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Enough Words, More Actions!

Forum contribution: [Toward a Great Ethics Transition](#)

Roz Savage

The Earth Charter may well be showing its age in places (aren't we all?), and I can understand the eagerness of experts around the world to "participate in a renewed global ethics dialogue, and with the potential to empower the Earth Charter and its vision for the great transition we so desperately need." I am sure this would be a fascinating and personally rewarding enterprise. However, my personal view is that we already have enough charters and declarations, Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals, to last us for the foreseeable future. There is an old English proverb that "fine words butter no parsnips," roughly translated as "pretty words are all very good, but they don't get the job done." The danger is that we confuse the creation of yet another aspirational statement with actually doing something.

To my mind, we are still trying to solve the problems from within the same system that created them. I am thinking particularly of the neoliberal capitalist system. Much has been written on this already, which I don't need to repeat here. Charlie Munger says it best: "Show me the incentive and I will show you the outcome." As long as the incentive is to externalize costs and to exploit natural and human resources as cheaply as possible, the outcome will always be environmental degradation and affronts to human dignity. Although there is an encouraging increase in conscious capitalism, overall the system continues to pull us in the opposite direction from our stated intentions.

This is the crucial decade for action on climate change and biodiversity loss. We may well be too late already to avoid many catastrophic consequences. I wholeheartedly agree with [Brendan Mackey](#) that we "cannot rely on the notion that good will inevitably prevail because it is

divinely pre-ordained or inevitable given a rising tide of cosmic consciousness.” We do not live in a Hollywood movie, and it is by no means certain that the good guys will win.

I also agree that we need to “build systems that are supportive of the greater community of life and the interdependence of people and nature,” and this is where I feel motivated to put my energy. What we need, to echo Donella Meadows, is to transcend our existing paradigm. We need a new story about what it means to be human—something simple and accessible—and to design a new economic system that embodies that story. This economic system does not necessarily need to replace capitalism, but it does need to provide a viable and attractive alternative that enables people to meet their needs while supporting the ethical values that we say we want. There is exciting work already happening with complementary currencies all over the world.

Rather than taking several years to appoint a suitable chair organization, design a drafting process, create and sign off on the final version, and achieve ratification (years that we do not have), I would rather put my energy into implementing systems—economic, and thereafter by implication, also political and technological—that enshrine and incentivize the worthy ethical values that have been well articulated in all the declarations, charters, and goals already in existence.

About the Author



Roz Savage is the only woman to row solo across the world's "big three" oceans: Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian. She is a United Nations Climate Hero, a trained presenter for the Climate Reality Project, an Athlete Ambassador for 350.org, and a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. She was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire for services to the environment. She is on the board of Adventurers and Scientists for Conservation, and a Blue Ambassador for the UK-based BLUE Project. She writes, speaks, and lectures on sustainability, courage, resilience, and change.

About the Publication

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