

Economies that Dare to Care

Achieving social justice and preventing
ecological breakdown by putting care
at the heart of our societies



Suggested citation

Lorek, S., Power, K., and Parker, N. (2023). Economies that Dare to Care - Achieving social justice and preventing ecological breakdown by putting care at the heart of our societies. Hot or Cool Institute, Berlin.

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ISBN (PDF): 978-3-98664-010-1

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Caring Societies is a project carried out by [Hot or Cool Institute](#), in partnership with [SERI](#), [Climate Outreach](#) and [Global Action Plan UK](#).



This work is possible thanks to the generous support from [Partners for a New Economy](#) and the [ClimateWorks Foundation](#), with operational support from the [Stanley Center for Peace and Security](#).



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Commission on care-centred transformation to equitable, low-consumption societies

The development of this work is supported by the valuable contribution of the Commission on care-centred transformation to equitable, low-consumption societies. This report does not necessarily reflect the ideas and positions of every member involved. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations presented in this report are based on a synthesis of diverse viewpoints but should not be interpreted as a unanimous endorsement by all members as individual perspectives and opinions may vary.

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Executive summary

The aim of this report is to explore how putting care at the heart of our societies could promote social justice and prevent ecological breakdown.

This project is guided by three key questions:

1. Can we achieve social justice and prevent ecological breakdown by putting care at the heart of our societies?
2. How can we make a radical transformation to conscious consumption lifestyles, while maintaining or increasing well-being?
3. How can we communicate effectively about just, low-carbon transformations considering gender and race and bring society on board?

The report consists of **three parts**:

- Chapter 1 sets the scene, describing the multiple crises we face, how they are connected by the current system, and why care-centred transformation could be the holistic approach needed for powerful systemic change.

- Chapter 2 identifies approaches that promise potential for more effective and systemic responses – that go beyond the mainstream.
- Chapter 3 looks ahead to how we can move forward together to join forces and build a forum for just, low-carbon, and caring societies.

The report concludes by proposing the establishment of a Forum for Caring Societies to develop a common agenda for action and to build the mandate for change to promote care as a catalyst for radical transformation.

Our hope is that this report inspires a wide network of researchers, funders, activists, and practitioners to join us in working towards caring societies.

In this executive summary, we provide an overview of the report's findings, which cover a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences from 18 months of literature review and consultation with a Commission of over 30 experts in the field of social and environmental care, from Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and South America.



Chapter 1: Setting the scene

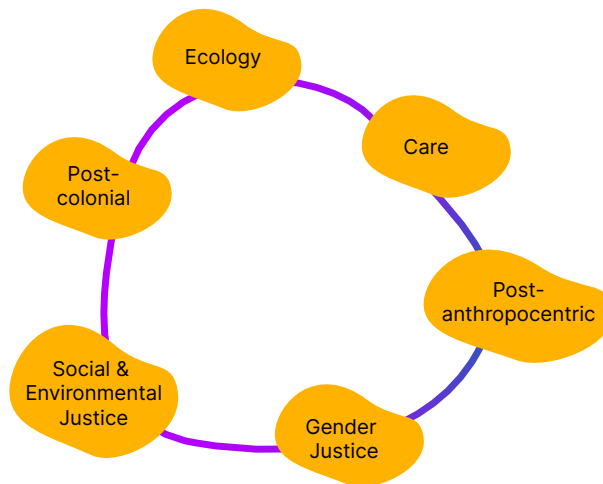
The world is currently facing multiple, interconnected crisis including poverty, global and gender inequality, climate change, and biodiversity loss. This report suggests that these problems are all symptoms of the same systemic crisis and need holistic interventions to solve them.

Unpaid care and the natural environment are linked by the fact that the current economic system would collapse without them - but places value on neither. The extractivist, industrial capitalist system has led to an imbalance – resulting in ecological breakdown that is taking us to a tipping point of no return. It also perpetuates the colonial exploitation

of resources and workers in the Global South to maintain the excessive consumption of the Global North.

We take inspiration from six perspectives: ecological, care work, gender inequality, social and environmental justice, post-anthropocentric and post-colonial approaches, that have emerged from different geographical and cultural regions and demand an end to social injustice and ecological destruction. They all call for an increase in care for people and nature and provide strong roots from which to build a full picture of the types of values, world views, and actions needed to transform to an equal, sustainable care-centred society.

Figure 1: Six perspectives for a holistic approach to interconnected crises



This report proposes a care-centred transformation as a holistic approach to address these challenges. A care-centred perspective recognises the interconnected nature of all things; that the wellbeing of the whole system is impacted by the wellbeing of each part. Care, which encompasses ethical, emotional, and relational dimensions has always been essential for individual and societal survival and with the increasing ecological breakdown and social pressures, the capacity for care becomes even more important.

Systemic change requires a powerful vision, and we suggest that a caring society offers an appealing vision for holistic eco-social transformation. Caring societies prioritise the well-being of all beings, including humans, non-humans, and nature. They challenge the current paradigm of constant economic growth and competition, aiming for a fair and equitable distribution of resources, redressing systems of oppression, and reducing carbon emissions and resource use.

Figure 2: From current oppressive systems to future caring societies



A care-centred transformation provides a comprehensive and sustainable approach to address the interconnected crises the world is facing. By recognizing the value of care work, promoting gender and racial equality, and reevaluating our relationship with nature, societies can strive towards a more equitable and environmentally conscious future. These issues are usually approached separately, and we propose more work is needed to understand the synergies and form common agendas for action.

Chapter 2: Potential for change – approaches beyond the mainstream

Chapter 2 explores various concepts and world views that can contribute to caring societies, encompassing perspectives from both the Global North and the Global South. These include the abolitionist framework, Buen Vivir and Vivir Bien (Living Well), commoning, degrowth, eco-feminism, environmental

justice, the foundational economy, Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK), just transition, queer ecology, solidarity economy, Ubuntu, and the 5R Framework.

These concepts represent diverse perspectives and form a pluriverse, offering alternative visions to neoliberalism, development, and capitalism. Each concept brings unique characteristics and perspectives to the discussion on how to end injustice, social and environmental unsustainability, and highlights the interconnectedness between humans, non-humans, and nature.

In addition to theoretical concepts, we delve into the growing number of networks and practical initiatives that are placing care at the centre of research and action towards fair and sustainable societies. We provide a list of examples of initiatives ranging from local to global scales that prioritise care, such as the Global Care Network, Care Revolution, and Feminist Green New Deal, among others.

Table 1: Concepts and world views contributing to develop just and low-carbon caring societies

Global South				Global North			
Concepts and world views	Environmental care	Social care	Economic change	Concepts and world views	Environmental care	Social care	Economic change
Buen Vivir <small>P</small>	● ●	● ● ●	● ●	Abolition <small>TP</small>	● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●
Environmental Justice <small>TP</small>	● ●	● ● ● ●		Commoning <small>TP</small>	●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●
Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge <small>P</small>	● ●	● ● ● ●	● ●	Degrowth <small>T</small>	● ●	● ●	● ● ● ●
Just Transition <small>TP</small>	● ●	● ●	● ●	Eco-feminism <small>T</small>	● ●	● ● ● ●	● ●
Solidarity Economy <small>TP</small>	●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	Foundational economy <small>T</small>	● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●
Ubuntu <small>P</small>		● ● ● ●		Queer Ecology <small>TP</small>	● ●	● ● ● ●	● ●
				5 R Framework for decent care work <small>T</small>	●	● ● ● ●	● ●

●	● ●	● ● ●	<small>side aspect</small>	<small>some attention</small>	<small>strong focus</small>	<small>TP theory and practice</small>	<small>P practices approach</small>	<small>T theoretical concept</small>
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The report also explores a range of case studies from around the world, showcasing real-life projects that have promoted higher care and lower carbon lifestyles within communities; from community kitchens in Argentina to co-housing in Germany.

The report emphasises the significance of women’s participation and leadership in shaping environmental and social initiatives as women tend to demonstrate greater concern for climate change and propose different solutions. However, the gender gap in climate change policymaking and decision-making processes persists, particularly in wealthier countries. It is crucial to recognize that caring should not be limited to femininity but should be viewed as a central factor shaping economies and societies, as gendered roles and social norms have contributed to current problems.

We then present a comprehensive overview of the debates surrounding the recognition, valuation, and compensation of care work. We highlight the complexities and trade-offs involved in different approaches and emphasise the need for a transformative shift in societal values and structures to create a care-centred economy.

We explore the arguments concerning whether unpaid care work should be monetarily compensated or remain unpaid, which remains a contentious debate. Arguments for paying for care work include giving caregivers greater choice, reducing the gender gap in care, and increasing employment opportunities in care economies. On the other hand, some argue that paying for care work does not challenge the current system’s values and distribution of care work. Commodifying care may lead to underpayment and exploitation, reinforce gender imbalances, and perpetuate neocolonial power dynamics. Instead, proponents suggest commonising care and recognising its value beyond monetary exchange.

We explore the potential role of reducing working hours to promote and redistribute care which could help challenge gender divisions and enhance well-being. However, this requires careful adjustments to avoid increasing the burden on marginalised communities and the provision of informal labour. We also discuss the role of the welfare state and the potential of convivial technology in the transition to a care-centred economy.

Chapter 3: Moving forwards together – care as a catalyst for the radical transformation of society

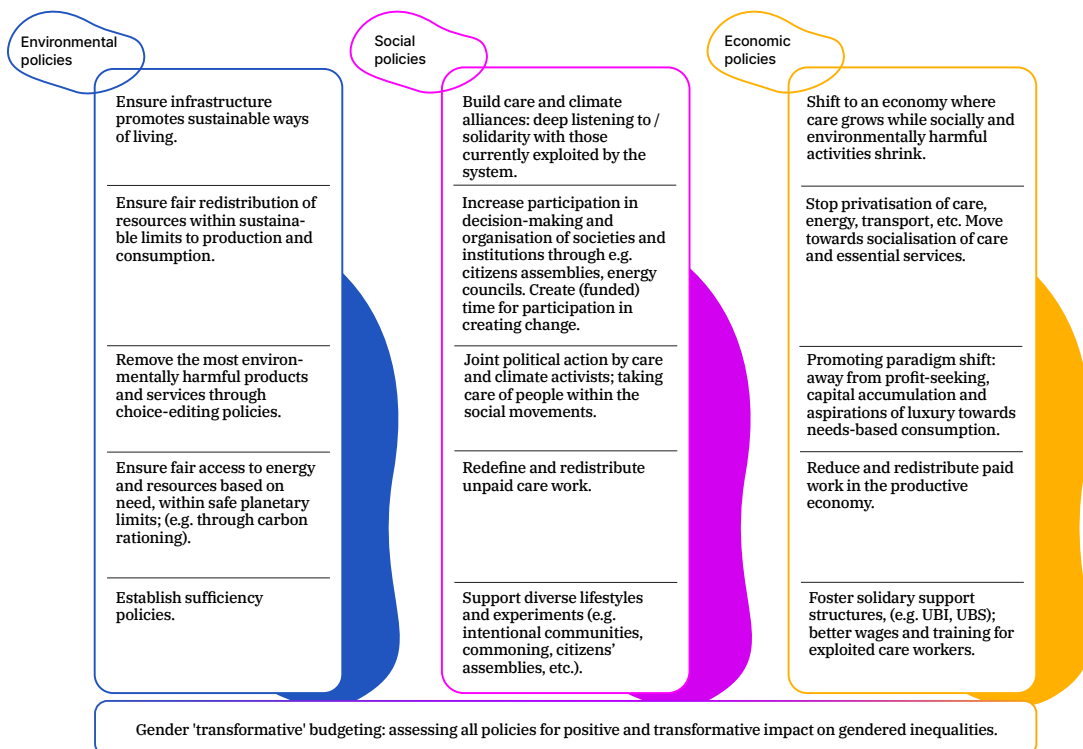
Chapter 3 focuses on shaping the work to be undertaken in the transition to creating caring societies. The chapter builds upon Gabriele Winker’s Care Revolution, among others, as a foundation for structuring the agenda for change. Winker’s proposal for a solidarity economy outlines short- and medium-term reforms for policy and practice within the current system as well as more revolutionary changes that would lead beyond profit-making and exploitation to societies based on fair contributions and distribution of resources according to need.

Short-medium term approaches for inducing change within the current system are presented, including carbon rationing, reduced working hours, universal basic services, sustainable and caring urban infrastructure,

gender budgeting, care levy, and reparations. These approaches aim to address equity, overconsumption, and fair financing of care work.

We then go on to discuss policies and practices that require more radical approaches to achieve a solidarity economy - that emphasises the importance of fair redistribution of resources within ecological limits and the promotion of non-profit and commons-based services. We describe policies and interventions that include better conditions for care workers, capping overconsumption, considering the global chain of care, limiting and rationing carbon emissions, and implementing universal basic income. These examples demonstrate the need for holistic policies that simultaneously address resource limits, wealth redistribution, gender equity, and historical accountability.

Table 2: Policy and practice proposals to change the current system



Next steps: Towards a Forum for Caring Societies

In 2022-23, we established a Commission on Care-centred transformation to equitable, low-consumption societies, comprising over 30 experts in the field of social and environmental care to contribute to the development of this report through interviews, written feedback, and exploring issues together during a series of workshops.

We conclude that a care-centred transformation could be a comprehensive and sustainable approach to addressing the world's interconnected crises. Deep systemic change can only be achieved by shifting the entire system: recognizing the value of care work, promoting gender and racial equality, and reevaluating our relationship with nature, are all necessary paradigm shifts towards an equitable and environmentally conscious future.

Going forward, **we are co-creating a Forum for Caring Societies**, bringing together diverse stakeholders and bridging gaps between different movements. The Forum is open to individuals working on various aspects of a just, low-carbon, caring society, and we invite others to join us in this work.

The Forum's goal is to develop a common agenda for action and to build social and political support for the transformation of societies through care. The Forum's work will involve mapping existing movements and alliances that advocate for similar transformations, such as feminist, workers, informal workers, care, anti-racist, anti-colonialist, and climate justice movements. The mapping aims to identify connections and potential collaborations that have not been explored before, bridging gaps between different groups working on women's rights, climate issues, labour rights, and care. Additionally, the Forum will focus on creating spaces for dialogue, strengthening voices to

influence policymakers, and building social and political mandate for change through joint activities.

Addressing power structures is another crucial aspect of the Forum's agenda. It recognizes the obstacles to change embedded in the current power system, such as white and male supremacy, which fail to adequately value care and ignore informal care systems. To overcome these hierarchies, we emphasise the need for inclusive communication and collaboration among diverse political backgrounds and better connection between local and national levels. We also emphasise the need for further research to broaden the base of evidence on the linkages between care, justice, and climate, to develop a just and gender-balanced vision of a caring world and highlight the importance of integrating care and climate issues into international processes.

Working towards a fair consumption space will involve promotion of policies to tackle both under and overconsumption, and we stress the significance of public debate and shifting social norms to challenge overconsumption. We need to effectively communicate the negative effects of capitalism, neoliberalism, and colonial logics on care for each other and the environment. We propose engaging with mass media, campaigns, and creative collaborations with artists and activists to promote the positive aspects of care and recognize it as an essential part of our existence.

The **first steps** envisioned for the Forum for Caring Societies include:

1. strategic communications research to effectively communicate complex issues related to caring societies;
2. convening with funders to support transformation beyond the current system;
3. creating a platform for collaboration, policy analysis, and peer learning.

Commission on Care-centred transformation to equitable, low-consumption societies

To cover the broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences necessary to push for caring societies, the leading team invited a Commission of over 30 experts in the field of social and environmental care to contribute to the development of this report and to shape the development of the forum. Commission members provided feedback on previous versions of this report and explored issues together during a workshop series in January 2023. In addition, 28 of the Commission members were interviewed, to build on the diverse literature review conducted. This report does not aim to reach a consensus

but to explore a range of perspectives and possibilities for action.

We thank the Commission for the extensive range of views and perspectives offered to guide this report. Due to the broad nature of the topic and the need to focus the report on the key issues, we were unable to include every contribution, but we hope to explore all wider issues as the project progresses. For example, we were unable to include the broader field of violence to women and vulnerable groups, nor have we been able to extensively cover the care of non-humans as we have taken a mainly anthropocentric view in our analysis.

Care to join us?

We hope this report will inspire many researchers, activists, practitioners, funders, and policymakers to join us in working towards the transformation to fair, sustainable, care-centred societies.

The Forum for Caring Societies will promote radical eco-social transformation, with care as the guiding principle. It will set an agenda for collaboration grounded in the decades of work undertaken by eco-feminist, decolonial and climate justice researchers and activists.

To connect, find out more, or join the Forum for Caring Societies please contact us: care@hotorcool.org

1

Setting the scene

Today the world is facing multiple crises; poverty, war, global and gender inequality, climate change and biodiversity loss. Could a care-centred transformation to equitable societies be a holistic approach to address the multiple challenges we face? **Care has always been essential in the survival of both individuals and societies.** With escalating ecological breakdown and social pressures, society's capacity for care will be even more important for cushioning against the impacts and maintaining the well-being in our societies and protecting the material world.

The current economic system would not exist without a facilitative environment and the broad range of care work, but **both nature and care work are devalued and often ignored in policymaking** and economic analysis. The current system also is based on and perpetuates colonial and extractivist approaches to nature and worker within a Global-North/Global-South hierarchical relation. In many cases, the extraction of common natural goods and the exploitation of human resources by certain groups in Africa, Latin America and Asia is associated with the organisation of production in global value chains, commanded by multinational companies from the Global North.

Ecofeminist theorist Ariel Salleh developed the concept of 'meta-industrial labour' to encompass the caring, regenerative, productive, and reproductive work of women, peasants, tribal people, and others whose activities are not adequately acknowledged within the dominant global economy. This caring perspective considers the importance of care in a broad sense, including the world view that all living beings are part of an interconnected system¹.

At its core, the caring perspective is based on the recognition that everything in the world is interconnected, and that the well-being of one part of the system, which includes humans, non-humans and the material world, is intimately tied to the well-being of the whole. This implies that caring for the planet and its inhabitants requires a deep understanding of the complex relationships between different species and ecosystems, as well as a commitment to nurturing those relationships in a way that promotes equity, reciprocity, and balance. In this sense, the caring perspective views capitalist industrialism as deeply problematic for a more balanced relationship between humanity and the rest of the natural world, resulting in ecological stress and ultimately severe multifaceted crises².

¹ Shiva, 2020

² Clark, 2012; Fraser, 2017

A caring perspective also opposes gender, sexual and racial based violence, which are the most frequent and less reported forms of violation of human rights, used to keep historically marginalised and oppressed groups in subordinated places through a matrix of colonial, extractivist, patriarchal, ableist and racist relations of power. This also **includes the violence that is faced by environmental activists**, many of whom have been murdered worldwide, often by paramilitary groups paid by corporations or financial investors to protect their vast interests in the exploitation of common natural goods. The result of this exploitation is decimating biodiversity, upsetting ecological balance, polluting environments, and destroying the habitats of wildlife and of indigenous people.

To care is both a concrete practice as well as a set of values. It includes ethical, emotional, and relational dimensions³ and entails a broad spectrum of activities contributing to human well-being and quality of life: from improving one's own living conditions via the well-being of the (chosen) family to caring for the local, regional, national, or international community⁴. To care implies a deep empathy with humans, non-humans⁵, and nature. Moreover, 'in the context of deep-seated capitalism, racism and patriarchy, there is actually nothing more radical than people and societies unapologetically caring for each other on an equal and equitable basis and being actively supported to do so'⁶.

Care - in this sense - provides an essential social good which underpins well-being and standards of living by supplying many of the 'services' that enable people to participate in society⁷. Increasing the amount and status of care work has environmental benefits too. Care work is less environmentally harmful than the production of goods and services, as it is non-extractive work. Placing care at the centre of our economies is therefore essential to a more socially just and sustainable society as it provides potential sources of socially useful, low carbon employment. In order to move towards such a system, care work must be recognised as socially necessary labour, be redistributed, and be valued as high status, high importance work.

In an economy shaped, defined, reflective of and working to the benefit of the traditional white man, unpaid care work and the environment are linked by the fact that they are taken as externalities, invisible in dominant economic models and theories, political and corporate spheres, and deeper public consciousness. More work is needed to clarify the synergies, and create practical opportunities for forging common change agendas and platforms. This project aims to contribute to action on radically fair and sustainable care for people and the planet by inviting organisations working in this space to come together creating a forum for change.

³Tronto, 1993

⁴Spangenberg and Lorek, 2022

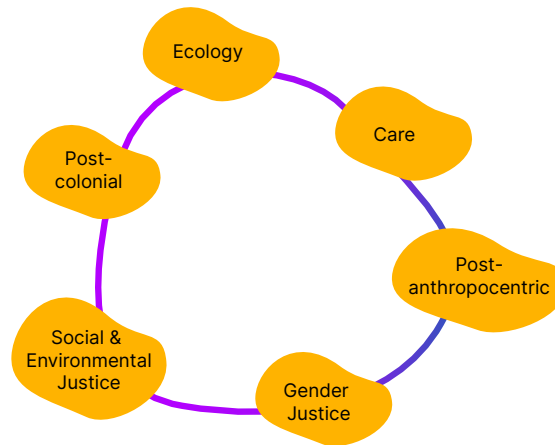
⁵Tronto, 1993

⁶Piaget et al., 2020

⁷Nirmal and Rocheleau, 2019



Figure 1: Six perspectives for a holistic approach to interconnected crises



1.1 OUR SOCIETIES ARE IN CRISIS

The various crises we face appear to be separate: our report suggests they are constituents of a systemic crisis that requires holistic intervention. This introduction briefly presents the six major perspectives on the crises in society. The first two parts of the report analyse the existing interventions for change and explore the potential for holistic systemic eco-social transformation while part 3 sketches out an agenda on how interested organisations and individuals could join forces in a Forum for Caring Societies.

The six perspectives identified in our background research are:

- The ecological perspective:** humanity lives far beyond its means and planetary boundaries have been crossed for six (out of nine) vital functions⁸. Greenhouse gas emissions are one crucial aspect here; ocean acidification, land degradation, overfishing and biodiversity loss are further symptoms with increasingly severe consequences. For the relatively small share of the global population living beyond their means, the restoration of sustainable living conditions requires going not only back to threshold levels, but significantly below them – to compensate for past overshoot.
- The care work perspective:** although care represents a condition for life and provides the foundation of wellbeing for our societies, care work is under pressure to become “more efficient” within the current capitalist system. The problems appear different in various world regions. In the Global North, paid professionals in health care, childcare, care for the elderly, people with disabilities and other personal services to individuals experience high workloads and low pay. Additionally, sick rates are high, and care institutions are chronically understaffed. This is exacerbated in systems where the care sector is predominantly in the hands of profit-seeking organisations. In the Global South the situation is often even worse. Care jobs tend to be informal and precarious, often without any labour rights, very poorly paid with salaries below the minimum wage, and tend to be marked by ongoing colonial relations and manifold forms of violence, especially in the realm of paid domestic work. The lack of social and legal protections leaves them vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and discrimination, having limited access to healthcare systems, pensions, unemployment subsidies, and paid leave. Still, the majority of care work is not done through jobs at all but is the task of women, done in families or communities. Unpaid carers and domestic workers are left to pick up public and corporate shortfalls, acting as shock absorbers for failing social and economic models.

⁸ Steffen et al., 2015

- **The gender inequality perspective:** The situation of women and girls in societies and economies is inextricably linked to the value of ‘women’s work’, work that has been and still is considered to be the primary responsibility, if not duty, of women. Accordingly, care work is disproportionately done by women and girls. In addition to the dominance of women in paid care work, women and girls are responsible for 75% of unpaid care and domestic work in homes and communities around the globe every day. The care work to maintain everyday life everywhere includes physical tasks such as cooking, cleaning, raising children, caring for elderly relatives, as well as mental tasks like planning schedules and performing emotional labour, for example, tending family relationships. Depending on the world region and financial status it can also involve shopping, gardening, fetching water and firewood, enabling subsistence livelihoods, and providing environmental care work through water and forest conservation. The amount of care work, as well as its importance to the economy and society, is heavily underestimated and undervalued. This creates an often invisible burden for women and girls leading to financial dependence or precarity, even though this unpaid work is fundamental for keeping the economy and society functioning.
- **The social and environmental justice perspective:** social and environmental injustice are intertwined. The richer a person (or country or institution) is, the more environmental harm they cause. Poverty, in turn, increases vulnerability to environmental disasters. This means that people who contributed the least to ecological destruction face the worst consequences from the damage it causes.
- **The post-colonial perspective** throws light on the links between all the other perspectives. Social and environmental inequality can be observed between the Global North and the Global South for example, through resource extraction and burden-shifting⁹. Historically, the Global North carries the main responsibility for the GHG emissions. Additionally, the colonial legacy of the global care chain brings (mostly female) workers from poorer to richer countries to work in the care sectors leading to a deficit of care in poorer countries¹⁰.
- **The post-anthropocentric perspective** challenges the dominant viewpoint that ecosystem change has positively contributed to human wellbeing.

⁹Hickel et al., 2022

¹⁰Hochschild, 2020



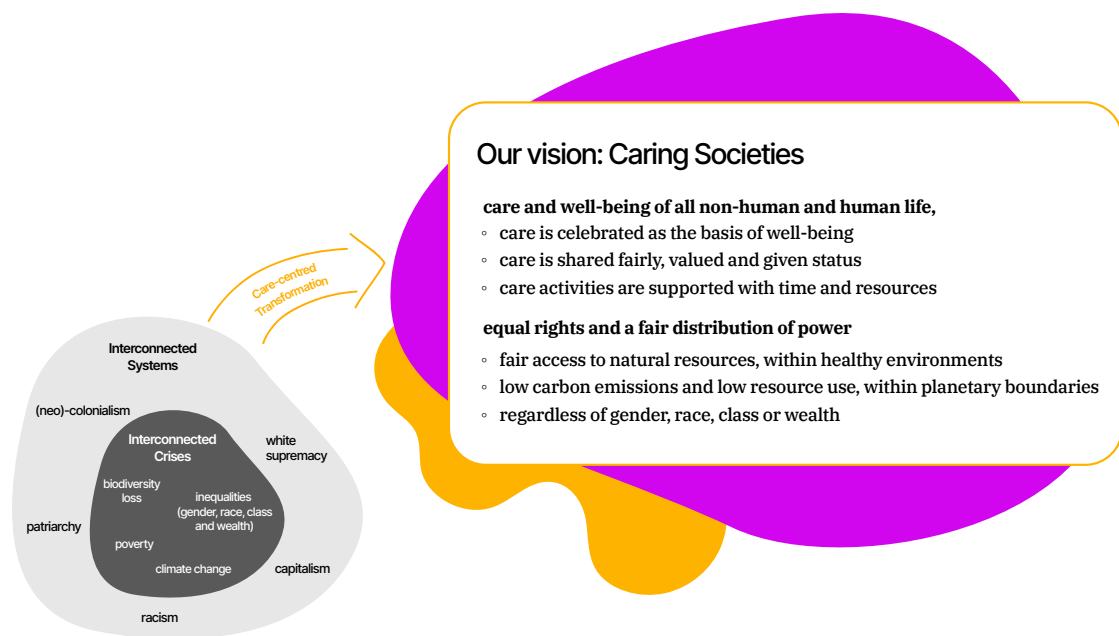
These gains are made at the expense of other species in their ecosystems or livestock. To stop accelerating extinction, environmental degradation, and injustice a radical transformation of what is being considered as wellbeing is necessary. Achieving the wellbeing of non-humans is a crucial step towards a world of sustainable wellbeing for all beings. This goes beyond dealing with non-humans as a direct component to human wellbeing (e.g. ecosystem services). More-than-human wellbeing exists independently of human wellbeing, though it is inextricably entangled with it¹¹.

As different as **these six perspectives** are, they **have common root causes**, primarily **the exploitative, competitive capitalist system focused on GDP growth**. A further shared root problem is the **unequal distribution of resources between social groups**. This manifests in diverse ways, depending on the perspective, for example the over or underconsumption of common natural goods,

the gender pay-gap as well as the gendered and racialised nature of different types of work, the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work based on patriarchal structures. Moreover, white supremacy keeps historical colonial structures active.

Whichever perspective we take the common ground is that the transformation to caring societies cannot be achieved within the current paradigm of constant economic growth and competition at almost all costs. This masks the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few at the expense of the many, capital accumulation of this type is founded on exploitation of nature and people. A holistic approach is required to address the multiple crises with a full transformation of the systemic exploitation currently threatening our world. A partial transformation is out of question, as it will be absorbed by capitalism in order to continue the exploitation.

Figure 2: From current oppressive systems to future caring societies



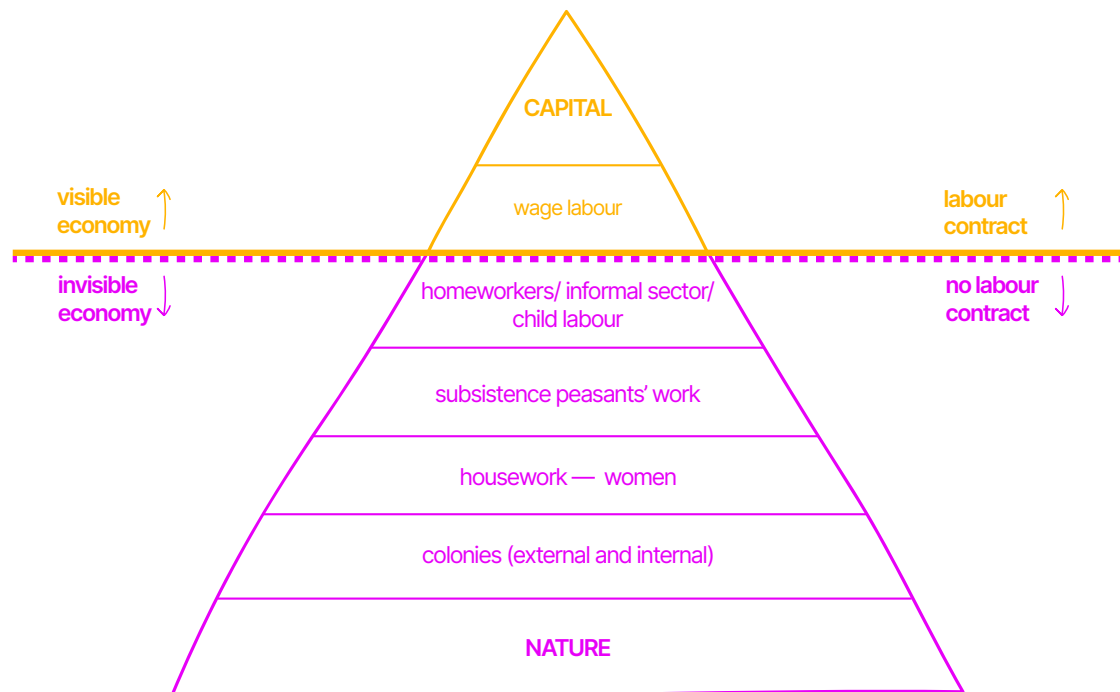
¹¹ Brevik et al., 2020

Systemic change requires a powerful vision. We believe that a caring society provides an appealing vision, as well as a guiding principle for holistic eco-social transformation.

Care is much more than activities in the household or the care sector or even in the wider community; it is an attitude, or moral orientation that provides meaning. To care implies a deep empathy with humans, non-

humans, and nature. It overcomes fixations on what happens on monetized markets and instead deeply values the other sources our own lives - and life on our planet - are built on. It overcomes fixation with monetized markets and instead deeply values the other sources of nourishment in our own lives - that life on our planet - is built on.

Figure 4: Care to see: The essential contributions to life below the surface of markets. (Redrawn version of the image from Mies & Benholdt-Thomsen, 1999)



Throughout this report the terms care, caring, care work, caring society and care economy and their variations are used broadly. Therefore, we would like to provide definitions here:

Caring is a **mindset** that implies a deep empathy with humans, non-humans and nature. It includes ethical, emotional, and relational dimensions.

Care entails a broad spectrum of **activities** contributing to 1) human well-being and quality of life, from improving one's own living conditions via the well-being of the family or group and its members, to caring for the local, regional, national, or international community. 2) The well-being of non-humans. 3) The natural environment, 4) materials, and the built environment.

Care work includes both paid care work and unpaid care work, we refer to both in this report. It includes physical as well as emotional and mental activities. Some examples of care work, far from an exhaustive list, include:

- For humans: Feed, shelter and clothe ones-self and others, especially;

children, elderly, people with disabilities and members of the household, the family and the community. Healing and support during illness or injury. Listening and giving attention that promotes flourishing. Providing emotional support.

- For non-humans: Protect natural and semi-natural habitats. Care for pets. Avoid (where possible) consuming animal products.
- For the natural environment: Re-naturalise cultivated areas. Choose activities with less carbon/resource use, such as travel by bus instead of car.
- For the built environment: Maintenance and repair of private and public infrastructure and spaces.

Care work activities differ depending on circumstances, for example, in rural communities of the Global South, significantly more time might be spent on subsistence farming and collecting water and fuel. In the Global North, more time might be spent on carefully choosing what to cook and where to buy it.

Figure 3: Caring Societies - a definition

Our vision: Caring Societies

care and well-being of all non-human and human life,

- care is celebrated as the basis of well-being
- care is shared fairly, valued and given status
- care activities are supported with time and resources

equal rights and a fair distribution of power

- fair access to natural resources, within healthy environments
- low carbon emissions and low resource use, within planetary boundaries
- regardless of gender, race, class or wealth

Caring societies promote the care and well-being of all non-human and human life, according to need regardless of race or gender, with fair access to natural goods in healthy environments within planetary boundaries. They are built on equal rights and a fair distribution of power redressing the existing system of oppression. A caring society is thus a gender and racially just equitable society, with sustainably low carbon emissions and low resource use. In a caring society, care activities are valued, supported with time and resources, shared fairly, and given status. They are

celebrated as the basis of well-being and the fundamental aim of economy and society.

A **care economy** is based on the principles of caring societies. The provision of human basic needs and promotion of well-being for all is at its core. It represents a paradigm shift away from competitive, unequal societies based on economic growth, profit seeking and capital accumulation. In a caring economy innovation shifts from creative destruction, efficiency, and power towards repair, sufficiency, and shareability.



2

Potential for change - Approaches beyond the mainstream

2.0 INTRODUCTION

How can we make a radical transformation to a caring society where we use goods and resources within the earth's limits while maintaining or increasing well-being? We explore the diversity of opinions and broad debates about what to strive for in a caring society and how to reach it. This section includes perspectives from the Commission and reflects some of the different perspectives through which the global crises are predominantly perceived.

Many critical approaches have emerged offering new directions and highlight the incompatibility between an economic system oriented towards infinite growth on a finite planet, (benefitting a small minority at the expense of the rest). Originating in Europe, degrowth approaches have sparked multiple discussions, analyses and actions to re-politicise the debate for socio-ecological justice and equity. Similar proposals are present in other geographic regions of the world and known with different terms. In South America the philosophical world view of Buen Vivir (loosely translated as “good living”) describes a way of doing things that is community-centric, ecologically-balanced, and culturally-sensitive. In Africa the concept of Ubuntu (I am because

we are) offers a world view that inherently acknowledges our interconnectedness and rejects individualism. Many of these concepts have gone from being life horizons of specific communities to become references for the construction of alternatives to neoliberalism, development, and capitalism.

Each of these concepts bears specific characteristics from the region where it was developed. Degrowth recognises and intends to overcome the colonial, exploitative past of the Global North for the excessive consumption of resources and energy, implicit in the dominant “imperialist way of life”. Buen Vivir and Ubuntu are ways of life and forms of community organisation that are rooted in resistance against experiences of capitalist colonial modernity. Together the concepts build a pluriverse, a ‘rainbow of cosmologies, knowledges, and vital worlds’, as Paulson calls it¹², envisaged not as distinct cultures or sciences with independent logics, but as multiple ways of being and knowing co-evolved in relations of power and difference¹³. The struggle against global capitalism and the global environmental crisis generated by it requires global political articulations that can only result from a dialogue between the diversity of actors in the Global North and the Global South, on equal footing.

¹² Paulson, 2018

¹³ Escobar, 2018

Together these movements are demanding an end to social (poverty, discrimination, inequality) and environmental (climate crisis, biodiversity loss, pollution) unsustainability and injustice, through a redistribution of power and fulfillment of rights within and between countries¹⁴ linking societal care and ecological care. In this second part of the report, we explore a variety of approaches, concepts, world views, networks, and practical initiatives that have overlaps with our understanding of care.

To care is both a concrete practice as well as a set of values¹⁵. It includes ethical, emotional, and relational dimensions¹⁶ entailing a broad spectrum of activities contributing to human well-being and quality of life reaching from improving one's own living conditions via the well-being of the (chosen) family, to caring for the local, regional, national, or international community¹⁷. To care implies a deep empathy with humans, non-humans¹⁸ and nature.

We provide a range of case studies from around the globe that demonstrate real life projects that have helped communities to move towards higher care, lower carbon lives. We then explore some of the key arguments for and against rewarding care and explore whether a reduction in working hours could play a helpful role in making more time for, and redistributing care. Paying for care is a contentious topic, and how to pay for and support care is an equally complex challenge. We examine the role of the welfare state in provisioning paid care and the opportunity for convivial technology to provide sustainable opportunities to reduce certain types of care work.

2.1 CONCEPTS AND WORLD VIEWS

Working towards just, low-carbon, caring societies can build on strong roots of existing concepts and world views. They range from indigenous philosophies like Buen Vivir and Ubuntu to quite recent concepts like the 5R Framework for decent care work. All the concepts we are introducing below contain

– more or less explicitly – elements of caring as we describe them in our definition. Some have their roots in the Global South, some in the Global North but all are part of the pluriverse and have the potential to contribute to a full picture of transforming the presiding dangerous structures of capitalist, patriarchal societies.

Abolitionist framework emphasises that current mainstream responses to climate injustices such as technology shifts and top-down policymaking tend to ignore the fundamental drivers of structural inequities that make certain communities more vulnerable to climate impacts in the first place. Abolitionist frameworks address root causes of vulnerability within communities, community history, and current social and environmental challenges in order to equitably and holistically address climate impacts. Its roots are in the abolition of enslavement which began in the late 18th century. However, the framework is now applied using non-carceral approaches to the polycrises we face today, especially the climate crisis.

This involves centring the impact of the climate crisis on vulnerable people still rooted in generations of state sanctioned violence, using community centred care approaches which do not rely on state solutionism. The abolitionist framework challenged the very foundation of the global slave economy by dismantling the pillars that supported it i.e., Property rights, profits, privilege, and power. These very same pillars form the basis of the fossil fuel economy that needs to be dismantled. “Abolition” of climate change requires changing norms, values, and strongly held beliefs about property, profit, power, and privilege. If the climate crisis is seen as a manifestation of ongoing colonial violence, then an abolitionist framework can be seen at its most basic, to seek to respond to violence without creating more violence and/or engaging in harm reduction to lessen the violence. It can be thought of as a way of “making things right,” getting in “right relation,” or creating care together.

¹⁴ Martinez-Alier, 2021

¹⁵ Schildberg, 2014

¹⁶ Tronto, 1993

¹⁷ Spangenberg and Lorek, 2022

¹⁸ Tronto, 1993

Everything in our life is built on relations. Relating to oneself. Relations with others. Relations with our ideas, thoughts, beliefs, values. Relations with our experiences. Relations with our identities. Relations with our past, present, and future. Relations with living and non-living. All the systems that we currently have are made by people and a result of how we relate to one another. Do we meet each other in mutual care, in a caring relationship where everyone has the right to decide what they need, and how, for their well-being? Or do we meet each other in control, punishment, shame, intentional and unintentional harm created by the carceral values of good versus bad? What would it take to create a world where the harms of colonial and racial capitalism, binary values and otherness were not the values on which we built our economies and systems? What would it look like to bring the imagined realities of abolition into the creation of a system built on mutual aid and care?¹⁹

Buen Vivir and *Vivir Bien* are philosophies of the native peoples in Abya Yala (the original name of the Latin American territory). The idea of good living, stems from the world view of the original and indigenous peoples of the Cordilleran region (Quechuas, Aymaras and even Mapuches), present in countries such as Ecuador, Guatemala, Bolivia, Argentina. This philosophy is, above all, a critique of the Western way of life, marked by colonialism, individualism and hierarchies of gender, ethnicity, race, class, among others. It seeks the recovery of community life and ancestral knowledge. It includes a vision of the world centred on the human being, as part of a natural and social environment.

Vivir Bien-Living Well or *Suma Qamaña* (in Aymara language) is a proposal for communitarian feminism, in the region of Bolivia. The movement for living well, or community feminism, aims to recover the voices of ancestral wisdom and the centrality of women in the process of struggle and recovery of that knowledge. Community feminism is born from the struggle of rural Andean women for the recovery of the territory-body and territory-land (*territorio-cuerpo*

and *territorio-tierra*), as two inseparable concepts. It is a proposal for revolutionary transformation, which looks at the liberation from the structures of violence, oppression, discrimination, exploitation and death, which lies in the patriarchal structure. The construction of a new community life implies the elimination of all forms of hierarchy and individualism. The solution is de-patriarchalization, decolonization, and de-neoliberalization through community restitution (or rescuing space, time, and movement of the indigenous people)²⁰.

Commoning is a century old concept which got new attention in the 21st century not least through the Nobel Prize for Elinor Ostrom work on 'The revival of the commons'. Commoning is characterised by a collective approach; responsibility is shared between households and self-managed at the community level. Initiatives include community-run childcare, community-owned non-profit energy companies, and local solidarity agricultural schemes. Commons and community-based provision is increasing, which creates the potential to shift mindsets from an individual to collective responsibility for care. This kind of community provisioning needs a certain homogeneity and lack of power relations within the community²¹.

Degrowth emerged as a movement in Italy and France in the late 20th century. It developed fast in academia and in practice after the first degrowth conference in 2008. Degrowth describes the way to a socially sustainable, equitable reduction - and finally stabilisation - of society's throughput. With such a definition degrowth clearly takes a Global North perspective. However, it is seen also as an attempt to re-politicise debates about desired socio-environmental futures²², promoting re-localisation of economies, aiming for well-being rather than ever-increasing material wealth. It links to Global South needs in so far as the reduced resource consumption achieved through degrowth in the Global North could (at least partly) be used for necessary increase of consumption levels in the Global South.

¹⁹ Sze, 2021; Why Evidence-Based Climate Justice Includes Abolition – SISTER (sisterstem.org)

²⁰ Cabnal, 2010

²¹ Bollier and Helfrich, 2014

²² Demaria et al., 2013

Eco-feminism arose in the 1970s in Europe (especially in France) and the United States, from the concern of feminists about the situation of ecological devastation caused by the capitalist mode of production. However, given the effects of globalization on the environment and the balance of power, ecofeminist thought soon began to develop in the global south (with authors such as Vandana Shiva, in India, and Wangari Maathai in Kenya), who study relationships between the patriarchal exploitation of women and nature. Vandana Shiva points out that ecofeminism states that, from the historical, cultural and symbolic point of view, there are important interrelationships between exploitation, oppression and violence against women and exploitation, oppression and violence against nature. These relationships have been structured by a society organised by patriarchal ideology. Ecofeminism proposes the rupture of the multiple forms of violence through a more holistic vision of the cosmos, rethinking the role of the human being within it, highlighting the female role, and using as a reference, the Indigenous Cosmovision according to which living beings and nature are all interconnected. Ecofeminism points out that the planet and the economy must be visualised as the house, where the activity of women in them is transcendent from the productive and reproductive point of view. Ecofeminism defends the need to place care, in a broad sense, at the centre of human concerns²³.

Environmental Justice is a facet of the global environmental crisis explained above. It is also a social and scientific movement to fight structural and practical cases where environmental resources are exploited beyond limits by some, with whole societies and groups suffering the consequences of that. The strength of this movement is well documented in the Global Atlas of Environmental Justice that provides information on nearly 4000 cases of environmental conflicts around the globe²⁴.

Foundational Economy is a concept that emerged from a collective of (mainly) European academic researchers working together to develop a new way of thinking which challenges mainstream ideas about what economic policy should be. It intends to overcome the systematic non-sustainability of

capitalism, deriving from how its subordinates use value to exchange value, organising the economy around profit and using capital as self-expanding value. It distinguishes between the core economy (family and community), a form of provisioning outside market-exchange, and public provisioning; the foundational economy composed of (1) provisioning systems for material services like water, electricity, retail banking and food” and (2) providential services such as health and care, education, and social housing; the overlooked economy of lifestyle and comfort support systems (e.g., haircuts, holidays, bars, restaurants, gyms) and the tradable and competitive economy, including (aspirational) private purchases (e.g., cars, electronics)²⁴.

The aim of the concept is to first re-orient public policies towards support of the foundational part of the economy. To arrange this within the environmental limits it seeks to extend low-carbon services such as education, health, care, and to clean up the high-carbon foundational sectors of food, mobility, and housing.

Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK) is the ongoing accumulation of knowledge, practice and beliefs of Indigenous Communities across North America, South Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere exploring relationships between living beings in a specific ecosystem. Relationships that have been acquired by indigenous people over hundreds or thousands of years through direct contact with the environment, handed down through generations, and used for life-sustaining ways. This knowledge includes relationships between people, plants, animals, natural phenomena, landscapes, and timing of events for activities such as hunting, fishing, trapping, agriculture, and forestry. TEK encompasses the world view of a people, which includes ecology, spirituality, human and animal relationships, and more. This realm has long been studied by disciplines under headings such as ethno-biology, ethno-ornithology, and biocultural diversity. But it has received more attention from mainstream scientists lately because of efforts to better understand the world in the face of climate change and the accelerating loss of biodiversity²⁵.

²³ Mies and Shiva, 1993

²⁴ Bärnthaler et al., 2021

²⁵ Whyte, 2013



Just Transition is a vision-led, unifying, place-based set of principles, processes, and practices that build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy. It comes largely from the trade unions across the United States in the 1980s affected by water and air pollution but since has been adapted by environmental groups to ensure that all communities, be they workers, or other social groups are in conversation about how to move towards a low-carbon future that meets the needs of all. This means approaching production and consumption cycles holistically and waste-free. The transition itself must be just and equitable; redressing past harms and creating new relationships of power for the future through reparations. If the process of transition is not just, the outcome will never be. Just Transition describes both where we are going and how we get there²⁶.

Queer Ecology means changing both language and scientific theories to reflect the true nature of nature. It means looking at the world through a nuanced lens, differentiating between ingrained social ideologies and the natural world. In May 1994, an editorial essay in *UnderCurrents: Journal of Critical Environmental Studies* entitled “Queer Nature” introduced the notion of queer ecology, however its roots can be traced back to Queer Theory and eco-feminist work in the 70s. By approaching nature with an open mind we can rid ourselves of the rigid, oppressive thought processes behind ecological science and slowly shift cultural perceptions. Creating an awareness and understanding that queerness is a part of nature and human behaviour, not an anomaly but a natural way of existing. The more we accept that we don’t understand

nature, the more we will be able to form a more comprehensive and accurate depiction of the natural world. Queer ecology disrupts the association of nature with sexuality, and in the case of care work it disentangles the gender binary, including the ties between the female body’s reproductive potential and the responsibility of social reproduction and childcare. Environmental issues are closely linked to social relations that include sexuality, and so a strong alliance exists between queer politics and environmental politics²⁷.

Solidarity Economy (or Social Solidarity Economy SSE) is a framework for a just and equitable economic alternative to capitalism and other authoritarian, state-dominated systems. It is a combination of practices that align with values informed by social movements focusing on anti-racism, feminism, anti-imperialism, labour, poverty, environment, and democracy. The concept encompasses principles of solidarity, equity, participatory democracy, sustainability, and pluralism²⁸. Predominantly used in Latin America since the 1970s already and Social Solidarity Economy in the late 90s.

Ubuntu is a philosophy from Southern Africa (South Africa, Zimbabwe) reflecting the Africanisation during the independence process and decolonization (1980-1990). However, there are indications that the word and its meaning predate that period and come from the oral tradition of the South African peoples. Ubuntu preserves the idea of a society sustained by the pillars of respect and solidarity. It is an expression of the reciprocal nature of community. I am because we are (or we are because you are). A person with Ubuntu is aware that she is affected when others are diminished or oppressed.

²⁶ <https://climatejusticealliance.org/just-transition/>

²⁷ Queer Ecojustice Project | Media | Education | Community (queerecoproject.org)

²⁸ Kawano, 2020



5R Framework was developed in a UN context in 2009. It originally highlighted the three aspects to recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work. It was taken up and further developed, so it now refers to 1) recognising, 2) reducing, 3) redistributing, 4) representing, and 5) rewarding care work²⁹. The framework is grounded in feminist theory and is used to ensure that development of climate policies and interventions are designed to be both care-sensitive and gender-just. The framework has been widely adopted in the grey and academic literature on care work inequalities in the global north and the global south. Recognising care is the first step to making care work visible and valued. Care work must be acknowledged as foundational to a functioning society having social, political, and economic value. Reducing refers to interventions that can reduce

the amount of time needed to be spent on labour-intensive care work, or ways to make it safer, more convenient or less physically demanding. For example, providing solar cookers can save time and effort in looking for firewood. Redistributing refers to policies and interventions that share care work more equally across family members. Gender norms around care work should be challenged and men encouraged to take on more domestic and care labour. Representing means giving carers a voice in decision-making and listening to their concerns and ideas that come from their lived experience. Rewarding involves remuneration for previously unpaid care work through cash payments and through tax and pension arrangements.

Table 1 provides some graphical impression where the concepts have their main emphasis.

Table 1: Concepts and world views contributing to develop just and low-carbon caring societies

 Global South				 Global North			
Concepts and world views	Environmental care	Social care	Economic change	Concepts and world views	Environmental care	Social care	Economic change
Buen Vivir <small>P</small>	● ●	● ●	● ●	Abolition <small>TP</small>	● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●
Environmental Justice <small>TP</small>	● ●	● ● ●		Commoning <small>TP</small>	●	● ● ●	● ● ●
Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge <small>P</small>	● ●	● ● ●	● ●	Degrowth <small>T</small>	● ●	● ●	● ● ●
Just Transition <small>TP</small>	● ●	● ●	● ●	Eco-feminism <small>T</small>	● ●	● ● ●	● ●
Solidarity Economy <small>TP</small>	●	● ● ●	● ● ●	Foundational economy <small>T</small>	● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●
Ubuntu <small>P</small>		● ● ●		Queer Ecology <small>TP</small>	● ●	● ● ●	● ●
				5 R Framework for decent care work <small>T</small>	●	● ● ●	● ●

●	● ●	● ● ●	TP theory and practice	P practices approach	T theoretical concept
side aspect	some attention	strong focus			

²⁹ MacGregor et al., 2022

2.2 NETWORKS AND INITIATIVES PROMOTING THE CENTRALITY OF CARE FOR A SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION

In addition to the broader theoretical concepts, there are a growing number of researchers and practitioners developing practical initiatives that place care at the centre of research and action towards fair and sustainable societies. While a broad range of initiatives are developing, which have a holistic social and environmental care perspective (similar to that used in this project), some potentially relevant approaches are limited in their perspectives. Ecologically motivated approaches can sometimes ignore the impacts on traditional care, while initiatives for strengthening care can sometimes disregard environmental considerations.

Examples we came across from the literature and in exchange with the Commission range from individual engagement like the work of Meera Ghani³⁰ and Thera van Osch³¹ to local, national and regional initiatives as well as global networks: Global Care Network³², Care Revolution³³, Economiefeministe³⁴, Economy is Care³⁵, The Care Collective³⁶, Covid-19: Feminist space³⁷, Feminist Green New Deal³⁸, Red de Cuidados³⁹, Global Alliance for Care⁴⁰, Generation Equality Forum⁴¹, Barcelona - Caring City⁴², Building a 'Care First' World⁴⁴, Make Mothers Matter⁴⁵, Feminisms and Degrowth Alliance⁴⁶, Care Income Now⁴⁷, Developing Crip Care Networks for (Pandemic) Survival⁴⁸, Covid-19 Mutual Aid UK, Community Care Kit Project⁴⁹, ASOMASHK⁵⁰, Seeding Sovereignty⁵¹, Pirate Care⁵², Laudato Si' Movement, A Growing Culture⁵³. There are, no doubt, many more we are not able to list here.

³⁰ <https://meelaya.medium.com>

³¹ <https://www.world-house-wetten.com/sustainability>

³² <https://careworknetworkresponds.com/>

³³ <https://care-revolution.org/english/>

³⁴ <https://economiefeministe.ch/>

³⁵ <https://wirtschaft-ist-care.org/english/>

³⁶ <https://www.gold.ac.uk/goldsmiths-press/features/what-is-care/>

³⁷ <https://wedo.org/feminist-solidarity-for-a-collective-response-to-covid-19/>

³⁸ <https://wbg.org.uk/>

³⁹ <http://www.redcuidadosmx.org/>

⁴⁰ <https://alianzadecuidados.forogeneracionigualdad.mx/acerca/?lang=en>

⁴¹ <https://forum.generationequality.org/>

⁴² <https://www.barcelona.cat/ciutatcuidadora/en>

⁴³ <http://www.carefirstworldwideweb.com/>

⁴⁴ <https://makemothersmatter.org/>

⁴⁵ <https://degrowth.info/en/fada>

⁴⁶ <https://globalwomensstrike.net/careincomenow/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.aag.org/webinar/developing-crip-care-networks-for-pandemic-survival/>

⁴⁸ Fernandes-Jesus et al. 2021

⁴⁹ <https://dcc.uic.edu/cckp/>

⁵⁰ <https://chaikuni.org/news/the-onanyabo-in-action-initiative>

⁵¹ <https://seedingsovereignty.org/>

⁵² <https://pirate.care/pages/concept/>

⁵³ <https://www.agrowingculture.org/>



Most of these initiatives show that **women's participation and leadership broaden ways of thinking and change outcomes of environmental and social initiatives.** For example, compared with men, women are more concerned about climate change, perceive environmental risks as more threatening, express different concerns and potential solutions to problems, consider climate change impacts to be more severe, are more sceptical about the effectiveness of current climate change policies (especially technical solutions), are more willing to adopt a sustainable lifestyle, and are currently underrepresented in climate change policymaking⁵⁴. This gender gap increases with the wealth level of a country. There, for men more than for women, the perceived benefits of mitigation tend to decrease with economic development, whereas the perceived costs increase⁵⁵. Studies suggest that the efficiency of environmental management increases with the involvement of women⁵⁶. While this demonstrates untapped potential, it may risk equating caring as an essentially feminine quality and maintaining care as a women's issue instead of a central factor shaping our economy and society. It is

the gendered roles and social norms in society that have shaped the current state, not the biological sex. This difference has to be kept in mind to ensure that these same **gendered roles and norms are not something to be reinforced.** Increasing women's participation in existing institutions is therefore not enough to change unequal relations and could even just rubber stamp existing inequalities⁵⁷.

The following examples illustrate how an explicit care approach can come together with an environmental perspective:

The *Feminisms and Degrowth Alliance* (FaDA) brings together the contributions of eco-feminist ecological economics and the Degrowth movement. Together they ensure that environmental, gender, care, and colonial issues are understood as indivisible in the movement for socio-ecological transformation. A broad range of issues are being explored by researchers, including commons and community-based initiatives as important experiments in building alternative ways of living and transcending the current economic paradigm. This addresses gender and colonial equity issues, and rebalancing paid work and unpaid care work across societies⁵⁸.

“A radical transformation of society beyond the growth paradigm can only be achieved by addressing the capitalist growth dictates and its deep patriarchal roots in conjunction.”⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Ergas and York 2012; Albert and Roehr 2006; McCright 2010 cited in Gaard 2015

⁵⁵ Bush and Clayton 2023

⁵⁶ Arora-Johnsson, 2011; Gaard, 2015

⁵⁷ Arora-Johnsson, 2011

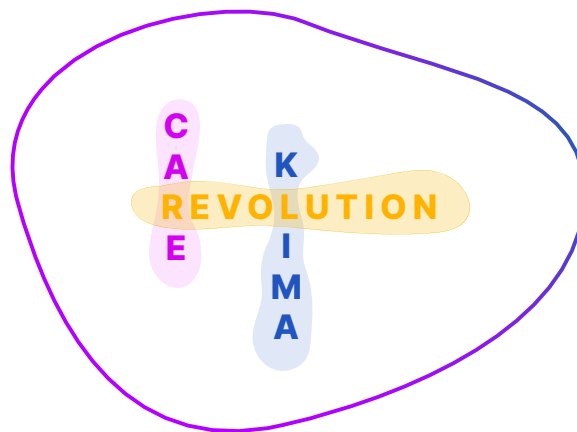
⁵⁸ <https://degrowth.info/en/fada>; Dengler et al., 2022

⁵⁹ Sovacool and Scarpaci, 2016

The activist group Care Revolution propose change based on (1) the reduction of wage labour which would release time for unpaid care work and reduce ecologically harmful production, (2) the expansion of solidary support systems such as Universal Basic Income and Universal Basic Services, (3) democratic and participatory structures for decision-making and (4) the expansion of commons initiatives which enable a care-full exchange with other humans, the living environment and nature in general. In her books, Winker perceives redistribution of income and wealth, as well as the socialisation

of (not the least care) businesses, as crucial elements on the way to a care-centred economy – elements which can be cultivated now within the existing system. In her long-term vision, a solidary society would need to overcome the separation between paid and unpaid work, distribute goods and services based on individual needs, where needs would largely be satisfied through the richness in social relations, rather than predominantly through material goods⁶¹. Needs in this context encompass education, health care, social housing, public transport, culture, the digital infrastructure, energy and water supply⁶².

Figure 5: Inspiration from Klima-Care-Revolution⁶⁰



Van Osch developed an *Economy of Care* based on the paradigm of the ‘caring human being’. Recognising that the current neoliberal economy is incompetent at solving the multiple crises of climate change, peak oil, care, finance, and poverty, she highlights the importance of care. She describes care as much more than activities in the household or the care sector, but an attitude, or moral orientation that provides meaning. In van Osch’s framework,

sustainable social development is the main objective of economic policy. When accounting for well-being, the income per capita becomes less relevant. Instead, the Environmental Space Used (ESU) per capita as well as the distribution of paid and unpaid work are key factors in this economic approach, which leads towards a fiscal system that penalises consumer behaviour which is harmful to people and the planet⁶¹.

⁶⁰ <https://care-revolution.org/aktuelles/arbeitskreis-care-klima-revolution/>

⁶¹ van Osch, 2013

⁶² <https://www.awid.org/special-focus/confronting-extractivism-corporate-power#:~:text=Women%20human%20rights%20defenders%20%28WHRDs%29%20worldwide%20defend%20their%20of%20communities%2C%20loss%20of%20livelihoods%2C%20and%20environmental%20degradation.>

Women Human Rights Defenders especially the groups in resistance to mining extractivism in favour of the water, environment and local communities organise forces against the economic and political model of development that commodifies nature and prioritises profit over human rights and the environment. Often, Black, rural and Indigenous women are the most affected by extractivism, and are largely excluded from decision-making. Defying these patriarchal and neo-colonial forces, women rise in defence of rights, lands, people and nature⁶².

Next to practical care and conceptual shaping of care also collective advocacy for care leads to material, legislative and policy changes. Collective advocacy initiatives for provision of water, electricity, and fuel/wood

can play an important role. One good example of this is the *RESCOOP* community energy initiative⁶³.

Just as women's leadership and participation lead to powerful shifts in mindsets and outcomes, indigenous knowledge and leadership can be vital for shifting to care-centred values and ways of thinking⁶⁴ and as examples may serve the *Movement of Indigenous Women and Diversities for Good Living* (Movimiento de Mujeres y Diversidades Indígenas por el buen vivir), organising the march against terricide in 2022⁶⁵, *SPACE 10* providing an indigenous approach to community care⁶⁶ and *Nawi*, a Pan-African feminist collective looking at alternatives to the current macroeconomic models⁶⁷.

“There is so much of indigenous knowledge that those communities have on the relationship between Earth, the seasons, the resources, but that’s not valued. It is not even considered being advanced, as having knowledge that works. That has sustained us for so long. What we can learn from them is having our conversation not so centred only on human life, but on our interdependence among each other and with nature.”⁶⁸

⁶³ <https://www.rescoop.eu/uploads/rescoop/downloads/Community-Energy-Guide.pdf>

⁶⁴ The potential for narrative change, including the power of indigenous knowledge, is explored in detail in our Strategic Communications research.

⁶⁵ <https://movimientodemujeresindigenasporelbuenvivir.org/>

⁶⁶ <https://space10.com/indigenous-approaches-to-community-care/>

⁶⁷ <https://www.nawi.africa/>

⁶⁸ Interviewee #20



2.3 CASE STUDIES

In this section we present do you need promising here?examples of how a diverse range of communities has developed approaches to catalyse a radical transformation to just, low carbon lifestyles, while increasing well-being. None of the approaches explored is enough in itself - however, their combined potential for systemic change is powerful.

Co-housing in Germany

Co-Housing are living arrangements in which people live in individual units within a housing complex and share a range of common facilities (kitchens, workshops etc.). Collective community living is chosen predominantly by families or singles and is linked to expectations of support in care work, in particular, the mutual raising of children⁶⁹. A diversity of co-housing forms exist around the world. The potential for sustainable living is significant, given that residents share many spaces, facilities, tools and equipment; sharing creates a potential for reduced consumption, transport, waste and pollution. However, claims for environmental potential tend to be based on case studies rather than systemic

analysis, and questions have been raised about 'wishful thinking' regarding the potential of co-housing to challenge capitalist norms⁷⁰. An interesting example is MHS (Mietshäuser Syndikat or 'apartment-house syndicate'), a German cooperative project that assists community groups to buy affordable shared living spaces, thereby taking them from private ownership into non-profit, collective ownership for co-housing. At the end of 2022 MHS has supported 177 housing projects, or non-profit intentional co-housing communities⁷¹ - a small but significant shift in urban infrastructure, and demonstration of the possibilities for citizens to create alternative systems of provision outside of capitalism. Co-housing projects show a potential to redress problems of alienation and vulnerability⁷². However, even though the physical infrastructure of co-housing enables residents to share the work of social reproduction, there is no guarantee that this will happen fairly: studies suggest that the context of deeply entrenched gender roles almost always results in "caring-as-usual", with women taking on the bulk of the responsibility, unless specific interventions are made to institutionalise equal sharing of unpaid care work⁷³.

⁶⁹ Littig, 2018

⁷⁰ Száraz, 2015

⁷¹ <https://www.syndikat.org/en/>

⁷² Fromm, 2012

⁷³ Tummers and MacGregor, 2019



Food Security and MST in Brazil

The Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST) in Brazil is a social movement that emerged in the late 1970s as a resistance against the Military Dictatorship. Its core mission is to provide access to land through agrarian reform, promote agro-ecological production of healthy food, and ensure food sovereignty for the Brazilian people. The MST is present in 24 states across the five regions of Brazil and comprises 450,000 settled families, 160 cooperatives, and 120 agro-industries⁷⁴.

The MST's production is primarily focused on healthy and agroecological products through family farming for daily consumption by Brazilians. The movement competes with financial speculation and agribusiness, which prioritise profits over the quality and sustainability of production processes, leading to deforestation and the production of transgenics. To combat this, the MST has developed methods for producing, for example, organic rice, one of the main foods in Brazil, without pesticides and contamination, using ancestral knowledge and developing bio inputs.

An essential aspect of the MST's approach is the recovery of ancestral knowledge as

the basis for training and education. The movement advocates for a Dialogue of Knowledge, which draws on the historical experience of peasant communities and methods developed by Popular Social Movements in Latin America, as well as scientific production in Freirean Pedagogy, Agroecology, and Historical-Dialectic Materialism.

During the COVID-19 crisis, the MST played a critical role in addressing food insecurity in Brazil. With many Brazilians losing their jobs and facing inflation in food and energy prices, the MST donated over 6,000 tons of food and 1,150,000 lunch-boxes to people and families in need throughout the country. The MST believes that fighting poverty and hunger in Brazil requires Popular Agrarian Reform, access to diversified and healthy food, and conservation of common natural goods⁷⁵.

As the MST representative Jailma stated: "It is only possible to fight poverty and hunger in Brazil and transform the lives of our people with Popular Agrarian Reform, building production conditions and access to diversified, and healthy food, and with other production relations, with the conservation of our common goods of nature"⁷⁶.

⁷⁴ <https://mst.org.br/>

⁷⁵ Fernandes, 2009

⁷⁶ <https://mst.org.br/2022/01/14/mst-ultrapassa-6-mil-toneladas-de-alimentos-doados-durante-a-pandemia/>



Community Kitchens in Argentina

Hunger and poverty have long been major issues in Latin America, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the situation. In the case of Argentina, the social organisation La Poderosa⁷⁷ estimates that in 2023, over 10 million (that is 1 out of every 4 Argentines) needed some type of food assistance. Therefore, community kitchens in Argentina have illustrated the importance of communitarian initiatives to address food security and sovereignty in urban contexts, as they serve as a vital source of livelihood for vulnerable populations.

It is estimated that more than 70,000 women in Argentina volunteer in community kitchens, collecting food and gas bottles, cooking then serving food to those most in need. While the state provides some support by distributing raw food and other products through the Argentine National Plan Against Hunger of the Ministry of Social Development⁷⁸ in collaboration with the UNDP, and by subsidising the women working there (about 150 euros per month, which is half the minimum wage), these community kitchens are largely sustained by the collective efforts of their volunteers and the solidarity networks they have built. Many of these women face the added burden of a triple working day, as they have to balance their work in the community kitchen with their commitments with unpaid care work in their own homes and with their paid jobs. In this context, they struggle to be recognised as workers by the state so that they

can receive fair wages and decent working conditions to reduce the responsibilities they carry⁷⁹.

It is important to note that by recognising the entitlement of these women workers along with strengthening community kitchens, the state and public policy could together achieve 3 goals: 1) with the formalisation of the female workforce, community kitchens became an opportunity for women who were previously working informally to obtain formal employment, thus creating decent work with fair wages and benefits. This is essential for a sustainable transition, as decent work is a critical component of sustainable development; 2) expanding the population that has access to community kitchens can reduce the workload of unpaid care work for women in society while ensuring food sovereignty. This can have a positive impact on women's well-being and overall quality of life; 3) finally, community kitchens can promote sustainable agricultural practices by implementing a public purchase programme for organic inputs and products of family and community farming. This can help reduce the environmental impact caused by agribusiness while promoting agroecological and sustainable practices. In summary, with appropriate public policies, the State can promote sustainable community initiatives, create decent jobs, improve food security and sovereignty, and ultimately recognise the importance of care work by giving visibility to those who have always been considered invisible.

⁷⁷ <https://lapoderosa.org.ar/>

⁷⁸ <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/desarrollosocial/comedorescomunitarios>

⁷⁹ <https://lapoderosa.org.ar/2023/04/el-dia-arranca-levantando-las-ollas/>



The Mabilgu Programs in Ghana

Aims to provide immediate relief and alternative economic opportunities for young women and girls living in dire conditions and working as Kayayei, the Or Foundation has organised a structured, paid, apprentice placement program with local designers, artists, and business professionals. This six-month to year-long program trains young women in marketable skills, provides a living wage income and builds bridges and mentorship networks across communities frequently divided by different regional and socioeconomic backgrounds within Ghana. As part of the apprenticeship program participants are encouraged to save a minimum of one third of their pay, ensuring that they have money to start their own business. The Mabilgu Program (meaning 'sisterhood' in Dagbani) includes a monthly class on financial literacy, entrepreneurship, women's rights, workplace safety and various sustainability practices. They are also working to extend these classes to a broader community of young women outside their apprenticeship program.

In addition to placing apprentices with other companies, the Foundation also offers direct skills training through positions within their No More Fast Fashion Lab. Apprentices in the lab learn to upcycle and recycle textile waste

and attend courses on photography and media production. Fast fashion is one of the highest contributors to climate change accounting for 10% of all global GHG emissions, when factoring in the entire lifecycle of a garment, from manufacturing to transportation to ending up in landfill, mostly in the Global South. It is also one of the most exploitative industries as we saw with the case of Rana Plaza in Bangladesh.

This program not only provides a safe space for young women working as Kayayei to gather and learn new skills, but also weekly storytelling workshops to counter the dearth of female-identifying photographers and cinematographers in Ghana who are vital to telling the stories of the women working as Kayayei - a necessary element to address the injustices and abuse that the young women and girls frequently face. Photographs and stories from some of our photography training alums were featured in Display Copy magazine, and they are currently working with other media partners focused on slow and inclusive journalism. It helps build a sense of community amongst the participants and build networks of care. It's important to understand that care networks are an essential part of care work and help improve a sense of well-being and belonging, especially in communities where there is a high degree of patriarchal control and gender-based violence⁸⁰.

⁸⁰ <https://theor.org/work>

Cool Roofs for climate resilience and women's empowerment in urban centres in India

For the urban poor, home is also a workplace, especially for women in Indian cities. Rising temperatures and heat waves interfere with productivity, subsistence, and home comfort. Through this project, Mahila Housing Trust provided cool roofing solutions to lower indoor temperature and enhance well-being. Pro-poor solutions in roofing, walling, and housing-ventilation were devised, demonstrated, and validated, with support to test prototypes. Women from community-based organisations were consulted and designs were revised according to their feedback. The lack of financial mechanisms and gender sensitive technical solutions was tackled through a women-led, community-wide approach, so that today credit cooperatives bring financial support to ensure a gender just access to cool roofs. The project increased the earning capacity of the women by 40%. It aided good health and alleviated the domestic care work load for these women. It reduced electricity bills and energy consumption. The project has been successfully replicated in other South Asian cities⁸¹.

SEED project in Jordan

The Sustainable Energy and Economic Development (SEED) project implements a holistic and gender-responsive approach to energy transition in Jordan, providing technical training to women, empowering local communities to adapt to climate change and advocate for climate solutions. Women energy ambassadors learn to install solar water heaters and photovoltaic systems, thereby challenging gender-stereotypes in the male-dominated sector of energy efficiency and renewable energy (EE&RE). SEED also facilitates women's participation in the labour force thanks to individual coaching, innovation grants, and employment opportunities. The SEED team conducts awareness-raising and national advocacy activities to scale up the project's impacts. It led to energy savings in private households and public institutions with the installation of 1,500 solar PV systems and 1,700 solar water heaters. It uses social justice in climate adaptation through the use of EE&RE solutions in areas of poverty. They have also set up a revolving fund to ensure financial sustainability of the project. It focuses on capacity building aimed at the organisation's female leaders, who take on inspirational roles within their communities and not only challenge social and gender norms but also create broader community⁸².

⁸¹ https://womengenderclimate.org/gjc_solutions/cool-roofs-for-climate-resilience-and-womens-economic-empowerment-in-urban-centers-of-india/

⁸² <https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/stories-histoires/2021/jordan-energy-energie-jordanie.aspx?lang=eng>



Climate Resilience and Covid-19 recovery in Kenya

This project brings useful responses to specific gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which left many women in urban slums without a job while increasing their household responsibilities. The Association Of Women in Agriculture Kenya (AWAK) trained 700 urban women in slums to convert former domestic dumping sites into vegetable gardens, using organic compost to enrich the soil and biomass waste to produce biochar. The project provides women with sustainable sources of livelihood, including money from vegetable sales, and promotes table funding as well as access to formal banking. It builds a holistic recovery program, with beneficiaries training more women, economic empowerment reducing domestic violence, and access to education for children. It helped reduce methane emissions by converting dumping grounds into green spaces while promoting organic farming, including organic compost. This project promotes women's leadership in the community and helps women gain technical and business skills, subsequently transferring their knowledge to other women⁸³.

Queers for Climate Justice in Germany

The project connects and trains actors across Europe who are working on the topic of intersectional feminism and climate change with WLINTA* (Women, Lesbian, Inter, Non-Binary, Trans and Agender people) actors of the

LGBTIQ+ community, with an interest in the intersection of those same topics.

GenderCC's European members as well as members of ILGA Europe (and other LGBTIQ+ networks and organisations) will be addressed with the idea to build a movement of activists within Europe, of people who are WLINTA* and support the idea of gender- and LGBTIQ+-just climate change policies.

The main goal is to establish the topic of gendered climate change policies within the queer community in Europe and to be able to give evidence of how WLINTA* are specifically affected by climate change impacts as well as climate change adaptation and mitigation policies, also in the political global north. At the same time, a specific LGBTIQ+ perspective and knowledge base concerning climate policies will be developed within the project. Climate change and climate policies affect WLINTA* differently from cis male people. While there is a – however small it might be - database about the situation of cis-women in regard to those topics, there is hardly any evidence or data on the situation of LGBTIQ+ people. Yet, there are some indications that LGBTIQ+ people might contribute less to greenhouse gas emissions, and might be affected more severely by climate change impacts. In any case, plausibility considerations suggest that certain climate actions are critical for and can have adverse effects on LGBTIQ* people, such as low-carbon urban and transport planning⁸⁴.

⁸³ <https://awak-kenya.org/>

⁸⁴ <https://www.instagram.com/queers4climatejustice/?hl=en>



2.4 DEBATES AND DIVERSITY OF OPINION

Valuing and/or monetising care

The false impression that care work is available infinitely will persist as long as **care is** mainly conceptualised as a burden, and not as **a formative experience**. Those in power tend to outsource their care and caring responsibilities and therefore do not feel the impact of caring responsibilities in their own lives. In turn, this delegation of care tasks is a key reason and/or factor that those people or groups can keep their powerful positions. What would happen, if we *built citizenship around care*? What would happen if care and caring would be part of the education programme from pre-school and valued as important as maths, grammar, etc.⁸⁵?

Until we reach such a state, the question of how care is recognised and rewarded is a subject of much debate. Whether unpaid care should be financially compensated is a complex question, and we outline some of the key arguments for and against below.

In order to increase the visibility and value of care, Elson emphasises that gender gaps will never be closed by measures that aim to make women's working lives more like men's. Instead, she calls to better recognise, reduce, and redistribute the unpaid care work (later expanded to the 5R's Framework)⁸⁶.

Why unpaid care should be paid

In the current, dominant economic system, activities that do not involve financial exchange are undervalued and ignored. It can therefore be argued that **to increase the value and visibility of care work, it should be given monetary value**, no matter who is providing it. For example, a parent looking after their child could be financially compensated just as a childminder is. Or a spouse taking care of a sick or disabled partner could be paid just as a care worker would be. Arguments to pay for care have been made for a long time⁸⁷ from the international Wages for Housework campaign brought forward by radical Italian feminists in 1972⁸⁸ to the more recent 'Care Income Now Campaign'⁸⁹.

Those in power tend to outsource their care and caring responsibilities and therefore do not feel the impact of caring responsibilities in their own lives. In turn, this delegation of care tasks is a key reason and/or factor that those people or groups are able to keep their powerful positions.

⁸⁵ Medicus Mundi, 2016

⁸⁶ Elson, 2017

⁸⁷ Weeks, 2020

⁸⁸ Dalla Costa, 1972; Federici, 1975

⁸⁹ <https://globalwomenstrike.net/careincomenow/>

Paying for care could give individuals with caring responsibilities greater choice as to how they provide it. Currently, their choice is between dropping out of the workforce and providing unpaid care to loved ones themselves or going out to work to pay for others to provide care. It is also increasingly common to rely on grandparents to take on childcare responsibilities. Many can't afford to provide unpaid care and so are forced to go out to work to cover their own costs of living and must often work even longer hours to cover the costs of providing care. If those undertaking caring responsibilities for loved ones could be paid a liveable income to do so, they would have the choice whether they wanted to do this or to work elsewhere and pay for others to provide care.

As the current dominant economic and cultural systems only values what is paid, some argue that the best way for care work

to be valued is for it to be paid⁹⁰. Waiting for new systemic structures to arise risks leaving carers undervalued and underpaid. The transformation to an economy that pays for care could be also part of a transformative process where societies are challenged to consider what work is really valued. It is also important to note that ethics of care and how people feel about provision of that care is cultural sensitive and deeply intersects with gender identity of the person⁹¹.

Ecologically, **care work tends to be low-carbon and low resource intensive work**⁹². If an increased proportion of the workforce worked in care instead of extractive and ecologically destructive sectors, care work could be the foundation of a sustainable economy providing intrinsically valuable services to meet human needs without destroying the planet.

⁹⁰ Hoskyns and Rai, 2007

⁹¹ Bilwani and Anjum, 2022

⁹² Bauhardt, 2014; Nelson and Power, 2018

Why unpaid care shouldn't be paid

Pulling unpaid care work into the paid economy does not challenge the current system where only what is monetised counts as work, nor does it challenge the unfair distribution of care work. It could also further entrench the values of a non-caring economy⁹³.

Commodifying care makes it visible, but not necessarily valued. Even when it is paid, care work is generally under-paid, and exploitative, with many carers and many care professionals in European countries facing dependence on food banks. **If care is paid** and brought into the paid economy, there is a risk that **it is** then **subject to market pressures** to be more efficient, **which** often **results in low quality care**⁹⁴. Paying for care does not challenge the unfair gender distribution of care work, which could result in women feeling pressured to stay home to undertake care duties rather than go out to work. Shifting **care** work to the commodified sector can also **reinforce neocolonial power asymmetries through global care chains**⁹⁵. As care work is commodified, it is often shifted from the women of the Global North who can afford to externalise caring responsibilities, to the women of the Global South, with care work retaining low social recognition.

Some argue that instead of being commodified, care should be commonised⁹⁶; that care work should be shared within communities, and be largely unpaid, but socially recognised and valued. The distinctions between the productive sphere (currently valued and paid) and the reproductive sphere (currently unvalued and unpaid) should be broken down so that socially useful work is valued whether it is paid or unpaid. Valuing unpaid care could lead to a deeper paradigm shift that is required for a sustainable economy rather than commodifying care and absorbing it into an economic system that only values monetary exchange.

This does not mean that no economic provisioning for unpaid care work should be put in place. Income and time poverty could be reduced through policies such as a Universal Basic Income, a shorter working week, or pensions for unpaid work. The benefits of communities coming together to provide care would go beyond economic concerns. Increased care within communities could reduce loneliness and isolation, improve mental health, and bring people together through a sense of purpose and connection.

Commodified care reinforces neocolonial power asymmetries through global care chains.

⁹⁴ Folbre, 2006; Andersson and Kvist, 2015; Winker, 2015

⁹⁵ Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2004

⁹⁶ Dengler and Lang, 2021

Some countries have already experimented successfully with alternative systems for valuing care work. For instance, in Japan, carers (including family members) can earn credits for caring for the elderly through the *Fureai Kippu* welfare system. They can save the credits for their own care as they age, transfer credits to family members, or exchange credits for services⁹⁷. This enables family and friends to provide care for the elderly in their own homes while receiving valuable compensation⁹⁸. This, however, still follows an exchange logic. In a caring society all the care already exchanged between people anyway would be supported by conditions and infrastructure which would make it an unconditional service.

An additional concerning aspect can arise, that **the State expects all care needs are met when they pay informal carers** (usually through an allowance rather than universal income). The effect is usually the opposite, as the amount paid by the State is mostly insufficient and consequently paid informal carers find themselves in a worse financial situation than professional paid carers - in the short as well as longer term. This way the Welfare State pays out of responsibility towards care receivers and informal carers. Paying for unpaid care also fosters the shift towards non-professional care as if caring doesn't require any specific skills or competencies. Ageing populations and higher pressure on public budgets foster this shift as some states (for example Eastern European Countries) see it as a cheap opportunity to solve the ageing/care issue. And again, relying exclusively/mostly on informal/family care provision is linked to traditional conservative family values contrary to women's emancipation and an equal sharing of care tasks among gender⁹⁹. Such an equal sharing is the significant turning point where family care provision is decoupled from women and has men taking similar caregiving roles.

In an ecologically sustainable economy, a high share of people in Global North societies will need to earn and consume less. If all care work was paid, the size of the economy would likely grow which could lead to an increase in

the overall consumption as people have more to spend. Paid employment tends to increase emissions due to using transport to reach a place of employment, increasing income, and decreasing time available – therefore leading to convenience purchases with higher carbon emissions¹⁰⁰. This shall not ignore the portion of the population where people need to increase income and access to resources. Where people already have their needs met, redistribution of care work and reduction of paid work (facilitated by a shorter, paid working week) might be a better solution, freeing up time for caring without increasing overconsumption.

Finally, it needs to be considered if there could be deeper cultural consequences of paying for all types of care. For example, could paying a parent to look after their own child risk further entrenching perceptions of human nature as being inherently self-interested? Might commodifying care commodify compassion? Could there be a risk that intrinsic desires to care for others be eroded and lead to an increasingly self-interested society? **Unpaid work has intrinsic value that cannot be replaced by the price for work on the labour market.** Moreover, the volume (in working hours) of unpaid work is more than the volume (in working time) of all paid work together.

To induce a change requires a new vision of care, where care is distributed in an egalitarian way – neither assumed to be unproductive nor primarily female work by nature¹⁰¹.

A recently discussed method to find balance between paid and unpaid care work is the 'care levy'. It intends to improve the social financing of private, voluntary and paid care work for other people and thus solve the problems of underpayment or lack of payment for care work and the associated grievances (such as overwork, lack of time and dwindling quality). The Ecological Tax Reform serves as an orientation for the development of such a policy proposal¹⁰². A care levy that could even be adapted to the current economic system and change it from within¹⁰³.

⁹⁷ Poo and Gupta, 2018

⁹⁸ Power, 2020

⁹⁹ Interviewee #26

¹⁰⁰ Fremstad and Underwood, 2019

¹⁰¹ Chatzidakis et al., 2020

¹⁰² Saave-Harnack, 2019

¹⁰³ Interviewee #4

Additional ways to value care

Despite complex arguments on whether care work should or not be paid, there is agreement that all care work should be valued. Oxfam is currently working with partners to change the system of work so that it values care (paid and unpaid) work¹⁰⁴. To do that involves three levers:

- **shifting narratives** on what and whose work counts as work (as reflected in media, society, governments), to understand existing and potential future narratives that would situate care differently in the economy, so that it is seen as work by governments, media, society;
- **shifting power** of low and unpaid carers especially from historically marginalised groups to have rights and be part of collective bargaining; shifting what is part of the new feminist decolonial economy;
- **changing metrics** and going past GDP.

Reducing working hours in paid labour: enabling redistribution of care work

From a historical perspective, the industrialization process has substituted labour for energy, materials, and emissions. Reducing paid work creates the potential

for both lowering emissions through less production as well as less commuting and consumption. Reduced labour, however, could also be replaced by resource and energy consuming machines and the free time might be used for energy consuming leisure activities. Whenever paid working hours are reduced this needs to be accompanied by further careful adjustments to steer the additional free time to care work at home, in society and ecological care work. Activities like organic farming, recycling, sharing, caring, and repairing devices require more working time. The impact of such changes would depend on the extent of consumption reduction and the specific modifications made to the production process in order to reduce environmental impacts.

Some people are already voluntarily reducing their paid work (and income) in order to undertake more unpaid care and community work; however, research suggests two-thirds of these are women¹⁰⁵. Redistribution of paid work, so that the typical working week becomes shorter for all or most people, would create the potential for challenging the gendered division of labour, by ensuring men and women all have more time for care activities. This however would require a change from patriarchal social norms. **Without such changes these fewer hours in paid work may lead to more leisure time for men and more care work for women** as happened during the covid lockdowns¹⁰⁶.

Efforts to reduce paid working hours must be accompanied by adjustments to steer the extra free time towards care work, while simultaneously fostering societal norms that encourage men's engagement in caregiving activities.

¹⁰⁴ Parvez-Butt, 2017

¹⁰⁵ Lane et al., 2020

¹⁰⁶ Interviewee #13

A shorter working week could also have co-benefits such as increasing well-being through slowing down and reducing stress¹⁰⁷ as well as a mindset shift away from status, productivity, optimisation, and competition. Although reducing paid working hours is essential for making these changes possible, shorter work weeks would not automatically result in lower emissions or redistribution of unpaid care work within households; other interventions are needed to shift mindsets and social norms. Reducing paid work - and therefore reducing production and consumption - suggests the

need for a societal discussion about how to change our economy: which goods and services should be reduced or phased out? Which “social goods” - such as ecological and human care, health, education and training - might be increased¹⁰⁸? How might we redistribute income and wealth as we redistribute paid and unpaid work?

However, solutions like reducing working hours may not work in regions and countries with informal labour markets and little or no regulation, it may in fact increase the burden of labour on more marginalised communities.

“This distinction of productive work and unproductive work - it’s old-fashioned because it ignores how care work is needed to enable the so-called productive work.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Godin and Langlois, 2021

¹⁰⁸ Fuchs et al., 2021

¹⁰⁹ Interviewee #4



The role of the welfare state

There are big questions to answer about who should provide and pay for care, and what the role of the welfare state should be¹¹⁰. As discussed above, market mechanisms of productivity and efficiency are particularly unsuited to the provision of high-quality care and so state provision of care can seem like the default answer. There are arguments against this as the solution: 1) public services are increasingly subject to the same pressures as private services with demands for efficiency and competitiveness driving provision;

2) the welfare state has a long tradition in some countries in the Global North, but its development has been enabled by very specific historical conditions involving huge transfers of wealth from the Global South to the Global North. Many nations in the Global South have never known stable public welfare arrangements¹¹¹; funding for care must not further entrench inequality; 3) there are serious ecological implications because in welfare states, care work is subsidised by (taxes from) the production of goods and thus from the exploitation of nature¹¹².

“This vision of a feminist care-centred society is very much different from a classical welfare state model in that it is feminist, and it’s environmentalist...the classical welfare state model wasn’t about the environment at all. It was just ‘spend as if there are no limits, build as if there are no limits, make sure that you’re just meeting human needs without concern for limits to growth’. So, the classical welfare model promotes growth; care-centred society, as we understand it, is degrowth.”¹¹³

State provision can also be perceived as creating an over-reliance on the government as a provider, with passive citizens¹¹⁴. There is a hierarchical relationship rather than relating as equal citizens. The welfare state can feel patriarchal, where free people go out to work and provide for the “dependent people”, the young, old, sick, and disabled¹¹⁵. In a care-centred vision of society, the responsibility of care is shared by communities, not outsourced to poorly paid workers, or shouldered by the unpaid labour of women.

The state *can* play an important role in ensuring a minimum standard of care for all

and enabling individuals to have the time to care whilst also living well themselves. **Care does not always need to be provided by the state but should be enabled by it.** Solutions focused on a “commonisation” of care, where communities pull together to look after each other on a voluntary basis can provide additional provisions in addition to state or private care, but must not be used as an excuse for the state to absolve itself of responsibility (e.g. as in the rise of food banks in the UK to compensate for unliveable wages and benefit provision).

¹¹⁰ Corlet-Walker et al., 2021

¹¹¹ Bhambra and Holmwood, 2018

¹¹² Interviewee #15

¹¹³ Interviewee #16

¹¹⁴ Interviews #9

¹¹⁵ Interview #9, #15, #23

“The classic welfare state model is a state model that tries to redistribute money that has been earned through capitalistic work structures and working systems. (...) A care-centred society has a different economical basis: not any more centred around profit but centred around care. So, it’s no longer about redistributing money for care work that has been earned in precarious and bad working conditions, but finding a way of distributing money, or just resources, for everyone to have a good life.” ¹¹⁶

As we have pointed out before, without all the aggregate care-taking, there would be no society. It is care work that produces and reproduces¹¹⁷ it. Care work provides for the citizens, workers, and consumers, who populate society and its institutions. The uncompensated **labour of caretakers is an unrecognised subsidy**, not only to the individuals who directly receive it, but more significantly to society. If we take this seriously it creates societal obligations¹¹⁸. **Only states have the capacity, the power and the territorial sovereignty to enforce such obligations.**

They require redistribution of resources within societies - including finance and time. This involves rules, for example, to pay certain taxes but also to finance public care work¹¹⁹, or to establish obligations for every member of society to do care work. The state has the capacity to change parental leave regulations and the kind of education we are getting. This, of course, requires a state interested in doing these things¹²⁰.

¹¹⁶ Saave-Harnack et al., 2019 p.4

¹¹⁷ Bhattacharya, 2017; Fraser, 2017

¹¹⁸ Fineman, 2000, 2008, 2020

¹¹⁹ Haug, 2008

¹²⁰ Interviewee #28

If we think about the welfare state, we have to consider how it emerged. The capitalism we are in has a tendency to commodify everything, because capitalism is based on accumulation and profit imperative. In all areas it seeks to accumulate. If this tendency to commodify did not meet resistance, society would not only end, but capitalism itself would end. Then every person would only be a labourer and nature would simply be a resource and nothing more. Thus, the welfare state is, not least, an institution set up as a countermovement to pure capitalism. It intends to decommodify some basic needs making them available to their citizens for free or for reasonable prices. However, the classical welfare state in this dynamic also has the function to stabilise the social conditions, to enable further capital accumulation. Therefore, even as a countermovement, it is not anti-capitalist. However, through the provision of e.g., education, health, and transport systems it has built the basis for mass production and mass consumption, for increased purchasing power and thus provided the basis for new accumulation possibilities¹²¹.

Caring societies, in turn, would not only aim at de-commodifying social structures,

but concomitantly push back at the logic of capital accumulation, turning around this hierarchy between capitalist production and social production. Thus prioritising social production, this would include carers social rights and see carers not simply as a functional necessity for capital accumulation¹²².

What is important to consider here is also the role of the welfare state in countries in the Global South, colonisation that led to wealth, resources extraction, and labour exploitation with ongoing imperial war projects makes the role of state extremely precarious. There are not enough resources to implement policies and measures that provide vast ranging social protections leaving many governments vulnerable to outside interference and having to depend on neocolonial institutions like the IMF and World Bank, which also erodes the trust with their citizens. Moving towards caring societies requires a tremendous investment in public services, commons and goods, many Governments spend the majority of their budgets on debt re-servicing. Welfare states in countries in the Global South require domestic, political and economic stability, as well as stability in their regions.

¹²¹ Gough, 1975; Bärnthaler et al., 2023;

¹²² Bärnthaler and Dengler, 2022



Convivial technology as positive alternative to presumed “clean technology”

Technical innovations are often promoted as “solutions” to both the care crisis (such as care robots) and environmental crises (such as electric cars); they reduce care work, or reduce emissions for richer households, while intensifying exploitation of low-paid labour in the subcontracting industry for automotive and robotics production and ecological problems in other locations like mining areas for rare earths¹²³. These **technical innovations persist because they give richer populations the illusion of reducing environmental costs or improving quality of life while avoiding a deeper change** in the way we live and the economic and political systems that drive our lifestyles.

As an alternative, convivial tools and technologies promote ways of meeting our human needs that are friendly, shared and enjoyable. They promote increased equality while minimising ecological harm¹²⁴. Examples include friendly and accessible public transport, repurposing disused industrial buildings as cooperatives or community space, planting productive trees in cities to regulate temperatures and provide food and wood, and turning car parking space into neighbourhood recreation areas. It also includes protecting critical resources, for example the activism to prevent destruction of forest or water sources. Convivial technology is defined as easily understood, created and repaired, assisting

people to care for their own needs, while equally helping others care for theirs¹²⁵. Some important elements of care can be recognised in areas traditionally understood as ecological engagement; for example, **repair, recycling, reuse**, re-gifting, retaining, and **refusing** - these all **contain an element of care for objects as well as others**¹²⁶.

2.5 SUMMARY

In this part of the report, we have explored concepts and world views that go beyond the mainstream, together, they offer deeper potential for new ways of living that can bring about high care, low carbon societies. We have demonstrated local, national, and global practical initiatives that place care at the centre of interventions to bring about fair and sustainable societies. We provided a range of case studies from around the globe that demonstrate projects that have helped communities to move towards higher care, lower carbon lives. We explore the arguments for and against financial compensation for care work that is currently unpaid, and explore whether a reduction in working hours could play a helpful role in making more time for, and redistributing care. We examine the role of the welfare state in provisioning paid care and the opportunity for convivial technology as a positive alternative to so-called ‘clean’ technologies to provide more sustainable approaches to reducing care work.

¹²³ Gough, 1975; Bärnthaler et al., 2023;

¹²⁴ Bärnthaler and Dengler, 2022

¹²⁵ Gough, 1975; Bärnthaler et al., 2023;

¹²⁶ Bärnthaler and Dengler, 2022



3

Moving forward together - Towards a Forum for Caring Societies

3.1 CARE AS A CATALYST FOR “RADICAL TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIETY”

As a starting point for structuring our agenda for change we gratefully build upon the foundation of Gabriele Winker’s Care Revolution. Winker’s proposal for a solidary care economy¹²⁷ details short- and medium-term reforms in policy and practice that can be implemented within the current system to build the social infrastructure necessary for a transformation to care-centred societies. We have used some of these proposals to exemplify ways for change (see Table 1). Further exploration of some of the economic, social, and environmental policies we suggest in this section can be found in the previous part of this report (for example regarding redistribution of unpaid care work, ending profit-making systems of care). Short explanations of some other key policies follow Table 1.

We close by outlining more revolutionary system changes that go further than policies

and can still be implemented within the existing system. We add our own perspectives regarding necessary environmental policies and integral practices for a radical eco-social transformation.

Inducing change within the current system

The following approaches provide an interesting but mainly illustrative selection of the diverse directions policies towards just, low carbon, caring societies could take within the current system.

Carbon rationing is a concept based on equal carbon rations for all, with some modifications for children or vulnerable persons, or based on differing access to infrastructure and basic services. A concern for equity is one of the key motives as it has a redistributive aspect, with individuals in lower income households having lower emissions on average than those in wealthier households¹²⁸.

¹²⁷ Winker, 2021

¹²⁸ Fawcett, 2003, 2004

Reduced standard working hours in wage labour are promoted both for social and ecological reasons. This shall not be mixed up with the individual reduction of working hours people are forced to make when children or elderly need more care. On the social side, reduction of paid work - together with acceptable minimum wages and poverty standards - offers significant potential in formal work. In informal work contexts, the equivalent would be to increase minimum or basic income guarantee to allow a standard of living that does not require working 5 days a week or more.

From a care perspective, a shorter paid working week reduces overwork and exploitation of unpaid caregivers and creates an opportunity – also no guarantee – for fair redistribution of unpaid care work as well as time to care for oneself.

On the environmental side, for those earning (well) above the minimum wage reduced working hours needs to result in reduced income and thus overconsumption. In parallel time is freed for care work, community work and sustainable behaviours¹²⁹ potentially resulting in a redistribution of both work and wealth. A caring economy most likely will require more work. There is a substantial amount of work involved in caring for the environment instead of relying on pesticides, herbicides, or fossil fuel-based nutrients. It requires repairing, discontinuing the culture of use and discard, ending the current unequal exchange that benefits the wealthy.

Universal Basic Services allows the adoption of preventive and precautionary public policy by directly influencing the supply of services. Dengler and colleagues summarise the recent and emerging research and found a universal provision of basic services increases their quality allowing for a direct selection of low-carbon need-satisfiers, while fairly redistributing the costs of the social-ecological transformation for example, by improving the energy efficiency of housing stock. As UBS disentangles livelihood security from engagement in wage labour, this could reduce labour supply and consumption in case people choose to reallocate their time and engage in (potentially more time-consuming) sustainable activities. Thus, UBS has the potential to ease the transformation towards post-growth regimes shifting the focus of the economy towards a caring basis¹³⁰. However, there is also the risk that an increase in the social wage might result in higher disposable income and time to spend in more carbon-intensive non-waged activities, or that people with lower incomes increase their consumption of energy and fuel to meet needs they could not fulfil before. Hence, UBS does not directly create a resource low society but opens a window of opportunity. One element could be to combine USB with higher social-environmental standards in production. An income increase would keep consumption the same but with better quality (i.e., better labour conditions and environmental protection), the challenge is how to coordinate these policies to get the desired output!

¹²⁹ Paech, 2013

¹³⁰ Dengler et al., 2022; Coote, 2022



Sustainable and caring **urban infrastructure** intends to provide needs fulfilment for citizens, close to where they live. The 15-minute neighbourhood model, for example, makes it easier for citizens to access health and care services, recreation areas, and work in a local urban structure, thereby reducing environmental pollution from cars. Co-housing arrangements, in which people live in individual units within a housing complex and share a range of common facilities are a growing solution in urban areas. Urban infrastructure is both a reflection and an influencer of the priorities of society; putting caring opportunities and institutions at the centre of urban areas enables a shift in thinking and practices.

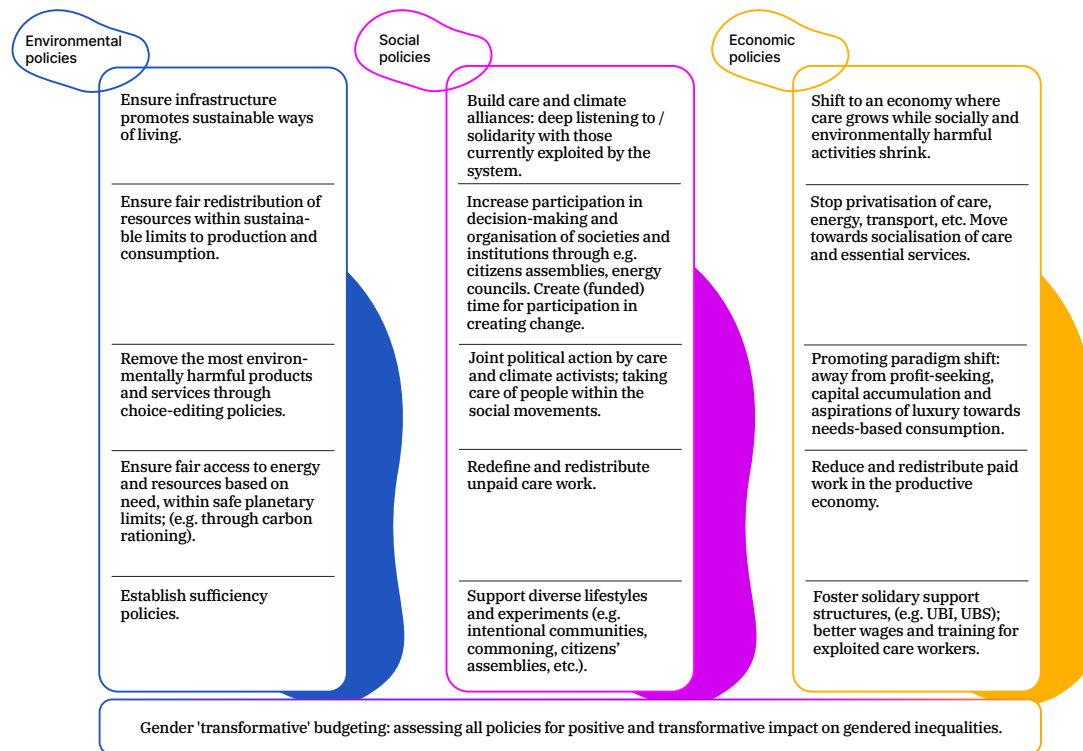
Gender Budgeting aims at dealing with budgetary gender inequality issues, such as discrepancies between women's and men's salaries. It also promotes equality through fiscal policies by taking analyses of a budget's differing impacts on the sexes, as well as setting goals or targets for equality and allocating funds to support those goals. This

forces an awareness of the effects of financial schemes on all genders¹³¹.

Care levy is a method recently discussed providing an economic basis to finance currently unpaid care work. It intends to improve the social financing of private, voluntary and paid care work for other people and thus solve the problems of underpayment or lack of payment for care work and the associated grievances (such as overwork, lack of time and dwindling quality). The Ecological Tax Reform serves as an orientation for the development of such a policy proposal⁷⁷. A care levy could be adapted to the current economic system and change it from within⁷⁸.

Land Back and Reparations call on the Global North to pay back the extracted wealth and give land holdings and territories back to Indigenous Peoples and citizens of those countries. Such reparations could be used toward putting in place social and welfare protections including Universal Basic Income and Universal Health Care as well as appropriate infrastructure like running water and adequate housing.

Table 2: Policy and practice proposals to change the current system



¹³¹ <https://www.gendereconomy.org/gender-budgeting-a-tool-for-achieving-equality/>

Beyond the current system

“Care work is a vital foundation of society. Without the many people who look after children every day, care for relatives in need of support or help people in need, it would collapse immediately. At the same time, those who take on this work are overburdened, as are the ecosystems and their material cycles on which all life is based. Ultimately, these problems cannot be solved in a capitalist social order. Therefore, we must radically restrict profit-oriented economic activity in favour of a care economy that is oriented towards successful care relationships and the resilience of ecosystems. The concept of the care revolution opens the way to a society characterised by care and solidarity instead of competition and exclusion.”¹³²

Care revolution as the basis of a Solidarity Economy

Winker’s Care Revolution (and those before her) explores why the above-mentioned policies and measures on their own will not be enough to overcome the present system of exploitation for profit, or to reduce emissions by the necessary amount. She argues that we will not fully and equally value every member of society – or fully value family, care, voluntary work and social/political participation - until

we achieve what she calls a solidarity economy. The solidarity care economy is based upon each person contributing and receiving fairly, according to needs and within ecological limits. According to Winker, to achieve this, it is necessary for social movements to work towards **replacing the capitalist division into paid and unpaid work**. We agree with this analysis and support the proposed steps, as well as adding perspectives from our work with the Commission during this process.

¹³² Winker, 2021 (own translation)

“In a solidarity society, all people have free access to what is created in practice based on the division of labour, and everyone contributes to the necessary work according to their needs. In such a society, the focus is no longer on competition and growth, but the central design principle is solidarity.”¹³³

A just redistribution of resources within fair limits

Any society will only thrive within healthy ecosystems, and this requires economic policies that ensure fair and sustainable use of the global common goods. On a finite planet it will simply not be possible to meet the basic needs of everyone while enormous inequalities

between and within countries exist. Limits to certain forms of excess will need to be imposed so that resources cannot be hoarded by some while others can't access enough to survive¹³⁴.

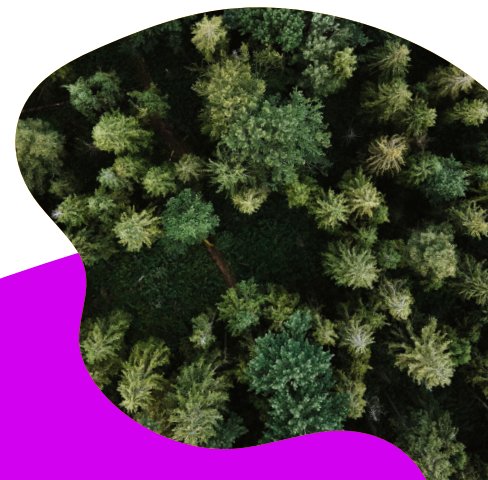
As the Commission notes, limits are intrinsic to our life on Earth, but would be more readily accepted in a just, low carbon and caring society:

“Well, caring is definitely in a better position than one based on economic growth to deal with limits and actually not to see limits as something unwelcome, but basically as part of our existence on the planet together with others.”¹³⁵

¹³³ Winker, 2021 (own translation)

¹³⁴ Interviewee #28; Akenji et al., 2021; Fuchs et al., 2021

¹³⁵ Interviewee #2



Building non-profit and commons-based services to meet social and environmental needs is essential to provide an alternative to the current competitive, growth-centred economy. Yet building these caring alternatives outside the capitalist system will not be sufficient to halt social and ecological destruction. Stopping overconsumption in the richer parts of society is necessary for far-reaching and rapid reductions in carbon emissions, biodiversity threats such as forest clearance, mining and extraction and other harmful practices needed to support an economy based on consumption growth. Policies, interventions and changes in social

norms and practices must urgently change to include support for limits to consumption.¹³⁶

Some concepts already identify the need for integrating ideas of well-being, justice, and limits on a structural level. As an early approach, the concept of environmental space links the existence of limited natural common goods to ideas of justice and the ‘good life’, promoted by Friends of the Earth Europe¹³⁷. Kate Raworth’s doughnut economics¹³⁸ likewise relates planetary boundaries to social justice, as does the idea of a safe and just operating space¹³⁸. Other concepts focus on sufficiency, and the need to avoid both underconsumption and overconsumption.

“Addressing what the last IPCC report calls the ‘polluter elite’ now with the richest parts of the society with far over proportional ecological footprints, we have talked about, maybe introducing a cap on wealth or income.”¹⁴⁰

The *fair consumption space* is an ecologically healthy perimeter that supports an equitable distribution of resources that allows opportunities for individuals and societies to fulfil their needs. Within this space, there is a range of options, but also clearly-demarcated limits to over- and underconsumption, notably a cap in emissions, and a more equitable distribution of limited carbon budgets¹⁴¹. Working towards a fair consumption space involves promotion of policies to tackle under- and overconsumption, including UBS and carbon rationing.

The concept of *consumption corridors* combines ecological and social limits in the context of consumption, taking a more comprehensive look at demand for various resources and the subsequent social and ecological implications. It links the need for sufficient resource consumption to the opportunity to live a good life (for all individuals now and in the future), thereby refocusing our attention on the essence of human aims and ambitions¹⁴².

¹³⁶ Interviewee #2

¹³⁷ Spangenberg, 2002

¹³⁸ Raworth, 2012

¹³⁹ Rockström et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2015; O’Neill et al., 2018

¹⁴⁰ Interviewee #2

¹⁴¹ Akenji et al., 2021

¹⁴² Fuchs et al., 2021

It is accompanied by the concept of *production corridors* and argues that tackling production directly can be ecologically more effective than detouring through ‘end of pipe’ consumption. The production corridor then exists in a sphere in-between essential production to cover basic needs and excessive production which is wasteful, or of labour that is non-reproductive. In this zone, social value is destroyed, not augmented. Examples are the luxury industry and broad parts of the finance sector and ‘bullshit jobs’, defined as ‘forms of paid employment that are so completely pointless, unnecessary, or pernicious that even the employee cannot justify its existence’¹⁴³.

These concepts promote fair redistribution of global common goods but have tended to lack a strong consideration of paid and unpaid care as well as gender issues in their analyses and advocacy. Just as there is a growing group of environmental and social organisations beginning to integrate care into their analysis, care-centred concepts are emerging that develop specific proposals to tackle overconsumption.

Requirements for holistic approaches

The next steps towards challenging the current profit-driven, exploitative system need to be taken with an eco-feminist, decolonial solidarity-based mindset where care is the central principle in terms, policy, and practice reflecting the holistic approach that is necessary for deep systemic change.

Various advocacy campaigns around the world promote better pay and conditions for care workers, this is an essential step, but our agenda goes further to promote a solidarity framework.

We will give some short examples here to demonstrate the need to consider policy from the perspectives of care, justice and climate simultaneously:

Example 1: Policies for better conditions for care workers will contribute to holistic systemic change when they are implemented together with overall limits to resource and energy use, and redistribution of wealth and access to global common goods.

- An overall cap on overconsumption by the richest people in society is necessary: this facilitates a fair consumption space¹⁴⁴. Reducing unnecessary consumption by richer populations is essential so that people with low incomes can improve their wellbeing while societies reduce overall emissions and environmental damage.
- The global chain of care and the “Care Drain ” are impacted in various ways by shifts in policies and pay for care workers mainly oriented to improve national situations. Therefore, it is important that policymakers pay better attention to how their policies affect paid and unpaid care work in other parts of the world, including the social and environmental consequences.

¹⁴³ Graeber, 2019; Bärnthaler, 2023

¹⁴⁴ Akenji et al., 2021



Example 2: There is a small but growing acknowledgement of the need to limit, then fairly distribute, energy and material resources according to need: Policies that limit and ration carbon emissions will contribute to holistic systemic change when they anticipate the additional work required, creating physical and social infrastructure to ensure low-carbon living is realistic and fair for everyone.

- Historical accountability for environmental damage requires acknowledging the overuse of resources that has occurred in the Global North, and following from there the need for reparations and the need for infrastructural development that does not rely on harmful extraction that worsens inequality.
- Implementing carbon rationing in context of the Global North social and physical infrastructure will create a new responsibility to care, for example, if it is no longer possible to drive kids to school due to carbon rationing, carers will need significant extra time in their day to cycle or walk children to school, unless there is a community-based solution to this and / or care work is distributed fairly in society among genders.
- Also within societies citizens have different needs for energy. For example, some disabilities result in greater needs for hot water, heating and mobility.

Example 3: Universal Basic Income (UBI) has been trialled in some countries to test potential for fairer and more effective ways to support all citizens. Policies for Universal Basic Income will contribute to holistic systemic change when they are implemented together with measures to redistribute unpaid care work fairly, and contribute to the necessary shift away from jobs in unnecessary overproduction and overconsumption.

- UBI could be a valuable compensation for people, often women, who reduce their paid work to undertake unpaid care work. Given the right framing, such payments could promote care work as a valued contribution to society, and could reduce reliance on paid work in production, therefore potentially reducing environmentally damaging production and consumption.
- Research and experiments into UBI show that women did spend up to 30% less time in paid work, so there is a real risk that UBI could worsen gendered patterns of unpaid care work and undermine women's role in the paid workplace.



3.2 ESTABLISHING A FORUM FOR CARING SOCIETIES

Launching this report is a foundation to establish a [Forum for Caring Societies](#) which aims to develop a common agenda for action and build the social and political mandate for change to promote care as a catalyst for radical transformation of societies.

The Forum will promote radical eco-social transformation with care as the guiding principle. It will set an agenda for collaboration grounded in the decades of work undertaken by eco-feminist, decolonial and Climate Justice researchers and activists.

“I really do think we shouldn’t forget the importance and value of social movements and collective action.”¹⁴⁵

Figure 6: Forum for Caring Societies



¹⁴⁵ Interviewee #23



Adding value to what already exists

One important aspect of the Forum's work will be mapping; helping to **connect/reinforce, and amplifying the power of existing movements** and alliances including: feminist, workers, informal workers, care, anti-racist, anti-colonialist, climate justice - all are **pushing for similar transformations**. Some mapping of the work connecting care and climate is provided in this report already. Where are further possible connections and pathways to collaboration? Still, beyond the efforts of the last decades actors working on women's rights do not necessarily see the connection to climate issues. Conversely, those working on climate don't necessarily also see the connection to race and gender. Youth groups engaged in climate issues might not be connected to labour rights and care. An important contribution of the Forum is to **bring such groups into solidarity together whilst being aware of not duplicating processes**.

The potential and need for such mapping is wide-ranging, from initiatives existing under the UN umbrella, via mapping grassroots initiatives around the world especially in the Global South to better document and understand who is working on the intersection of low carbon, care and justice from a research perspective.

While the mapping is and will remain an ongoing process, further steps are to create spaces to talk to each other, to strengthen voices towards policymakers, and to raise attention through joint activities.

Building an agenda to initiate change

The Commission was initiated to provide a solid state-of-the-art (the most recent ideas and developments) on how a care-centred transition to equitable, low-consumption societies could be achieved and examine what is already underway. Generate proposals for agenda-setting to work together. The Forum

we would like to establish will be far-reaching, aim to foster transformation and build a strong common voice.

Care economics: pay attention to finance and metrics

There is sufficient money to finance a caring society, but it is not allocated to the right sectors. More investments in care and fewer subsidies to environmentally harmful sectors are needed for transformation. To achieve this, changing financial institutions is crucial. Suggestions on how to redistribute the practical financial flows range from rearrangement of the tax system (like robin-hood-tax and North-South redistribution), via global universal basic income for care of children to the establishment of universal basic services through public provisioning of care. Stopping the financing of non-caring investments and the de-commercialisation and de-financialisation of the care sector are part of such a change as well.

In the context of fiscal reforms and of high formal employment economies, the need for reducing paid working hours is an important aspect as well, even if there is still a need to provide clear evidence for how this can be implemented to alter the gender division of labour and positively impact climate goals. Green jobs also play an important role. There is no need to find new "circular/green productive jobs" instead directing financial resources towards the care sector. Women's Budget Group (UK) already identified that investing in care jobs can generate three times more return on investment than investing in construction jobs and can create 1.5 x more jobs¹⁴⁶. Whether this 'return on investment' is a useful argument for investing in care jobs is challenged. Shareholders should not be making money out of the sector struggling for cash. Instead, de-financialising the care sector is a more obvious solution.

¹⁴⁶ Diski, 2022

Overcoming GDP measurement as the main and guiding metrics plays a prominent role in this context, as does establishing alternative state budgets, involving societal time use budgets, water budgets and CO2 budgets. Time budgeting is especially important to mainstream care recognition to overcome the distinction between paid and unpaid labour, including caring labour. The instruments have already been available for a while but are still under-utilised. Recent work links time budgeting to the societal metabolism of resource flows¹⁴⁷. The goal is to establish another type of accounting - building on ecological economics, stepping beyond traditional societal metabolism (which is focused on materials and energy) and including caring activities. Some recent societal metabolic studies are relating time use with resource transformation and waste generation. It includes budgeting of different types of resources – water/CO2/energy/time/land. The idea is to focus less on companies producing goods and services and relying on so-called “productive work”, and instead focus on the environmental goods and services necessary for humans to survive.

Shifting Power

Obstacles for change are basically rooted in the current structures of the power system. With white and male supremacy there is no place to adequately value care. We observe accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of a few and democratic systems that are not representative. Underlying to this system:

- is the lack of voice and representation of most unpaid and paid carers because the system demands women should be at home, caring and at the same time, not ‘outside’ and not ‘speaking out’.
- the structural setting in which care work is not ‘work’ (even domestic work is in many countries not paid the minimum wage), and therefore not counted in worker legislation or protections, nor often in social safety nets.

- the organisation of care workers to demand rights and bargain collectively is not available at sufficient scale.

It may be possible to shift power in the system by tackling carers rights as there are arguably 50% of the world population that is doing unpaid and paid care under less than ideal circumstances.

Informal systems are ignored, thus better representation is a precondition for change. To achieve this, it is necessary that people from different political backgrounds communicate with each other on equal footing. We would therefore like to create spaces in which people can 1) talk to each other and 2) do the actual research to amplify voices and put it into practice through policies. One important strategy in this context is to better connect the local with the national level, as this has proved to trigger change. Another strategy is to better introduce the value of just, low carbon, caring societies into ongoing international processes.

Public debate and shifting social norms and narratives that hide care and carers

To shift the cultural norms and behaviour around overconsumption requires openly challenging capitalism, neoliberalism, ongoing colonial logics and the harmful effects they have on the way we care for each other and the environment. Broad outreach to mass media, campaigns problematizing GDP or organising an international strike or a global action day – these are valuable medium-term goals for the Forum. They require actors from different backgrounds and different expertise.

A more immediate step to generate attention is to connect with artists, creative writers and activists to develop interesting and differing story lines around low-carbon caring societies. Campaigns need to catch us emotionally, so that we are touched by the extent to which we have received care throughout our lives – providing the feeling that ‘care is about YOU!’ This means nothing less than shedding light on the positive aspects of care, and recognising that care at its core is not a burden but an essential part of our existence.

¹⁴⁷ Manfroni et al., 2021



Care messages are best based on past and present real-life experiences. A promising communication method is to focus on small scale local examples. Imagining a different world where care is at the centre requires an understanding of the local needs. This might not be radical, but it is authentic and 'walks the talk'. Providing stories from and about caregivers to those who also receive or give care and actively listening to what they have to say effectively reaches modern audiences. From communication based on practical experience, campaigns and messages towards wider stakeholders can be developed. The messages have to reflect not only differing social experience but also differing meaning to words in different languages.

Video or animation, community radio and podcasts, can be an engaging and powerful tool. Videos and podcasts reach much further than written reports and are better able to bridge gaps between groups, for example, groups that at present primarily focus only on care or the environment. Suggestions of a 'day in the life' short film can illustrate how care for humans and care for the environment belong together.

This visual communication tackles a further crucial aspect; the term 'care' comes across differently in different language groups. In English, the word 'care' is much broader than in Latin/Spanish languages where it represents a very human centred concept which tends to reproduce gender stereotypes. Images and visuals can overcome the language barrier.

To foster public discourse, other communication activities are crucial as well. Further action can range from writing blogs to a national/global poster campaign. It is important for communication to use inclusive language and an appropriate narrative is found to meet the interests of diverse groups – academics and grassroots organisations,

environmentalists and care workers, global north and global south – so that they all feel they are working on the same issue.

Care as Commons

There is a great deal of interest in solutions connected with organising care as commons. The socialisation and communalisation of care appears to be a promising way to overcome commercialisation and financialisation of the care system. This can enable closer intergenerational relationships and stronger communities. Climate effects are assumed in this development but still need to be proven with further research on care community mapping and through action research within and across communities. Finally, in this context, the idea of 'caring cities' as a bottom-up idea of municipalities is an approach to keep an eye on¹⁴⁸.

Providing further evidence for the linkages between Care and Climate

Diverse and compelling visions for a just, gender-balanced and caring world are lacking. In addition to practice and action, these visions require further research, not least, to estimate the impact of carbon and resource use. Future research work ranges from identifying the differences in carbon emissions between formalised care and other caring systems, to participatory research development. With such knowledge academia can be a platform for change - connecting communities with the policy sphere. The Forum regards itself as 'action research', i.e. being involved in activities but also keeping sufficient distance to have a clearer overview about the different communities and their interaction with the official sections.

¹⁴⁸ Kussy et al., 2022; Gabauer et al., 2022



First steps envisioned

We offer additional value to the movement through our specific work in the following areas:

Strategic Communications research

We need ways of communicating the complex issues connected to caring societies - with the public, and with each other; even for experts it is hard work to access all of

this knowledge and make sense of the field as a whole¹⁴⁹. Our research on strategic communications centres care in bringing about just, low-carbon societies. We are identifying how to mitigate key risks, and make, explore, research recommendations for narratives and counter-narratives.

The insights will be used to build understanding of what is needed to unite people from different sectors and geographies to work on common narratives.

“Care work is seen as a burden, the drudgery of care, the burden of care. But if we begin to reframe it as something that’s a social good, that it’s needed, you need to invest in it, you need to value it. So it’s also about changing our language.”¹⁵⁰

Key communications concerns highlighted so far:

- Create narratives that go beyond ‘no-harm’ approaches. Care deserves a positive image. We do not do care work simply to avoid or respond to disasters.
- Avoiding the “climatisation of care”: Communicators need to be mindful of presenting care as a “new” issue¹⁵¹. Feminist scholars have been highlighting the crisis of unpaid care work and the burden that it places on groups around the world¹⁵². There is a need to avoid harmful “climate change bandwagoning”, which refers to purposefully expanding the definition of an issue to climate change for strategic reasons¹⁵³.
- Taking a decolonial and feminist approach: When communicating about

the care and climate nexus, there is an additional risk of perpetuating the dominance of Global North narratives, and for power dynamics and strategic priorities to be exploited between Northern and Southern actors¹⁵⁴.

- Considering nuances around care and gender: for example, ensuring that we are not equating care work with women’s work, and decoupling care from female-dominated occupations¹⁵⁵. Although the majority of care work is undertaken by women, women are not a homogenous group. There are clear distinctions to be made between the different issues faced by already marginalised women when it comes to the care crisis. This also implies communication strategies for caring masculinity.

¹⁴⁹ Interviewee #2

¹⁵⁰ Interviewee #23

¹⁵¹ MacGregor et al., 2022

¹⁵² Arora-Jonsson, 2011

¹⁵³ Jinnah, 2011

¹⁵⁴ MacGregor et al., 2022

¹⁵⁵ Nadasen, 2017

A broader understanding of care from a feminist ecological economics point of view would benefit the sustainability movement. There is a tendency to assume that care economics and feminist economics are only concerned with gender equity issues¹⁵⁶, and therefore, underestimate the significant contributions the ecofeminist political economic approach can make to the movement for sustainable and equitable societies. In fact, feminist ecological economics is concerned with how domestic and/or international policy interventions reinforce or alter axes of difference i.e. gender, race, age, class, ethnicity etc.

Strategic communication of the concept of care can facilitate more ambitious collaboration towards just, low-carbon caring societies. Controversial issues need careful consultation on how they might be expressed in various contexts and geographies. Listening to and learning from existing caring communities and societies is crucial, including indigenous knowledge.

Convening with funders to support transformation beyond the current system

As the crisis in care, and its connection to social and environmental exploitation, has been made more visible by the COVID-19

pandemic, progressive funders are increasingly interested in supporting the transformation to a just, low carbon caring economy. This project is supporting funders to learn more about the potential for promoting the care-centred transformation to equitable, low-carbon societies; through the Funders for Sustainable Living network, we are planning workshops that bring together funders, researchers and practitioners. Philanthropic funders provide the potential for catalysing change:

- Radical transformation requires funding from outside the current system; some philanthropic funders have the freedom to explore solutions beyond capitalism.
- Funders can provide resources to support grassroots initiatives. Civic engagement is work and needs to be properly recognized as such, especially if it is unpaid.
- Funders can act as mobilisers of change, through incubating ideas and supporting experimentation, as well as showcasing possibilities for deep and rapid change.
- Convening those pursuing similar goals, and connecting various stakeholders and institutions is a goal of many philanthropic foundations¹⁵⁹.

“The dual crises of care for people and care for the environment alert us to the real meaning of sustainability and the serious choices that governments and society as a whole need to grapple with.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Interviewee #6, #13

¹⁵⁷ <https://hotorcool.org/hc-projects/f4sl/>

¹⁵⁸ Littig, 2018

¹⁵⁹ Newell et al., 2022

¹⁶⁰ Floro, 2012, p.27

CONCLUSION

Short- and medium-term reforms in policy and practice implemented within the current system are first steps to build the social infrastructure necessary for a transformation to caring societies. But all such policies and measures on their own will not be enough to overcome the present system of exploitation for profit, or to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and nature exploitation by the necessary amount.

Caring Societies require a paradigm shift:

- a decisive departure from economies based on exploitation and abuse of power.
- a system that prevents profit, wealth accumulation, excess consumption, and accepts the limits that are intrinsic to our life on Earth.
- a redirection of investment and growth, to be equalising and restorative; working with new economic measures that promote justice, for example, in income, emissions, effort, time use and fair access to social and environmental resources.

The Forum for Caring Societies will promote radical eco-social transformation, with care as the guiding principle. It will set an agenda for collaboration grounded in the decades of work undertaken by eco-feminist, decolonial and Climate Justice researchers and activists.

The first steps envisioned for the Forum for Caring Societies include:

1. Strategic communications research: exploring ways to effectively communicate complex issues related to caring societies, making them accessible and comprehensible to a wide audience.

2. Engagement with funders: convening with funders to support transformation beyond the current system.
3. Creating a collaborative platform: establishing a platform for collaboration, policy analysis, and peer learning, encouraging collective efforts towards realisation of caring societies. Addressing power structures is another crucial aspect of the Forum's agenda. It recognizes the obstacles to change embedded in the current power system, such as white and male supremacy, which fail to adequately value care and ignore informal care systems. The Forum will explore what power shifting looks like in diverse situations, from governance to interpersonal relationships to international processes.

Working towards a fair consumption space will involve promotion of policies to tackle both under and overconsumption, and we stress the significance of public debate and shifting social norms to challenge overconsumption. We need to effectively communicate the negative effects of capitalism, neoliberalism, and colonial logics on care for each other and the environment. We propose engaging with mass media, campaigns, and creative collaborations with artists and activists to promote the positive aspects of care, to recognise it as an essential part of our existence, and as the foundation of our wellbeing.

Our project connects those working for systemic change that leads us away from the current system and its normalisation of exploitation. Moving forwards together our exploration is: how can a vision of Caring Societies help us to normalise the radical change we urgently need - but don't yet believe is possible?

Care to join us?

We hope this report will inspire many researchers, activists, practitioners, funders, and policymakers to join us in working towards the transformation to fair, sustainable, care-centred societies.

To connect, find out more or join the Forum for Caring Societies, please contact us: care@hotorcool.org

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