Proposal for a
Great Transition Initiative
Sharing a Vision, Building a Movement

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Overview

The Great Transition Initiative (GTI) aims to involve an expanding group of engaged thinkers and thoughtful activists in an exploration of ways to crystallize a global citizens movement for a transition to a future of hope. This document describes the motivation for the GTI and proposes tasks for launching the process. It has been shaped by the comments of scores of GTI endorsers worldwide, representing the concerns of North and South, environment and justice, peace and liberty. This initial group of participants reflects the diversity that is the bedrock of the Initiative.

The time is propitious for such crystallization. A global citizens movement would respond to the manifest desire among many activists – and the latent desire among many yet to be engaged – for a unifying vision and an inclusive framework for action. That vision would counter both the "Washington Consensus" and the view, often encountered in the anti-globalization movement, that the only alternative is a radical form of localism. The movement would complement, and build solidarity with, existing initiatives, while expanding the space for participation, unity, and vision.

Three interconnected considerations motivate this initiative concerning, respectively, the broad historic context, the question of agency, and the required political culture. History has entered the **planetary phase of civilization**, which increasingly binds the world's people to a common fate. Yet, the fundamental character of the global future remains open and contested. **Civil society** has a critical role in a humane and sustainable transition. Its strength lies in its energy and diversity, but it has been limited by organizational fragmentation, a culture of confrontation, and the lack of a compelling alternative vision. A **politics of trust** is urgently needed to build bridges, engender unity, and cultivate a movement culture that can galvanize people everywhere.

The Initiative is envisioned as a living process with distinct phases, each preparing the ground for a broader effort. The GTI will need effective structures for internal governance and external action, but these must adapt to changing needs as each new round of participants take ownership of the process. We refer to this balance between structure and adaptation as the **widening circle strategy**. To begin this process, the proposal features a managed electronic forum that builds toward a Scoping Meeting in 2004 to refine the perspective set out here and develop an action plan for the following two-year phase.

Planetary Phase of Civilization

A multitude of factors – economic, cultural, political, and environmental – has ushered in the planetary phase of history. Often referred to as globalization, this unitary process includes enhanced economic interaction and interdependence, increased cultural influence and human connectivity, rapid advances of information technology, new global governance challenges, and novel geo-political responses. These developments have been associated, on the one hand, with a seven-fold increase in global GDP in the past fifty years and, on the other hand, with rising inequality and unprecedented environmental degradation at the scale of the earth's biosphere.

More importantly, a global society is taking shape before our eyes, but its future form is subject to the choices we make now and in the critical decades ahead. We have the capacity to turn toward a truly planetary civilization, one that reflects universal social and ecological values while respecting differences. Today our collective wealth and technological prowess could defeat the scourges of destitution, war, and environmental destruction. Yet, without farsighted policies based on a spirit of cooperation and suitable values, these hopes will remain unfulfilled.

A systematic effort to scan the range of possible future worlds was undertaken by the Global Scenario Group (www.gsg.org). The GSG brought together social scientists and modelers from different regions and backgrounds to analyze the factors that influence the direction of change – the driving forces, the sources of uncertainty, the impact of individual and collective choice, and the role of alternative visions of the future. The GSG identified several archetypal scenarios, including *Market Forces*, *Fortress World*, *Policy Reform*, *Eco-communalism*, and *Great Transition*.

Market Forces is a scenario of rapid economic globalization and convergent growth, driven by the Washington Consensus policy agenda of free trade, liberalization, and privatization. It advertises the economic dynamism of corporate-led globalization, while ignoring its tendency to concentrate power, increase inequality, regenerate poverty, aggravate social polarization, and degrade the global commons.

Numerous critics have challenged the *Market Forces* vision. Global conferences issue grand edicts for social development and environmental preservation. International conventions struggle against narrow-minded nationalism to enact meaningful global covenants. Think tanks propound alternatives to mainstream economic, social, and environmental policies. Private sector visionaries advocate a new era of corporate responsibility. Activists challenge and disrupt the institutions of globalization.

The critiques span a broad ideological spectrum, but share a common theme – market-driven globalization is reckless. Markets have an important role to play in efficient resource allocation, but cannot on their own deliver social equity, community coherence, and an economy in harmony with nature. Social polarization, economic instability, and environmental degradation could interact and spiral out of control. Inadvertently, this process could lead to a general global crisis and to the authoritarian response of a *Fortress World*. This is a dark vision of global apartheid, with elites ensconced in privileged regions and countries from which the impoverished majority is excluded through deterrence, isolation, and barriers. It would derive its energy from sources of antagonism that are all too much in evidence today – confrontational politics, terrorism, and the repressive power of states.

To counter such risk, *Policy Reform* envisions a comprehensive government-led program of policies, finances, and institutions to achieve an ambitious set of social and environmental goals. But it does not question the fundamental premises of market-driven globalization. *Policy Reform* is an essential component of an overall transition strategy. Yet, it alone cannot deliver a just and sustainable future. Incremental adjustments to highly unsustainable trends are simply insufficient. Reformism fails to challenge the consumerism of wealthy societies and to offer a compelling alternative vision of the "good life" and accepts extreme inequality even as it seeks to eradicate poverty. Finally, implementing the reform vision requires massive levels of political will and social consensus that are currently absent. Indeed, these can only rest on a global movement animated by the larger vision of a harmonious future for humankind and the planet, a movement for a *Great Transition*.

Many thinkers and activists, who reject market-driven globalization and find the reform agenda deficient, have been drawn to localist alternatives. The *Eco-Communalism* scenario is rooted in the small-is-beautiful ethic of Gandhi, Schumacher, and Wendell Berry, which emphasizes highly decentralized cooperative political, economic, and cultural arrangements. But its vision of radically reversing globalizing trends is not a plausible path from the present, and the capacity for such a world to contain tyranny and aggression, and to promote cooperation, is questionable.

The *Great Transition* paradigm endorses many of the ideals of *Eco-communalism*, with its plea for a reconsideration of human values and empowered communities. *Great Transition* rejects rampant consumerism, seeking improved human well-being through qualitative development built upon material sufficiency for all. It seeks a world where the quality of human knowledge, creativity, and self-realization, not the quantity of goods and services, signals development. It embraces equality, empowerment, and deep respect for the intrinsic values of nature. It recognizes plural paths to modernity and welcomes regional diversity in expressing such core values as freedom, equity, democracy, and sustainability. It champions subsidiarity, the principle that decision-making go to the most decentralized level possible subject to meeting obligations that can only be deliberated at higher levels within a nested global governance structure.

Rather than reject globalization, a *Great Transition* seeks to change the character of global civilization. It sees the planetary phase of civilization as an opportunity and a challenge. Rather than retreat into localism, it validates global solidarity, cultural cross-fertilization, economic interdependence, and cooperative efforts to build a harmonious and sustainable global society. It understands citizenship and governance in a planetary context, expressed at multiple spatial scales from the local to the global.

The Critical Role of Civil Society

Which social actors can tilt history toward such a global transition? Civil society, which includes civic action by individuals, associations, foundations, and a variety of nonprofit organizations, is a source of hope. It has generated an explosion of activities addressing the panoply of global problems. Its many voices are increasingly heard in the struggles for peace, justice, development, and environment. The strength of civil society has been its diversity and energy. Yet, its possibilities remain circumscribed by organizational and philosophical fragmentation.

There are over 25,000 active international NGOs and innumerable individuals active in social change. Many participate in issue-oriented collaborations and networks with one another, with intergovernmental organizations, and with the most dynamic representatives of the business sector. The GTI fits in this landscape by supporting and facilitating existing activities, helping build connections, and providing a space for advancing new values and systemic alternatives.

Of particular note is the evolution of the World Social Forum (WSF). The WSF has become the premier space to bring together activists, thinkers, critics, and reformers and for the articulation of a diversity of views and visions critical of globalization; it is viewed by many as the expression of an alternative to the Washington Consensus and the World Economic Forum. Still, there are concerns about how to move the WSF process to the next phase. The GTI may well be a missing piece of this puzzle.

More generally, current efforts to build global connectivity fall into four categories: campaigns, forums, information, and research and analysis.

Global **campaigns** foster greater coordination among organizations and individuals addressing international policy debates and issues. Important examples include the Climate Action Network, ATTAC (challenging the official trade agenda), Global Forest Watch, World Movement for Democracy, Transparency International, and EarthAction. Other networking initiatives spring up to mobilize direct actions such as recent protests against globalization, war, and the World Bank.

Global **forums** bring segments of civil society together to share ideas, discuss experiences, and build community. The World Social Forum ("Porto Alegre"), organized as an alternative to the World Economic Forum ("Davos"), has grown into a lively annual event. Equally energetic events, such as the quadrennial IUCN General Assembly and the annual UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, are held in conjunction with major international summits and NGO meetings. The most visible are organized around protests at international meetings (e.g., G-8, WTO, World Bank, and EC).

Information efforts enhance connectivity by providing news, perspectives, and resources for activist organizations and the wider public. The Internet offers a powerful and rapid mechanism for both linkage and information transmission. Numerous efforts cover general global issues (e.g., IPS), sustainability (e.g., Sustainable Development Communications Network), human development (e.g., Social Watch), justice (e.g., Coalition for the International Criminal Court), trade (e.g., ICTSD), and so on.

Research networks bring together independent scholars and analysts from policy institutes and academia. They aim to build the scientific case for sustainable development, promote common perspectives, and influence the policy agenda. Examples include The Ring, which pools the capabilities of a number of independent institutes, the Third World Network, the Trade Knowledge Network, the Trans National Institute, the Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research, and the International Forum on Globalization.

These activities represent an impressive range of initiatives, the DNA of any comprehensive global movement. However, there is a nagging sense of incompleteness. They remain too dispersed, diffused, and small-scale for the task of shaping a "common future." Progress painstakingly won here and there is overwhelmed by systemic deterioration. Success stories of community action do not scale up to a new pathway for global development.

A channel for effectively balancing the creative tension between coherence and pluralism has not been effectively developed. The strength of civil society lies in its diversity, energy, and dynamism. A genuine global movement would certainly engage in campaigns, forums, education, and research. It would build alliances and find common cause with existing initiatives and local movements, finding allies in both policy reformers and opponents of globalization.

Most importantly, it would be systemic, connecting across issues, themes, and regions; it would promote a positive vision of global development; and it would build an organizational framework for common action, not only as protest but also as affirmation of the alternative vision. The upsurge of civil society activity over the past two decades has made such a movement possible – and highlighted its necessity. The aim of the Great Transition Initiative is to help crystallize it.

Unity through the Politics of Trust

The Initiative would be rooted in a **politics of trust**, the collective commitment to balancing coherence and pluralism as the basis for a global movement. All social change movements are pulled in contrary directions. They must both reach out and resist -- expanding participation and forging alliances, on the one hand, and identifying and challenging entrenched forces, on the other. The politics of trust emphasizes the first aspect, a predisposition toward seeking common ground and tolerating proximate differences in order to nurture the ultimate basis for solidarity.

Building a common vision and a unified movement to realize that vision poses the difficult challenge of overcoming ideological conflict, regional antagonism, and organizational turf battles in order to find common purpose. The diversity of the forces for a just and sustainable future provides a richness and energy that must be preserved. Indeed, the embrace of diversity has been a liberating theme of the last thirty years, replacing the stultifying top-down ideologies of earlier oppositional movements. But a global movement must begin to understand these various perspectives and initiatives as different expressions of a common global project.

Seeds for the politics of trust already are present in attempts to build bridges between North and South, environment and development, and business and sustainability. But at the global level, the polarizing voices of opposition are heard more clearly than the unifying ones. While this is understandable given the highly contested terrain, it has limited the search for alternatives and proscribed the space for engagement of those uncomfortable with a militant culture of confrontation. Admittedly, the oppressed tribes in Nigeria or the forest dwellers in the Amazon have no choice but to turn to resistance and confrontation, but they too need to build bridges to other oppressed communities in their region and potential allies elsewhere. Overreliance on the politics of distrust can limit the options even of people who have no reason to trust anyone.

To imagine a Great Transition is to imagine a future that is based, not on the trust that comes from armed policing of borders, but from norms, values, and principles of social organization. The basis of this vision needs to be placed at the center of the movement and actions we envisage today. By embodying the vision’s goals in their pursuit, we help to nurture their realization. The GTI can play a unique role in introducing space for the politics of trust in an embryonic global citizens movement.

The emphasis on the politics of trust does not discount the realities of power and interest or assume away the conflicts that are sure to lie on the path to a Great Transition. Rather, it suggests that the reconciliation of pluralism, unity, and vision will be a fundamental concern for the birth and growth of an authentic global movement. Beyond this broad principle, the proposal does not offer specific formulations on the question of power and strategy since this will be ongoing in the GTI discussions where participants can take ownership of the consensus that emerges.

The Widening Circle Strategy

The inspiration for this proposal is the broad and enthusiastic support for the idea of the *Great Transition* amongst individuals from many different sectors, regions, interests, perspectives, and commitments. The basic premise is that, like a super-saturated liquid that needs only a tap on the glass to precipitate a crystalline form, the time is propitious to crystallize an alternative vision and a more unified global movement based on the politics of trust.

There are no blueprints for such a global movement. The top-down structure of earlier oppositional movements will not suffice, nor will its converse, faith that political coherence will arise on its own. A living movement must navigate between the polar pitfalls of rigidity and disorder. It must be fashioned by participants in a process of adaptation to one another and to changing circumstances. Still, some of the broad contours of a successful movement can be envisioned.

The initiative rests on a core set of principles, ethics, and values that can bind a global culture. Shared principles would no doubt include freedom, equity, democracy, subsidiarity, and sustainability, principles that were forged through centuries of struggle and are the heritage of all humanity. As articulated in the Earth Charter, the ethical foundations recognize our individual and collective responsibility for the well-being of others, for the wider community of life, and for future generations. Values such as the quality of life, human solidarity and ecological sensibility would counter consumerism, individualism, and domination of nature. A culture of peace, reconciliation, and non-violence would infuse the new global movement.

A successful global movement will need to attract an ever-widening circle of participants by offering both an inspiring vision and an invitation to develop it further. Such a process can only be built in stages. Each stage would broaden the set of participants and revise organizational structures and processes. The philosophical framework, internal culture, terms of engagement, and political strategy would be refined in an iterative process. This open approach is critical in order to allow new participants to shape and take ownership of the evolving perspective and organization. To succeed, it must adapt to changing circumstances as it envisions, learns, educates, and organizes. It will take a tolerant, exploratory, and open organizational culture to nurture a unified movement, and internal governance based on democratic principles – participation, openness and transparency. The capacity for the movement to grow and adapt will be the measure of its success.

An ideal in five years' time would be a growing global movement that serves as beacon, think tank, and advocate for advancing a new model for global development. It would participate in existing global venues, advocate new initiatives and experiments, and support issue campaigns. It would have active research, public outreach and education arms. It would organize across themes and regions. It would continue to

expand and adjust, while refining the details of the Great Transition vision as a legitimate and attractive alternative. It would build synergies with activists and allies from the public and private spheres.

Next Tasks

The GTI process began in June 2003 with the circulation of an earlier draft of this document for review by a diverse group of prominent representatives from the range of relevant communities. Many reviewers offered detailed comments that helped shape this revision. Nearly all endorsed the GTI concept (list attached). Based on this encouraging response, a provisional GTI Support Unit was established at the Tellus Institute. The GTI website (www.GTInitiative.org) was launched in September 2003 to facilitate information exchange and ongoing electronic dialogue.

Scoping Meeting

A major milestone of this first phase of the widening circle process will be a Scoping Meeting of about 30, drawn largely from GTI endorsers. The meeting will reflect upon and elaborate the perspective motivating the Initiative. A key topic of discussion will be specific actions for ramping-up the Initiative in the next phase. The meeting will consider (a) the program of activities, (b) the formation of a *Steering Committee* to guide a two-year catalytic effort, (c) the role of the *GTI Support Unit* to facilitate logistics, fund-raising, outreach, electronic dialogue, and document preparation, and (d) plans for subsequent meetings, such as a larger *Convening Meeting* to carry the process forward. A preliminary agenda outline for the Scoping Meeting is attached.

Communications

The extensive consultations that guided the development of this proposal must flow into a continuing dialogue that builds community, consensus, and commitment. An initial Internet-based system has been created to manage communications, post key documents, foster discussion, and broadcast information via email. It was designed with a flexible architecture that can evolve with the changing needs of the Initiative. This critical nerve center for the dispersed GTI participants will have to be fastidiously maintained and further developed to respond to changing needs. Electronic interactions will be supplemented with personal discussions by telephone and face-to-face meetings that take advantage of opportunities afforded by travel schedules.

Strategy Papers

Two draft strategy papers will be the focus of the electronic dialogue leading toward the Scoping Meeting. The first, *Expanding the Circle*, will identify priorities and strategies for expanding participation, for building alliances, and for public outreach. It will suggest specific tasks, activities, and meetings for enlarging the GTI in the following phases of effort. The second, *Strengthening the Circle*, will look inward at options for the internal operations of the GTI, including structure, process, and communications.

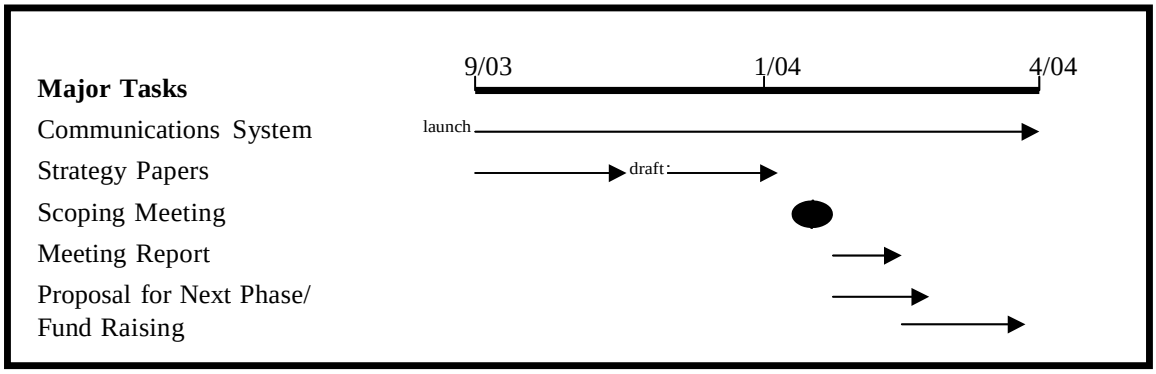
Carrying it Forward

Subsequent to the meeting, two documents will be drafted for review. A *Scoping Meeting Report* will document the substantive discussion (including areas of consensus, unresolved issues, and research and information needs) on the GTI strategy, the action plan for the next phase, and the commitments and expectations of individuals. A *Proposal for the Next Phase* will include a revised statement of premises, motivation, and

strategy. It will include a two-year action plan, a detailed budget, and a support team. This will serve as the basis for fund-raising and recruiting a larger set of participants for the second stage of the widening circle process.

Timeline and Budget

The figure below indicates the projected flow of tasks for an eight month effort beginning in September 2003. The budget for this phase of work is $150,000. This includes $50,000 for the direct costs of the Scoping Meeting, primarily for the travel-related expenses of participants, and an allocation for consultants, staff, and overhead. Budget details are available on request.



People Behind the Initiative

A Provisional Support Unit for the GTI has been established at Tellus Institute. Paul Raskin, the President of Tellus, Tariq Banuri, and Allen White serve as Coordinators for this phase of the effort, supported by technical and administrative staff. Drs. Raskin, Banuri, and White are internationally respected for their efforts to advance ethical and ecological solutions across the range of sustainability problems at global to local levels. Raskin is the founder of the Tellus Institute, the Boston Center of Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI-B), and the Global Scenario Group (GSG). Banuri is the founder of the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in Pakistan and has collaborated with a wide array of international civil society organizations. Recently, he led UNEP's Civic Entrepreneurship project, which brought together some 150 civic society organization. Raskin was lead author, and Banuri was a co-author, of the GSG's *Great Transition: The Promise and Lure of the Times Ahead*, a wellspring for this Initiative. White is a founder and former Executive Director of the Global Reporting Initiative, a multi-stakeholder effort to create reporting standards for corporate sustainability, and founding Director of the Business and Sustainability Group at Tellus.

The June draft of the GTI proposal followed upon consultations with several individuals in Boston, Johannesburg, New Delhi, New York, and elsewhere. This revision follows the comments and advice received from the endorsing group in the attached list. The Tellus Institute will serve as the administrative and fiscal agent for this initiative and as host for the provisional Support Unit during the initial phase.

Preliminary Agenda **Great**
Transition Initiative
Scoping Meeting
2004

Day 1

Morning: Defining the Challenge
Introductions
Adoption of agenda
Overview of GTI Concept
Discussion: premises, motivation, strategy

Afternoon: Refinement and Revision
Break-out groups:
A. Planetary Phase: formulation of global challenge, scenarios, GT alternative
B. Civil Society: existing landscape, potential for crystallization, positioning the GTI
C. Politics of Trust: beyond anti-globalization, principles of unity, power and the limits of trust
Group Reports and Discussion

Day 2

Morning: Strategies for the Future – Part I
The "widening circle" concept
Expanding the Circle: Summary of strategy paper and electronic forum on enlargement and outreach
Strengthening the Circle: Summary of strategy paper and electronic forum on GTI structure, process, and communications
Discussion: areas of consensus, issues to be resolved

Afternoon: Strategies for the Future – Part II
Break-out groups
Group Reports and Discussion

Day 3

Morning: The Path Forward – Part I
Provisional plan of action (structure, process, activities)
Discussion

Afternoon: The Path Forward – Part II
Expectations of participants (e.g., individuals, steering committee, support unit)
Timetable for meeting report, funding proposal, electronic dialogue
Next meeting: expanding the circle of participants
Summary and final thoughts

GTI Endorsers (partial list)

Name	Nationality	Name	Nationality
Sabina Alkire	USA	Khawar Mumtaz	Pakistan
Franck Amalric	France	Mohan Munasinghe	Sri Lanka
Tom Athanasiou	USA	Carlos Murillo	Costa Rica
Jayanta Bandhopadhyay	India	Khalid Nadvi	UK
Tariq Banuri	Pakistan	Adil Najam	Pakistan
Al Binger	Jamaica	Sunita Narain	India
Nicola Borregard	Chile	Madiodio Niasse	Senegal
Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend	Italy	Giok-Ling Ooi	Singapore
Ricardo Carrere	Uraguay	Richard Ottinger	USA
Eran Feitelson	Israel	David Ozonoff	USA
Hilary French	USA	Laszlo Pinter	Hungary
Gilberto Gallopin	Argentina	Arthur Powers	USA
Dharam Ghai	Uganda	Atiq Rahman	Bangladesh
Pablo Gutman	Argentina	Kilaparti Ramakrishna	USA
Dipak Gyawali	Nepal	Paul Raskin	USA
Mark Halle	Switzerland	Sanjay Reddy	India
Al Hammond	USA	Gowher Rizvi	Bangladesh
Kate Hampton	UK	Karl-Henrik Robert	Sweden
Wendy Harcourt	UK	John Robinson	Canada
Ana Hardoy	Argentina	Ignacy Sachs	France
Stuart Hart	USA	Ambuj Sagar	India
Hazel Henderson	UK	Suman Sahai	India
Thomas Jahn	Germany	Roberto Savio	Italy
Sitanon Jesdadipat	Thailand	Sam Shiroff	USA
Roger Kasperson	USA	Rehman Sobhan	Bangladesh
Robert Kates	USA	Youba Sokona	Senegal
Kausar Khan	Pakistan	Gus Speth	USA
Ashok Khosla	India	Philip Sutton	Australia
Smithu Kothari	India	Rob Swart	Netherlands
Phil Lane, Jr.	Canada	Kaarin Taipale	Finland
Lailai Li	China	Rolph Van der Hoeven	Netherlands
Luis Lopezllera	Mexico	Konrad Von Moltke	USA
Ian Lowe	Australia	Steve Waddell	Canada
Nicolas Lucas	Ecuador	Allen White	USA
Manfred Max-Neef	Chile	Ponna Wignaraja	Sri Lanka
Dennis Meadows	USA	Anders Wijkman	Sweden
Robert Molteno	UK	Alexey Yablokov	Russia
Robert Monks	USA	Simon Zadek	UK