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THE SOLUTIONS GENERATION

The Arab Spring and now the “Occupy” movement are indications of growing unhappiness with the state of the world, especially among the younger generation. As Paul Krugman has pointed out, Americans are finally getting angry at the right people – the financial and corporate elites who currently govern the United States and have caused the ongoing crisis. Anger and protests can be effective at bringing the current system into question. But they do little, by themselves, to lead the way to a better future. For that we need a compelling shared vision and a focus on solutions.

In 2012, our fundamental problems include the vast gap in incomes within and between nations, the ecological limits we are exceeding or approaching (climate change, biodiversity loss, etc.), the peaking of global oil production, the deterioration of natural and social capital, and the consequent threats to human well-being and sustainability that all of these imply. What we need now is a new vision and a generational commitment to finding real solutions. The “Solutions Generation” needs to think outside the box to create a vision of a better, more sustainable world for themselves and their children. They will have to design new technologies, new institutions, and new societal norms in order to get there, including new political and economic systems that can create shared prosperity without increasing demands on a finite environment.

This cannot be a top-down corporate or government vision. It must be built and it must be shared. If anything, it will be “bottom-down” decision making – an approach that reflects the needs of the vast majority of the people, not just the economic elites. Probably the most important element of this new vision will be a refocus on the goal of sustainable human well-being instead of maximizing conventional economic production and consumption (GDP).

As many have noted, including Tim Jackson and the Sarkozy Commission headed by Joseph Stiglitz, GDP is

fatally flawed as a measure of progress, and we desperately need new measures of well-being. We know from both the latest psychological research and from ancient wisdom that well-being and happiness depend on the appropriate balance of assets and opportunities. It is clear that natural capital provides a range of ecosystem services that are hugely important but largely unrecognized contributors to sustainable human well-being. These services include everything from maintaining a stable climate to producing soil and water to providing spectacular and inspiring views.

We will have to create a new vision of societal goals and the technical and institutional solutions necessary to achieve them. This vision will involve a better understanding of what actually contributes to human well-being and sustainability. It is a huge challenge that will require a generation to accomplish – the Solutions Generation. Many groups and communities around the world are already involved in building this vision and developing real solutions. There are far too many to list, but here are a few: Transition town movement, www.transitionnetwork.org, Great Transition Initiative, www.gtinitiative.org, Solutions journal, www.thesolutionsjournal.org, and our sponsors and partners, www.thesolutionsjournal.com/SponsorsPartners, [Wiser Earth, www.wiserearth.org](http://www.wiserearth.org) and [Center for a New American Dream, www.newdream.org](http://www.newdream.org).

It might be worth pointing out, that nature operates with a subtle dynamic between competition and cooperation. In “empty world” times of resource abundance, competition is favored. The great acceleration powered by abundant fossil fuels favored individualism, competition, and greed-based capitalism. The coming “full world” will favor cooperation and networking. We can now, as a global society, communicate, network, and cooperate as never before in the history of the planet. It will be the great work of the Solutions Generation – Gen S – to use this new capacity to envision and build a better, more sustainable, just, and prosperous society within the planetary boundaries of earth.