Commonwealth of Nations
Regenerative Development to Reverse Climate Change Workshop
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Seven Principles of Regeneration

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. I live in Santa Fe, which is in the high cold desert of NM. I've been drawn here by the unprecedented commitment of the Secretary General and the Commonwealth to take on this work of reversing climate change. It's the most important work I can imagine being part of. This is work of the heart, and I'm grateful to be here among you.

I am a member of Regenesis, a group that has dedicated itself to learning about and practicing regenerative development. Unlike a number of my colleagues, I am not a scientist. My background is as a designer, attempting to apply the insights of science and living systems to the regeneration of landscapes, communities, and businesses.

Echoing what Mary Robinson said this morning, the technologies and strategies we are talking about need to be undertaken in consultation with local people. This is key to the idea of regeneration. What we are really up to here is building new capacity into every community, nation, and ecosystem where these strategies are applied. This is how reversing climate change becomes an engine for social and economic regeneration.

Paul started us out with a message of hope—that this is something we can do. I'd like to add an additional thought. We can have far more influence in terms of what we **do** when we deliberately work on how we **think** about what we do. So my comments are not addressed not to what to do but to how we might want to think about the work of reversing climate change. What perspective might we want to adopt and what principles might we want to follow?

As we have explored the idea of Regenerative Development, we've discovered a number of themes or criteria that can increase the likelihood that every project and policy we undertake will evolve the capacity of living systems. This is the subject of our recent book, which was published last fall. In what follows, I'd like to summarize some of our key findings.

Whole

Regenerative development is primarily interested in what makes things more whole. Wholeness is the opposite of breaking life down into pieces and fragments. You can dissect a frog and learn about its parts. But will you really understand what it is to be a frog?
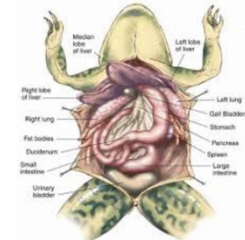
Wholeness is embedded in the very idea of the Commonwealth, whose diversity of member nations, linked as they are by common language, values, and purpose, are greater as a whole than they are as a set of independent parts. This collaboration and wholeness is, as Mary Robinson reminded us this morning, a necessary antidote to protectionism and isolationism in the international sphere.

Essential

Regenerative development starts by respecting that which is essential, or unique and singular in every person, every landscape, every community, every nation. This essential quality is often very evident in young children, before it has been covered over by formal

education and socialization. It can also be discerned in the qualitative differences among places. A regenerative approach seeks to understand and reinforce the authentic nature of people and communities—their essence—rather than diminishing them with one-size-fits-all, generic solutions and development programs. This is why we place so much emphasis on finding local solutions that tap the genius of places.

Potential

Potential has to do with what doesn't yet exist, but could. As an approach, this is very different from starting with problems. When we organize our actions around solving problems, we are being dictated to by decisions made in the past. It's like trying to steer a boat by looking backward at where we came from. Regenerative development always starts from the inherent potential in living things, potential that is anchored in their uniqueness or essence. This is a major source of the hopefulness and inspiration associated with this approach. Incidentally, when we work to manifest the potential of something, the perceived problems tend to dissolve, or they get resolved as a by-product of our efforts.

Reciprocal

Regenerative development proposes reciprocity as an alternative to transactional relationships. Quid pro quo or transactional exchanges are oriented to extracting as much value as possible from an exchange. Reciprocity, on the other hand, is based on the idea of mutual benefit, where our exchanges are intended to grow the vitality and productivity of a larger whole that we are part of. Janine Benyus has spoken very eloquently about the centrality of cooperation in nature as the very basis for healthy, functioning ecosystems. New research has overturned the old metaphor of competition as the dominant pattern in nature. For example, trees in a forest are linked together in symbiotic relationships with fungi, soil bacteria, and other trees. The resulting webs of mutual support make such trees healthy and long-lived. They work together to benefit the whole, rather than competing to extract the most value for themselves. Perhaps this points the way to more sustainable economic models for the future.

Nested

All living beings are made up of smaller systems and are part of larger systems. In many coastal forests in temperate areas, bears play a critical role. They harvest salmon who have swum upstream to spawn. Nutrients, concentrated by the salmon in the deep cold waters of the ocean, are distributed by the bears into the forest, where they fertilize the soil. Healthy soil means healthy forests, which support healthy streams, and therefore provide habitat for salmon to spawn. Remove any of the key elements and the whole system begins to suffer, impacting the health of myriad living things. So it is nonsensical to think of living things separately from their larger context. To remain viable, any living entity has to maintain reciprocal, nourishing relationships with all the levels of nested systems that it participates in. At the same time, because we are nested in systems, our actions, if thoughtfully designed, have the potential to create benefits that ripple out through multiple levels.

Nodal

Nodes are strategic points where an investment of effort produces transformative effects. Think of them as being like acupuncture points, places where a small intervention can shift the whole system. The city of Curitiba offers a wonderful example. Like many Brazilian cities, it was experiencing rapid growth of informal settlements or favelas. Because these favelas had no formal roads, there was no way to collect garbage and it was piling up, creating serious health problems. The city organized residents to gather the trash and bring it to the edges of the favelas, where it could be exchanged for tokens. These tokens could be used on public transport or in the local farmers markets. Through a single nodal intervention, the favelas were cleaned up, very poor people gained access to food and transportation, and local farmers and public transportation were supported. The mayor of the city named this solution multiplying approach "urban acupuncture."

Developmental

Regenerative development depends on evolving the capacity of all members of a community, human and non-human. In this image, we see students learning about Terra prieta, an ancient form of biochar that was used by indigenous people of the Amazon Basin to create one of the world's most biologically rich and diverse ecosystems. Rapid nutrient cycling in Amazon soils would ordinarily prevent them from building up fertility—all the nutrient is in the forest itself. However, by converting plant matter into charcoal, indigenous people were able to build fertile soils that have endured through centuries. In other words, indigenous people created ecological and agricultural wealth by developing the capacity of their soils to support life. In a similar way, these students are developing their own capacity to be life-generating agents by studying the carbon sequestration practices of ancient peoples.

Also, in case it isn't obvious, creating wealth requires enabling every citizen (and every ecosystem) to deliver their best. Discrimination, against people or against other species, is a waste of talent and undermines our ability to create wealth. Regenerative projects, by definition, seek to develop the inherent potential in everyone they touch. This is how communities becomes regenerative—they learn to evolve what they are doing in response to continually changing circumstances.