activities have exceeded the earth's natural limits. As a species we have created great inequalities and torn resources away from those yet to be born.

We cherish democracy: the rule of the people, by the people, and for the people. But democracy is undermined by decision-making that is democratic in name only. It is threatened by conflict, apathy, inequality, manipulation and corruption. It is failing to deliver sustainability.

Together, if we take immediate action, we have the power to transform democracy so that it is an engine for sustainability. This Manifesto for Democracy and Sustainability has been developed to guide a global movement for change. As its signatories, we confirm that we want to be part of this movement. What we create together will be part of our bequest to future generations.

Principle 1: Sustainability needs flourishing democracy

Democracy has multiple forms. It can always improve and must always adapt. Democracy is the best political system for people to secure a healthy environment and fairness for everyone now and in the future.

Democracy must never be a sham. Real democracy is much more than elections and voting: it also means that everyone commits to fairness and to ensuring vibrant and meaningful public participation in decision-making, especially by the most marginalised people. This means responsibility to future as well as current generations of people.

If it is to thrive and bounce back from shocks and uncertainties, democracy needs to be supported through citizenship education. It also requires effective measures to ensure freedom from vested commercial and financial interests; freedom from corruption; diverse and accountable politicians and public officials; a free and independent media; transparency; access to justice; the rule of legitimate law; an independent judiciary; and the upholding of all human rights.

Commitments

We commit to lead by example; deepening democratic decision-making through the ways in which we engage with other people, both in the real world and online.

We encourage our communities, our elected representatives, and leaders around the world to take up practices that demonstrate strong commitment to democracy with people at its heart.

We call on civic leaders and elected representatives to show the leadership that is essential for democratic renewal.

Principle 2: Take the long view

Democracy must plan for present and future human needs in ways that respect the earth's natural limits. From the local to the global, the practice of democracy at every level urgently needs to overcome short-termism.

Commitments

We advocate the development and strengthening of independent institutions and processes designed to bring future generations and longer-term thinking and evidence into political processes from the local through to the global level.

Through our active citizenship at all levels, we will become advocates for future generations.

Principle 3: Sustainability must be a central goal of governments everywhere

Democracy needs to drive the economy, not the other way round. To ensure that this happens, governments at all levels must make sustainability a central goal. Sustainability demands transformation of economic models that lead to environmental destruction and open up huge gaps between the richest and the poorest. All sectors of society need to commit to this process of change.

Commitments

We encourage governments and public bodies to adopt measures of progress that value fairness, wellbeing and the environment.

We encourage governments and international bodies to make sustainability a central organising principle of policy.

We support social enterprises and innovations which prioritize solving environmental and social problems over profit.

We support full transparency in the funding of political parties and candidates and the elimination of dependence on commercial and corporate interests.

We commit to lifestyles that demonstrate our will to prioritise action for a healthy environment and fairness for all, now and in the future.

Principle 4: Education must link citizenship and sustainability

Education must nurture the knowledge and values needed to strengthen democratic action for sustainability. It must empower all people, whatever their age, to be active as citizens and followers, and wise as leaders. It must help to unlock the potential of being, not having.

All people, from an early age, should have access to an education that builds the skills and knowledge to shape democracy so that it can deliver a healthy environment and fairness for everyone.

Commitments

We support civic education that develops active citizens and builds deep understanding of the case for democracy and its practices in different contexts.

We advocate strong programmes of lifelong sustainability education.

Principle 5: Knowledge must be inclusive

It is the right and responsibility of all citizens to be informed.

Knowledge and wisdom that is drawn from first-hand experience needs to be as respected as knowledge that is professionally accredited.

Informed processes of public deliberation of advice and evidence must be the foundation of public decision-making from the local to the global.

Commitments

We support initiatives designed to bring public engagement and deliberation into international, national and local scientific and other processes that inform public decision-making on addressing sustainability challenges.

We commit to speak out when we see that elected representatives and public officials rely too heavily on expertise from professionals at the expense of knowledge from those whose expertise comes from their experience.

Principle 6: Nothing about us without us

In our global society, decisions made at any level can affect people anywhere and everywhere. The interests of all people affected by public decisions need to be taken into account. Decision-makers at all levels should also be accountable to all affected people.

Communities must have access to the decision-making spaces and resources they need to shape their own future, with proper regard for the wellbeing of others, future generations, and the earth's natural boundaries.

The scale and effects of sustainability challenges often demand that democracy bursts out of its national borders. In decision-making at the international level democracy, not the self-interest of individual government or groups of governments should be the basis for engagement.

Commitments

We support initiatives to build public awareness of the interconnectedness of people and nature, and that enhance the importance of natural systems and boundaries in democratic decision-making.

We support initiatives at all levels to strengthen democratic decision-making and participation by, and representation of, all affected people, including those who have not been given the vote, for example children, refugees or people in other countries.

We support the creation of a Parliamentary Assembly of the United Nations as the first step towards a system of global democracy.