AN OPEN REFLECTION FROM THE COORDINATORS:

It is undeniable that we are in the midst of an unprecedented time in global history. Our planetary boundaries are approaching their limits. Global economic and financial systems are no longer accessible for many. Our political systems’ polarization is creating mistrust in our governments as an available avenue to avoid these wicked and intertwined problems that are putting our future at risk.

We often see youth at the forefront of activist approaches through leading protests or petitions. Still, youth voices are commonly relegated to the sidelines when it comes to crafting policy, excluded by those in positions of power due to young peoples’ lack of wisdom or experience. These ageist attitudes stigmatize the young (and old), impeding their ability to influence policy and their future. Youth have the most to lose from a future that has failed to consider their perspectives, but they also have the most to gain from being integrated into these conversations to determine what this future should look like.

Meanwhile, policy is crafted by those who tend to draw upon a set of experiences that don’t accurately reflect many in the younger generation’s lived reality. By bringing together both young and old, we all can benefit from shared wisdom, hopes for the future, and transformative strategies that reflect shared values. With the Club of Rome’s mission to address the “future of humanity and strive to make a difference,” it is imperative that all generations are represented and empowered to fulfill this mission. The Club’s fifth pillar, “Youth Leadership and Intergenerational Dialogue,” is the first step in responding to young people’s overwhelming call to participate in the dialogue. As an organization that convenes a diverse and expert group of government, business, and academic leaders, it also has an obligation to develop a network of young leaders elevating their voices in concert with these world-renowned experts.

We know that young people are not a homogeneous group. Their perspectives and lived experiences differ across cultures, religions, geographic regions, and ethnicities, yet are all connected by their age and the need for collective action to ensure a prosperous future. There is a small set of youth leaders
who have gained international recognition, like Greta Thunberg, but tens of thousands of Gretas’ in the world have not been given a platform. We need to intentionally seek out and welcome diverse participation regardless of socio-economic, cultural, or geographic boundaries, ensuring that we capture voices from society’s margins. Therefore, it is not enough to just include a small group of young people charged with representing their entire country or a token young person to speak on behalf of their generation in conversations that dictate their futures.

Building off the success from past Club of Rome Youth Summits, this past October, the Sustainability Institute of the Pennsylvania State University and the Club of Rome convened a virtual Youth Summit where 250 youth representatives from over 75 different countries gathered for 2 days of moderated dialogue. It became apparent that these youth yearned for a formalized space to gather and critically discuss issues impacting both present and future, find their collective voice, and shape their future. In turn, these youth leaders can embolden policymakers and international leaders to integrate moral courage and care for future generations into their work.

As we conclude the first phase of this effort, we are reminded that there is more work to be done. The enclosed document attempts to capture the diversity of thoughts, fears, and passions shared during the short time together … but this is just the tip of the iceberg. There is no way that 240 young people, regardless of how informed, passionate, geographically, ethnically, or culturally diverse they are, can capture the thoughts of 50% of the global population. So we hope that the findings in this summary serve as an introduction to our second phase, a global listening session project where young people will go into their communities and engage each other, young person to young person.

The late Justice Ruth Bater Ginsburg said, “Women belong in places where decisions are being made”, and we cannot agree more … but if we may also consider that maybe young people also belong in those same places? The young people we met desire to keep the movement going, and we hope that you’ll join us in supporting our peers, our fellow young people, on this journey to make their voice heard where decisions, which pertain to our collective future, are made.

Yours for justice,

[Signature]

Sustainability Institute
Global Youth Summit,
Senior Advisor

[Signature]

Madison Mitchell
Global Youth Summit,
Director & Summit Chair-
person

3
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Climate-Planetary Emergency Hub

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate Change Education</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitioning to Renewable Energy</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom-Up Approaches that Support Communities</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unequal Experience and Structural Violence of the Climate Crisis</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge of Youth Inclusion</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable Development vs. Survival</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Rethinking Finance Hub

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Transparency</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Financial Literacy</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient and Unequal Access to Credit</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy Designed for Return on Capital and Built on Values which Cultivate Inequality</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable Ways of Wealth Generation</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Emerging New Civilization Hub

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanity Instead of Civilization</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health and Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egocentrism: The Human and Environmental Approach</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Indigenous Communities</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Reframing Economics Hub

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Struggles of Small or Weak Economies</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in the Economy</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes, Corruption, and Tax Evasion</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond GDP: A Need for Better Measures of Progress</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalism and the Competition of Powers</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Should Make a Strong Economy?</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy and Environment</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Social justice and climate justice both have a common objective of reducing inequalities. Now, the important thing is to make them compatible.” ID4D

Changes in global human activities such as the increase in per capita meat production, energy consumption, CO2 emission, decrease in tree cover, carbon price, etc., have led us to the omnipresent climate-planetary emergency. However, during the summit and the sharing of the youth participants, it became abundantly clear that the current sense of emergency, is complicated by the reality in which these crises are unevenly distributed, responsibility is disproportionately held. Universal solutions do not exist for all regions of our planet.

Our generation was born into this capitalist and neoliberal society: reliant on inequality and the impending sense of planetary emergency born of its creation. We are now faced with the heightened sense of this disaster, as it continues to loom larger in parallel to our growing up. Yet, we struggle to have our voices heard. The youth participants look at this tragedy as lined with the opportunity to systemically transform out and away from the structures that enabled these crises. In this vein, climate and “green root” education was a significant focus, as was environmental learning and governance with communities in a conscious effort to promote transformative, grassroots change. While there was a resounding emphasis on the need to act regarding the structural violence and unequal experience of the climate crisis, a cross-cutting transition to renewable energy was recommended. Generally, without “social justice,” there cannot be “climate justice”; thus, holistic, sustainable solutions must be explored.
The year 2020 has been a year of converging crises and has facilitated a heightened sense of emergency amongst global climate activists. This year has taken us over the edge from a looming and ever-present ecological and climate crisis and abruptly thrashed the world into a devastating pandemic. However, these crises are not born in and of this year but are a result of decades of building our own demise. We have created a capitalist system that fuels individualistic competition to labor and produce, albeit failing to respect our collective: our planet’s health. Within this neoliberal system, welfare and living wages are not promised, and we cast that responsibility to survive back onto the individual. Civil society and non-profit organizations aim to fill the gaps of our welfare system; laboriously seeking funding to deliver essential services, which, ideally, should be a public good. While many struggle to fulfill basic necessities, our capitalist society continues to market and entice greater consumption. In hand, profit-seeking corporations produce solely to meet consumer demand; without regard for the health of their labor force or that of the planet. As a result, we continue to subordinate-ly witness deforestation, mass resource-extractive industries, and agricultural production pushing our planet beyond its limits. Financial growth, for the few, is prioritized above all else.

The COVID-19 crisis blatantly reveals the cracks in our political and societal systems. Healthcare is not equally institutionally equipped in all nations, and, within many nations, is not publicly available for all. Adequate living wages prove even more out of reach for many as the economic lockdown has put millions out of work. Some have the privilege to continue to work remotely, while mainly racialized and low-income communities continue public-facing work and bear the brunt of exposure to the virus. Additionally, racial injustice, omnipresent and always present in our society, is now increasingly visible. Apparent is not only anti-black and anti-Indigenous police brutality, but the predominantly black and Indigenous prison slave labor, which, while fueling production, subsequently minimizes the production cost and amplifies profits of mass corporations. The very social contract of our societies are void, and frustrated individuals are rioting for change.

It is clear that this is not a crisis of equal responsibility, nor of equal impact. Since the colonial era, the Global North continues to produce at the expense of the Global South. Beginning with the Doctrine of Discovery, European nations justified seizing lands on the basis that they were terra nullius, meaning community land uses did not fit within Victorian ideals of “productive use.” This same productive use thesis is used today to seize what is deemed as “empty land” for more economically “productive” uses; often to the detriment of said land and its biodiversity. We continue to see land in a narrow Western view: as an asset, commodity, and means of production instead of a link to identity, health, belonging and spirituality. We continue to cast aside Indigenous epistemologies that teach us to be in harmony with land. As the Global North continues to consume beyond its means, it continues to
deposit much of its waste in the Global South. Land is consistently stolen to keep up with the demands of, mainly, agricultural production. Even efforts to protect our planet are made at the expense of marginalized communities, as green-grabbing continues to rob the Global South of land then demarcated for biodiversity conservation or “green” biofuel production. We bear witness to this particularly in how Indigenous populations are deprived of their lands in order to prioritize biodiversity conservation. In this way, those with the least responsibility for this crisis are dispossessed in the effort to slow it. Indigenous communities who once stewarded our planet in harmony, with interlinked planetary and human health, now see their established civilizations pushed out of their territories for conservation, as well as denied the right- and criminalized in their practice—of those same land and marine-based traditions and livelihoods. Beyond the North and South divide, low-income and racialized communities, within most nations, are forced to endure the brunt of the consequences of the climate crisis: fleeing climate-driven disasters as climate migrants as well as serving as first hand examples of how environmental racism dictates environmental governance and places polluting factories and dumpsites in low-income neighborhoods.

We hope that the remainder of 2020 is a time that moves us from complacency to action, pushing us away from the brink of utter disaster toward a hopeful and progressive climate future. From the disastrous emergency, we find ourselves with this opportunity for transformative change. Conveying resiliency in every possible moment of action, we make our voices heard in the streets, through art, and on social media. We witness, are critical of, and reject the injustice our society was built upon; and condemn how this manifests in climate and social injustice. With this in mind, as a collective of diverse, driven thinkers and problem-solvers, the youth participants of this Global Youth Summit have appropriately raised the below themes of key considerations to bear in mind and recommendations for thoughtful, punctual, and meaningful action.
Themes

Climate Change Education

It is imperative for Climate Change Education (CCE) to incorporate both top-down and bottom-up approaches. Although some of the most privileged individuals with a more entitled perspective on the crisis are seen in academia, they possess a visible public profile that can raise valuable attention. On the other hand, the general public is bound by barriers that alienate them from pro-environmental behaviors and can be engaged by their community, resulting in a vast concerted impact. Crucially, experiential learning utilizes meaningful and authentic initiatives to reflect sounding voices and manufacture scalable successes, allowing students of any level to receive knowledge input by academics through established platforms. Furthermore, community partners offer apprenticeship and mentorship to students to interact with beneficiaries and create artifacts that reference authentic needs. Students then bring the outcomes back to their campuses and share this critical knowledge and experience with other partners, teachers, leaders, and peers, which, in turn, mobilizes more synergistic yet practical collaborations regarding climate action.

Transitioning to Renewable Energy

Electricity production has an increasingly significant impact on global carbon emissions. Coal-fired power stations currently produce over 70% of the sector’s carbon emissions while producing only 38% of the world’s electricity. To combat this harmfully unsustainable behavior, we must urgently move away from dangerous emitters of carbon and shift our focus to increasingly renewable sources. This shift requires divestment of fossil fuel assets, as well as increased subsidies to promote technological advances for ecologically cleaner energy systems. With adequate dedication, the issues surrounding renewable energy sources can be both addressed and overcome; but it will take a concerted and collective effort. Not only would the promotion of this technology decarbonize the global electrical system, but a transition to renewable energy has the possibility of creating millions of jobs for our generation, actively addressing the growing issue of employment amongst the world’s youth.
Bottom-Up Approaches that Support Communities

Traditional “low carbon” ways of life have always distinguished the world’s Indigenous population from that of the dominant civilization. Comprising four percent of the population, they utilize twenty percent of the world’s land and maintain eighty percent of the planet’s biodiversity. However, it is incredibly disheartening to see indigenous peoples being adversely affected by the ongoing climate crisis. Indigenous peoples are the carriers and cultivators of their Traditional or Indigenous Knowledge Systems that have resiliently maintained their cultures amidst devastating attempts at cultural genocide. Their Indigenous and medicinal plant varieties promote biodiversity and are, in fact, excellent observers and interpreters of climate patterns. Their knowledge provides a framework for experiential knowledge on community-based adaptation and resilient mitigative action to execute an interconnected socio-ecological system that can be replicated at the local, national, and global levels. Indigenous land-based pedagogies or “Land as Pedagogy” are critical manifestations of said knowledge and teachings at the grassroot level. These teachings regard the land as knowledge and resurrect from the violence, separating Indigenous peoples from their lands and associated social relations, to re-introduce and re-place themselves on the land in an attempt to learn within their knowledge systems and ways of knowing. In this way, land-based pedagogies serve as educational experiences of environmental harmony and an inherently decolonial process.

Unequal Experience and Structural Violence of the Climate Crisis

Given that the contours of our global society are, for the most part, dependent upon inequity, it makes sense that the impacts of our crises are unevenly distributed amongst various socio-eco-
nomic groups. Low-income populations worldwide are forcibly pushed out of their neighborhoods due to climate gentrification or pulled to the outskirts of urban areas for opportunity, where they are often overcrowded and disproportionately exposed to diseases and viruses, such as COVID-19. Furthermore, due to environmental racism, these financially disadvantaged and racialized communities are often strategically chosen as dumping sites, production areas for factories, and/or resource extraction sites: exposed to chemical run-off and diseases which mutate and run rampant. Individuals currently experiencing homelessness are among those most greatly exposed to not only COVID-19, but simultaneously symptoms of the climate crisis; such as the fires in the San Francisco Bay Area. When such disaster strikes, low-income areas, which are most often subsequently racialized communities, are depri-
oritized in government responses. The Summit participants witnessed and experienced this firsthand in their neighborhoods, as the City of Cape Town refused to clean up flooding and sewage run-off in the Cape Flats. Additionally, in Puerto Rico, lower-income and rural areas were not only most vulnerable to the recent back-to-back hurricanes--given their lack of infrastructure compared to affluent, more developed areas--but were also among the last to benefit from state recovery efforts and did not encounter preventive measures to combat this issue of inequity in the future. As these communities act as environmental defend-
ers, they are physically, but not symbolically, shot down, barred from vital federal assistance and virtually mandated to survive and rehabilitate on their own terms and using their own already diminished means.

Challenge of Youth Inclusion

Many of the world’s countries do not encourage strong, passionate youth voices to be included at policy, academic, and industry levels. Institutions in these spaces are often dominated by
Sustainable Development vs. Survival

Global South countries are most adversely affected by the climate crisis and are the least materially equipped to cope with the adverse economic, social, and environmental changes which are inevitably brought about by this global crisis. A need to lay a solid foundation that acts at the grassroots level with Indigenous, minority and vulnerable populations for sustainable development is a must. However, a dilemma arises when considering how to progress towards sustainable development when mere survival is an issue. First comes the hardships to sustain basic life: access to clean drinking water, struggles for quality of life, and insufficient living wages prove to be daily struggles which render the imminent climate crisis secondary. People cannot be altruistic: compromising the necessity to fulfill their basic needs and sense of security and suddenly shift their attention and interest to the climate crisis. Government bodies, policymakers, private and public organizations, and corporations should provide income opportunities amongst the young generations and implement action to bring disadvantaged populations out from the vicious cycle of poverty; doing so with a healthy economic plan that promotes green growth. Furthermore, sustainable development must include protecting areas of high biodiversity and ecological importance (for example: oceans, wetlands, and forests) before taking into consideration industrial development. Survival must include protecting Indigenous lands first.
As the global impact of COVID-19 is not fully known, young people are very concerned about the pathway that the global financial system will use to recover from the economic crisis. This situation offers a great opportunity for a “green” recovery, setting the stage for investment in sustainable infrastructure and renewable energy sources and sustainable growth over the mid-to-long term while simultaneously meetings our sustainable development goals. Like the Millennium development goals before them, governments, philanthropy, public and private funding must be brought to bear in utilizing not only country-by-country but via cross-border investment systemic global financial instruments to address pressing shared problems such as climate change, wealth inequality, social and environmental justice.

During the discussions with youth participants, I believe that these progressive alterations can be manifested not only within the topic of Rethinking Finance but also in areas that promote the overall improvement of the global climate and livelihood of all living things in a sustainable manner. A lack of transparency, which perpetuates insecurity, corruption, and the wage gap, is something that needs to be eradicated. Additionally, the participants identified:

A lack of financial literacy, which hinders development, needs to be addressed. Instead, a
A financial mechanism that acts as a guide to facilitate community decisions needs to be installed.

Insufficient and unequal access to credit, which prioritizes foreign investments, should instead focus on smaller local businesses to encourage local economic growth. There is a need to discourage the accumulation of wealth so that ethical capital flow can be encouraged in its place for improved social equity.

The existence of an economy that is designed to prioritize return on capital and is built on values that cultivate inequality needs to be abolished, and one that cultivates proper resource allocation and equity be its timely replacement.

Sustainable ways of wealth generation whereby young people can influence change through their decision-making powers as consumers/investors must become a priority.

As countries prepare to update their fiscal commitments at the upcoming 2021 UN Climate Summit, it is clear that our participants demand that a financial system that is sustainable and equitable be prioritized.
Themes

Lack of Transparency

Transparency is the key to democracy. Unfortunately, however, it is not present in the current financial system, and actively ignoring this discrepancy will in turn limit the real power of democracy. A fundamental lack of transparency within the overall financial system leads to an inevitable lack of trust between individual countries’ functional departments and their citizens. That being said, we recognize that finance or money is not the problem, but the emphasis we put on it is. In essence, the incorrect or insufficient way of handling money and the finance system is the main problem; as government and politics get in the way, being that they are more financially-centered. General populations seemingly feel insecure about their respective futures, as most wealth is controlled by a small, bureaucratic, hyper-influential percentage of the population. Thus, not everyone is afforded the opportunity to make their effort meaningful. Wealthy individuals receive federal subsidies, while impoverished populations are required to pay higher amounts in taxes; further exacerbating the wealth gap. Unfortunately, however, further biases in global financial systems are perpetuated by blatant loopholes which remain largely uncorrected, making it difficult for those who pay taxes based on their income level to justly support their respective financial system. The current financial system is in sheer disarray, as corrupt political leaders consistently fail to deliver on key principles of public finance systems, such as transparency of the budgeting process, access to universally-understandable financial documents, accountability, and accuracy of figures. The government cannot accurately account for expenditures and hidden reserves, perpetuating further corruption, which poses as a severe disease damaging the entire system.

As Kofi Annan said, “If corruption is a disease, transparency is an essential part of its treatment.” Transparency is the right to information, while openness is the right to participation, and, in order to promote effective change in regard to “rethinking finance,” the government must be open, transparent, and responsive. To more effectively facilitate citizen engagement, executive departments and agencies should also solicit societal input on increasing and improving opportunities for public participation in government. A progressive mindset committed to achieving sustainable development—economically, societally, and environmentally—is required. Organizations must create policies which improve money circulation through local, regional, national, and global economies of scale. Additionally, the govern-
ment must follow through on their plans to make climate-related financial disclosures mandatory for some organizations, with this requirement applying to publicly-listed companies, large insurers, banks, and investment managers.

Lack of Financial Literacy

The general lack of financial literacy consistently hinders efforts to address planetary emergencies, as many are not well versed in the financial trends, models, and sources utilized to acquire financial resources and subsequently implement viable, financially sound solutions to global climate concerns. On the other hand, those who understand finance and are able to regulate financial flow are not aware of how to do so sustainably, or how to direct finances towards efficient and effective community development. Developing countries, especially, struggle to properly financially manage their communities due to their growing debt burdens: it is terribly difficult to restructure their flawed financial models as they are simultaneously trying to facilitate debts. Assuming that financial literacy becomes a priority globally, we can experience increased allocation of capital and investment in solutions that are not at the expense of community burden. Primarily, the financial literacy question is a question of inclusion: by addressing the need to build the capacity of people towards planning, accessing, delivering, and monitoring finance at the national level, only then can we hope to bridge the gap between appropriate financial literacy and the addressment of the global climate crisis.

Financial literacy, including personal financial management, budgeting, and investing, allows for individuals to subsequently make financially sensible decisions from an informed, economical point of view. This should take precedence and be integrated into the required education for all. The challenges surrounding proper financing lie more
with communities, as they cannot adequately keep track of apparent financial risks. Closing the gap of financial literacy will in turn cultivate an improved universal knowledge base of lending policies, refinancing, and other financing schemes; whilst simultaneously helping to decrease financial, social, and environmental risks and reducing financial risk by socializing potential losses through insurance, credit guarantees, socializing payments, or other related risk-sharing mechanisms. One should not be knowledgeable about financing techniques only through their work at a financial institution or finance department. The role lies with all stakeholders, governments, the private sector, and financial institutions to put a financial mechanism in place that is well explained and resourceful to guide community decisions.

**Insufficient and Unequal Access to Credit**

Throughout the summit, we identified the significance of entrepreneurs and local businesses in bringing growth and innovation to the community while also acknowledging the enormous challenges they face. There is a profound need to provide greater opportunities for local and small businesses while at the same time prioritizing such establishments over larger multinational corporations (MNCs). Wealth is, at its most fundamental level, a representation of power and resources.

There is an immediate need to focus on improving the local economy by promoting local products and lowering the demand for imported goods. The youth believe that a financial system that allows local businesses, regardless of their size, to have equal, if not more, opportunities than foreign ones, will benefit local communities and consequently boost local economies. However, the current insufficient and unequal access to credit, in reality, inhibits this degree of development amongst small entrepreneurs and local businesses. While larger companies are more likely to attract lenders, the smaller ones who depend on credit access and further investment, especially those classified as homegrown and start-ups, often have trouble accessing capital from traditional lenders. Governments need to go a step further in supporting small and local businesses that may not have the necessary capital resources to adopt the best sustainable means of production through the provisions of eco-grants and tax rebates in a conscious attempt to level the playing field for these smaller corporate endeavors.

The unequal access to credit also affects lower-income households, young entrepreneurs, and people of color, who are all considered to have low ability-to-repay. The insufficient and unequal access to credit exacerbates the wealth gap, as only some populations can access credit and commit to advancing their businesses and entrepreneurial ventures. To ensure the financial justice and subsequent sustainable development of all communities, ensuring sufficient and equal access to credit is imperative.

**Economy Designed for Return on Capital and Built on Values which Cultivate Inequality**

Capitalism is enshrined in our identity as modern citizens. To question capitalism is to question progress, technology, and, in the most extreme scenario, democracy. Yet, as described by Fadel from Benin, our current system is focused on making a profit rather than helping people. If an economy is, at its core, a way of allocating resources to produce goods and services, its central goal must then be producing
these goods and services as efficiently as possible for the greatest number of inhabitants of the Earth. To achieve this, we must foster stronger beliefs in equality – to ensure the adequate provision of goods and services to the maximum number of inhabitants at any given time – and sustainability – to ensure this happens for the longest period of time possible. During the summit, we identified disproportionate investment in oil, the fallacy of the American Dream, and ideas about sustainable assets being ‘un-financial’ as current blockers to this shift in values, and began to address concrete strategies which we can implement, suggest, and adopt in order to facilitate greater sustainable development in regards to the global financial landscape.

**Sustainable Ways of Wealth Generation**

Creating a new financial system that promotes ethical capital flow and prevents accumulation in a specific social group, is fundamental to achieve social equity. Young people are increasingly proactive about wealth accumulation but are also equally concerned about sustainable means of doing so. Thus, encouraging large multinational corporations and organizations to consider their sustainable means of production and operation is imperative. Young people as consumers/investors/traders can influence change by using their decision-making authority and making a conscious decision to promote positive, sustainable financial operations and eco-friendly business models/corporate cultures.
“Evidence of the earliest true civilization was a healed femur, ... which she held up in front of the lecture hall. She explained that such healings were never found in the remains of competitive societies ... but the healed femur showed that someone must have cared for the injured person – hunted on his behalf, brought him food, and served him at personal sacrifice.”

Paul Brand's memoir Fearfully and Wonderfully Made reflecting on a lecture by Margaret Mead

The first notable remark made was that the term “civilization” was problematic. As a response, the youth proposed to talk about humanity and nature as a totality, focusing on its inherent diversity. The need for a new education which includes emotional intelligence and values the relevance of mental health for well-being additionally became apparent amongst the youth. Nonetheless, we are faced every day with the all-pervading individuality of our relationships in jobs, in school, etc. To challenge this inherited framework, the focus should ideally be placed on the experience of sharing, the creation of horizontal relationships, as well as the facilitation of cooperative endeavors. In the context of multiple viewpoints, it is possible to learn what others have and want to share, including those communities that are not usually heard.

Respect for others, compassion, and empathy were identified as the pillars that an education and mental health system should include to develop a more connected and humane civilization. Civilization relates to the colonial times, the westernization of cultures, and the misleading concepts of clashing of civilizations and evolution following biological analogies. Conversely, it was suggested that we should focus
more on the idea of humanity as a whole with emphasis on the intrinsic diversity and the process of learning how to be humans, as stated in the title of the Club of Rome’s document. This affirmation then leads us to the importance of education and mental health as fundamental building blocks of a new humanity.

However, our society currently lacks the capacity to identify and capitalize on the social and environmental needs that protrude through our everyday lives. To arrive at this global wisdom of caring for each other, all voices should consistently be heard, particularly those that have been forgotten in the past. It was emphasized several times throughout the summit that Indigenous people bear values that place humanity and nature in direct relation with one another, and we came to a general consensus that it would be beneficial to learn from this approach as long as these individuals feel comfortable sharing it. In order to do that, however, there’s a need to pave the way towards mutual civil development within communities.

Humanity only arises at the moment when people begin to care for others.

No summary can appropriately and accurately condense the diversity and richness of viewpoints shared by the rising generation during the summit. However, the summit has been a good starting point towards recognizing others who are also passionate about the global issues that affect us all as individuals. Importantly, the summit encouraged the breaking of isolation and the building of bridges between young people across the globe, especially during such a challenging time in history while we face the COVID-19 pandemic.
Humanity Instead of Civilization

The youth participants problematized the term “Civilization” during the discussion, establishing that the term’s sentiment goes against what we understand was the original purpose of its coining. The term “Civilization” is frequently referred to as the state of humankind’s progression that comes after savagery and barbarism. In this way, it is inherently being used to describe some communities as barbaric and inherently inferior to others. The “superior and civilized” communities, which are entitled to “civilize” their inferior counterparts, seem to apparently be awarded an authoritative and autonomous grasp over the less-civilized communities. This reference frame easily leads to discrimination, separation, hierarchization, and imposition, interrupting all possibility of productive dialogue, understanding, and valorization of diversity, which became a notable point throughout the sessions.

Instead, it was suggested that we should focus more on the idea of humanity as a whole, emphasizing the intrinsic diversity and the process of learning how to be human, as stated in the title of the Club of Rome’s document. To fulfill this deeper connection and understanding between all of us together with nature, inclusive and collective leadership must be encouraged, taking into account different genders, ages, ethnicities, professions, and fields of practice, to obtain transdisciplinary positions and ideas regarding the issues that affect us all. Thus, to achieve such a radical shift in our fundamental belief matrix, there’s a need to restructure education at a fundamental and holistic level.

Education

A continuous thread that was consistently highlighted throughout the summit was the inherent value of reimagining education. At its core, education is seen as the way to develop and nourish the youngest citizens’ minds. However, knowledge is undeniably continuous, and opportunities to develop further knowledge should be integrated into every phase of life. Contrary to this sentiment, however, there
is a false narrative that an adult is in a “state of completion” while a child is in a state of “becoming.” This unnecessarily creates a power dynamic between a teacher and their student, limiting a child’s confidence and authority to question elders’ thoughts and critically engage in productive, necessary dialogue. This dynamic can be seen in other domains, such as the relationship between an employer and their employee and a government and its citizens. This viewpoint limits our ability to recognize and challenge unsustainable systems, locking our societies in an ethical stalemate and encouraging complacency and acceptance instead of change and voicing our frustrations with unwavering conviction. If we want people to care and feel empowered to make changes in their own lives and their communities, they need to feel that they have the power, the ability, the autonomy to do so. The youth feel this can be done through engagement, confidence-building, and restructuring of learning. A form of this could take place through experiential learning, which encompasses the idea that students should be encouraged to spend time in nature, engage in production systems, and have apprenticeship opportunities to allow them to learn from elders in their communities. This type of learning helps develop intergenerational connections while also fostering an appreciation of the various forms of employment and processes required to create a functioning, efficient society. Through experiential learning, humility can be developed, in which the youth begin to develop a more connected and humane society, as opposed to an unequal, unproductive, and largely myopic “civilization.”

Mental Health and Emotional Intelligence

In trying to unpack what a humane society would look like, youth members highlighted a vision of respect, tolerance, integrity, empathy, compassion, and connectivity. For these states
to be achieved and expressed, it was felt that personal development in the form of self-awareness and emotional intelligence is needed. It is collectively felt that only when individuals can view themselves with compassion and kindness can they identify, sympathize, and resonate with others’ emotions and struggles. Thus, opportunities to encourage this stance were shared. One promising idea was to include emotional regulation and awareness into school curriculums from the first year of education onwards while adopting rehabilitation and mindfulness forms into systems of punishment. Instead of detention/solitary confinement in prisons, one could practice meditation or work on garden projects, remaining mindful and productive while consciously correcting their apparent wrongs. The youth voiced a sentiment that mental health disorders are overwhelming the population due to experiences of disconnection from each other and the environment. However, by normalizing and destigmatizing mental illness and providing a shared language to experience emotional distress, one gives society permission to connect and care for each other with less fear of rejection, judgment, and exclusion.

Egocentrism: The Human and Environmental Approach

The human and cultural capital may comprise an array of items, both tangible and intangible-acquired, and fabricate different outcomes. It is included but is not limited to: human beings’ consciousness, education credential, creativity, as well as economic and social embodiment. However, this apparent egocentrism seems to be a way of unhealthy competition amongst humans. This reflection is in congruence with what has been studied by Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist who emphasized the fact that the more you enrich your (human and cultural) capitals, the more exponential power you gain. These capitals that manifest in the human self may alienate oneself from society and tend to focus more on a single human affair. Thus, it builds up an extreme hierarchical relationship between human and non-human agency, which the youth appropriately addressed as egocentric. Most of us have less (and lost) sensitivity and capacity to identify and grasp social and environmental needs; which has been exacerbated by the feeling of superiority of person to person, and human to non-human. This mantra warrants a mentality construction to alter life’s view to be more commensurate, be in a stable equilibrium, and value all other earthlings. Possession of this issue is a kind of nexus created in a human’s mindset that is obtained from family, school/formal education, and societal facets.

Importance of Indigenous Communities

Throughout the Global Youth Summit, a common theme was the significance and need for the inclusion of Indigenous viewpoints. It has become blatantly apparent as of late that we, as human beings, have lost our connection with and understanding of nature, which was initially afforded to us by the graciousness of Indigenous peoples and their cultures. Importantly, the youth participants recognized that humanity is in the process of destroying our ecosystems during our rush of industrial advancements.

It shouldn’t be surprising that, with each additional year that passes, we see stronger hurricanes, fiercer wildfires, and increasingly uncertain weather patterns. At the same time, Indigenous peoples are often the ones who suffer the negative consequences of climate change to the most severe degree. Land
displacement, climate gentrification, and federal protection and conservation of native lands continue to devastate Indigenous populations every day. Even after this fact, these disadvantaged individuals are willing to help and advocate in any way possible regarding the impending climate crisis. A participant from Australia told a story of how the Indigenous people in some areas helped firefighters contain the devastating wildfires of 2019 utilizing their extensive knowledge of trees and plants; further emphasizing the importance of native populations and the benefit which they can have on our fundamental and incredibly necessary understanding of our natural surroundings as they relate to solving the climate crisis. We all felt that to establish new humanity; we must integrate indigenous knowledge into our society, rather than openly repel, replace, and unjustly exert our apparent authority over them. These populations deserve equal representation in our local, state, and national governments.

Often, we romanticize Indigenous communities for their connection between nature and society, seeing their ways of life as the answer to Western culture's distorted views. But in doing so, we are also very much limiting the conception of what would be “indigenous culture”. Like any other culture, thinking that indigenous knowledge is a never changing set of morals, ethics, and values uninfluenced by colonization is an illusion. Still, if we intentionally acknowledge the need to build beneficial and meaningful partnerships as equal partners, this will help us fight our global and dynamic problems, thus building a better, more humanistic, more considerate society.
“We need economic growth, yes, but growth can be jobless, so a sustainable development framework for employment must include a job creation strategy.”

Sharan Burrow

What good are our economies if they cannot support us when we need them to? The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating, and as Anderson et al. (2020) wrote, it will take many years to rebuild the economic gains that have been eroded. The pandemic exposed a lot of what is wrong with how economics has been traditionally conceived. High GDP does not mean that everyone is well off and content; the creation of wealth does not mean a fair distribution of the same; and neither does working long hours necessarily translate into financial freedom, especially for women, among others. A wakeup call couldn’t have come at a better time! We reiterate the Club of Rome’s call for “wellbeing economics” to be the anchor for recovery, renewal, and resilience (Dixson-Declèvè & McLeod, 2020) in a post-COVID-19 world and a world bracing for the worsening of the climate crisis (IPCC, 2018).

**Struggles of Weak Economies**: Youth participants thought that the struggles of weak economies range from overdependence on aid; heavy reliance on rainfed and smallholder farming, the inability to generate enough tax revenues, and the general mismanagement of funds. It was suggested that stronger economies assist the weak ones in developing just
economic systems, which would ideally strengthen their economies in a fair and non-competitive manner.

**Women in Economy:** Issues such as unpaid domestic work, low wages/salaries, and gender discrimination were mentioned. Youths prayed for a future in which women are afforded better jobs, better working conditions, and paid the remunerations they rightly deserve.

**Taxes and Tax Evasion:** Participants bemoaned that present systems are riddled with loopholes which big players maneuver to their advantage. Calls were thus made for reforms and for more transparency in the management of funds.

**Beyond GDP:** A Need for Better Measures of Progress: It was highlighted that GDP does not measure the physical and mental wellbeing of people, nor does GDP give a true picture of the earnings and spendings of individuals. Thus, better ways of measuring economic progress are needed to be the dominant indices of the future.

**Capitalism and Competition of Powers:** Participants indicated a wide wage and wealth gap between the rich and the poor. Also, powerful economic players are not mindful of the implications of over-exploitation for future generations. A general and honest consensus on working together for the betterment of all humankind must be established and progressively implemented.

**What Should Make a Strong Economy:** In a strong economy of the future, youth participants opined that wealth must be fairly distributed; the rights and freedoms of all citizens must be upheld, and citizens must also be shielded from economic perturbations such as when corporations go bankrupt or when pandemics like COVID-19 break out.

**Economy and Environment:** While the repercussions of the over-exploitation of the natural environment for aggregate economic gain has been known for decades, the adequate response has been snail-paced. Participants recommended that environmental policies be implemented with urgency. Also, the toolkits used by economists to assess the benefits of environmental policies must be improved, as most are outdated and call for the subordination of sustainability-related concerns as they pertain to economics.

In conclusion, it became evident that present economic systems are fraught with many weaknesses and inadequacies. Ultimately, youth participants called for future economic thinking to maintain citizens’ wellbeing at its core and prioritized over all other metrics.
The Struggles of Small or Weak Economies

During the sessions, there was consensus among participants that many nations are vulnerable in the current economic system. Worthy of mention is a participant from Nepal, Ataleisha, who said, “I believe that thinking like this growing [GDP as an indicator for power and wealth] and how to finance it [by taxes] are a really westernized view. In Nepal, our economy is fragile, and a majority survives from about $3 a day and 25% on even less, like a dollar a day, which is really little… We need to change our economic system to one that works for such countries, too.”

The current economic system urges small economies to rely on external capital to fulfill a demand for rapid growth. Current and past economic big players such as the United States and China use their power to further their influence, no matter the cost for the nations impacted. Despite the increase of the GDP in some cases, this led to long-lasting chaos and the worsening of living conditions compared to times before an intervention. Additionally, many smaller economies still rely strongly on rainfed and smallholder agriculture. Even though many of them try to industrialize in order to keep pace with already developed, economically efficient nations, the heavy focus on the sector makes them vulnerable to changes in climate or at the world markets.

In the future, the “big players” of the global economic system have to transition into a more just economic framework helping the smaller ones “catch up” to their levels of productivity and economic well-being per capita. Honest cooperation will also be key in the fulfillment of these goals.

Women in the Economy

While the role of women in economic growth can by no means be ignored. Generally, women work longer hours than men but for substantially less money. Unpaid domestic work was mentioned as a grave problem that needs addressing. In addition, women are underpaid and often have little to no economic
freedoms. Others bemoaned the gender discrimination problem in many economies. It was agreed upon that future economies need to address these lapses in an attempt to provide a more economically equitable society for all citizens, regardless of gender. Ultimately, until women are given better jobs, better working conditions, equal rights, and the salaries and wages they are deserving of, they may never get the independence to live the lives they desire, which will be detrimental to the sustainable future so fondly dreamed of by so many of the world’s inhabitants.

Taxes, Corruption and Tax Evasion

Taxation is a tool designed for taking resources from a designated area to be available to relocate to another one. Each country has its own systems as each economy has specific needs regarding tax revenues and allocations, but the problem emerges when these resources are not objectively well placed or instead used for political or personal gains. A fairer and more transparent system for controlling and managing tax funds is necessary to prevent tax evasion and flows of capital into tax havens. Kevin from Argentina stated in the meeting:

“A lot of politicians or enterprises are getting their money in tax havens instead of investing it in their own countries; we should measure the political involvement of the money of rich people.”

It is unimaginable that we live in a system that allows (or encourages) legal loopholes to extract substantial amounts of wealth from emerging economies. The idea of enriching a select few at the expense of the majority works counterintuitively to what we know as constituting sustainable development. This must be flipped on its head when considering how to reframe global economic systems. Sofia from Argentina brilliantly exposed this, stating,

“Sometimes, foreign enterprises come, make unfavorable deals to our governments to exploit our natural resources, and we are forced to accept them because we don’t have a better choice. They come, they destroy everything. Then they leave without fixing anything; it’s a cycle without end.”

In essence, democracy, accountability, and transparency must be a reality; as they are the best road to social progress for any nation.

Beyond GDP: A Need for Better Measures of Progress

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) only emphasizes the monetary worth of services and products produced in/by a country, fundamentally failing to capture the socio-environmental factors interconnected with citizens’ well-being and growth (Petrescu et al., 2020). In a concerted race to develop a high GDP, states compete to increase their production on a planet with an ever-dwindling amount of natural resources pushing our natural systems to the brink of collapse. During the discussions, participants stressed that we need to look beyond monetary gains and include education, healthcare, clean energy, biodiversity,
economic dependency in policymaking, personal development, work-life balance, employment opportunities, etc., for measuring the actual growth of a nation. The youth envision a future world where there would be economic and social stability and where nature, mental health, and people’s happiness are emphasized to determine any particular nation’s overall economic progress.

**Capitalism and the Competition of Powers**

The youth’s collective voice explicates that the world is running on an economic system that is not sustainable in the slightest; and which is also unfair and unjust to the majority of citizens.

Unfettered capitalism promotes an environment of extreme competition, rewarding those who can accumulate profits at any cost but perpetuating a system that creates a wide wage and wealth gap between socio-economic groups. This disparity is unfair to the rest of the population, reducing opportunities for those without the access, resources, or privilege to succeed in such a competitive and cutthroat environment. The big businesses are making more and more profit, accumulating an ever-increasing amount of assets and properties, all while leaving the rest behind and creating entrenched economic inequality and a dire social injustice. As one of the participants said, “They (the business owners) don’t care what will happen in the future,” which shows the young generation’s lack of trust in this economic system. They feel as though this system is pushing towards an uncertain future. Moreover, the currently unsustainable economic system endangers the security and prosperity of future generations.

**What Should Make a Strong Economy?**

In a strong economy, signs such as a boom in employment opportunities, higher loan approval rates, consumer confidence in stock markets, and citizens’ general high expenditures become evident. Yet, as positive as these measures are, they might not reflect how well a country and a collective people are consistently developing. Much of this economic development, even in perceived strong economies, has revolved around exploiting certain groups (the poor, minority, and indigenous) to better others (often the rich and privileged classes). Wealth has to be fairly distributed in a strong economy. Every citizen must be well cared for, including how workers are treated, remunerated, and ensuring that everyone has equal opportunities to thrive.
As we continue to explore what should make a strong economy, we’ll first experience our economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. Hopefully, local and state governments will use this to start preparing for the impending climate crisis. Local and state measures must be put in place to shield citizens from perturbations, such as when corporations go bankrupt or when economies are utterly shocked. These protections might be framed as economic, social safety net programs, but as we have seen with COVID-19, the connection between economic and social stability is deeply intertwined. For instance, economic uncertainty led to a string of public disturbances and gender-based violence by low-income earners in South Africa when lockdown protocols were declared. Above all, participants stressed that these conditions enumerated above would ensure that no one individual is left behind. This collective, people-centric sentiment will foster contentment and help promote peace throughout global economies.

Participants also indicated that strong economies should be resilient and, if possible, diversified so that they do not rely alone on a single product or service. This point was eloquently summed up by one participant who said, “An institution can be strong, but not stronger than people.” Thus, it must be the individual economies working for the good of the people and not the other way around.

Economy and Environment

The economy and the environment cannot be disconnected. Often, the environment provides resources and acts as a sink for emissions and waste. As Coline from France mentioned, “When we talk about growing above GDP and to have a new economy that works correctly and is an actual circle, I think taking the planet really into account is important, and we should do that.” Anything less, and we will lose financially, socio-economically, and in health. Indeed, “No nature, no economy.”

Environmental policies can curb the negative feedback from the economy on the environment, but how effective they depend on how they are designed and implemented. It might be questionable if putting a price tag on nature realistically solves the problem of overlooked long term consequences. Still, the attempt to include metrics to compare the costs and benefits of environmental policies or economic costs of biophysical and environmental consequences of policy inaction is essential to improve the toolkits that economists use to assess environmental policies’ benefits.
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