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Common Weal Policy

**WELLWASHING:
WHY A SUPERFICIAL APPROACH TO
WELLBEING ECONOMICS WILL FAIL**

COMMON WEAL



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KEY POINTS

- There has been much written and said about a Wellbeing Economy, unfortunately there are numerous examples of where the ideas presented are weakly related to the actual detailed work on what a Wellbeing Economy is or how to get there. Indeed, some of it presented recently in the independence supporting media, is profoundly confused.
- This has resulted in the term 'Wellbeing-Washing' being coined. This describes situations where the language of wellbeing is appropriated by design (or otherwise) to justify or reinvent existing neoliberal economic visions or where it is used for political purposes as a fashionable label under which to gather.
- This matters because before we can make strong progress towards a wellbeing economy, we must have a shared understanding of what it is and how to achieve it.
- Wellbeing is not an 'outcome' which can justify any means of delivering it. Wellbeing approaches based on our current economic model will not address the damage they cause including climate change and poverty.
- In a wellbeing economy, the economy is explicitly recognised as being subservient to the planet and society's needs. The economy delivers the needs of society and ensures planetary health.
- A wellbeing economy changes our economic system by changing the system goals. System goals matter because they can bring about profound change, quickly. This happens because all the infrastructure, institutions, materials, and processes within a system act to achieve the goal of the system. Changing the goal means all these elements of a system then move to work towards this new goal.

- The systems goal for a wellbeing economy can be understood as 'delivering social justice on a healthy planet'. This is achieved through 'designing in' the principals of Fairness, Dignity, Purpose, Access to nature and Participation. When these are hard wired into our economy through all the structures, policies and incentives used to build it, they create personal, community and societal wellbeing on a healthy planet. A wellbeing economy is therefore about how we design and do things, not just the results.
- Our current economic system goal is growing GDP which 'designs in' ecological and social failures through its exploitative principles. It needs to exploit nature to make all the 'stuff' used to satisfy needs and wants. It seeks to exploit labour by seeking lower cost through lower wages and regulation. Our current system goal therefore creates harms including poor health, poverty and climate break down. Harms we in Scotland spend billions of pounds mitigating.
- An economic vision focussing on GDP growth contains within it the drivers which harm progress on other indicators. This produces a feedback loop - no matter how much you grow GDP, the cost of mitigating its harm grows at the same rate so the gap remains.
- The concept of differentiating 'good growth' from 'bad growth' has been examined for years and is not supported by the academic literature. The primary problem is that this is a subjective judgment, and the process of politics is capable of redefining any growth as 'good', or 'sustainable' making the differentiation meaningless.
- This concept of 'good growth' takes its fullest form in the concept of 'decoupling' which is used to justify business as usual economics and government. Decoupling refers to trying to separate the need for physical inputs like materials to create economic growth (so, seeking to not use as much 'stuff' per pound of GPD produced) and seeking to separate economic growth from the pollution its create (less greenhouse gas per pound of GPD produced).
- But this 'decoupling' has not happened at anywhere near the rate it needs to and there is little available evidence to provide any confidence that it can ever work - and the planet is too close to tipping points to try it and wait to find out.
- Another area in pressing need of 'decoupling' is the belief that poverty is cured by GDP growth and is not a structural issue that is caused by the growth economy. In the end, 50 years of GDP growth have resulted in the same relative proportion poverty as beforehand. Poverty is a much wider issue than can be solved by increased benefit payments or subsidising the cost of providing public services.
- Focussing on energy transition is important but greatly insufficient to address the climate crises. Our current technology first approach to Just Transition and Net Zero are perpetuating our energy dependency on the oil and gas majors. This will perpetuate the cost-of-living crisis caused by being dependent on them for energy rather than localised, solutions in which communities have a stake and directly benefit.

- We can only address the climate crises by replacing the goal of our economic system, recognising that we live on a finite planet that cannot supply an ever-increasing desire for material abundance (irrespective of energy source) and that we must distribute goods and services equitably in order to achieve climate justice.
- Finally, there is an enormous disconnect between the measurable scale of the impact of climate change to humanity and the scale of the action being taken. One crucial area where the Wellbeing economy vision can be improved is to add a principle as to how change must be enacted. Crises can only be addressed through crises response and this requires emergency governmental response of the type seen during pandemics or conflict.
- Adapting existing economic orthodoxy or enacting a wellbeing economy using business as usual forms of government, governance and decision making will not work to address the crises faced in the time left to do so.

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INTRODUCTION

Much has been written and said recently by senior SNP and other independence movement figures regarding the need for a Wellbeing economy. We now have a Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair work and Energy, a Wellbeing Economy monitor and three leading figures in the SNP, Kate Forbes, Ivan McKee and Michelle Thomson recently wrote a detailed vision paper published by Common Weal titled: *Giving Substance to the Wellbeing Economy: A Discussion paper*. Their approach of attempting to address poverty and the climate crisis through generating tax revenue from a growing economy is the same basic approach taken by First Minister Humza Yousef in his 2023 Programme for Government.

It is hugely encouraging and indeed helpful that these powerful voices within the SNP set out how they understand and envisage a Wellbeing Economy and that they critically examine the role of the economy and its relationship with planetary health, people and society. Explicit in their work is the need for change and to find solutions to the perma-omni crises faced by many people in Scotland, the UK and across the globe. That they took the time to prepare their input highlights the traction made by the Wellbeing Economy (WBE) agenda in Government thinking, particularly in Scotland, and that in turn speaks to the dissatisfaction with what our current economic model delivers.

Whilst welcome, the WBE visions set out by Kate Forbes and colleagues, does not however correspond to the most clearly and concisely conceptualised and elaborated version set out by the Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WeAll). This organisation has been at the forefront of promoting this agenda to governments and business both in Scotland and elsewhere. WeAll's is a vision which celebrates concepts such as Donut Economics, Post-Growth, systems thinking, regenerative economics, feminist economics, and many others. This vision does not suffer from a lack of substance, but the lessons of this substance can be difficult to hear. It is a vision of systems change (and crucially how to achieve it), deep institutional and structural reformation, renewal and indeed creative destruction.

This paper will set out my understanding of WeAll's vision of the WBE and using a leverage point framework (Meadows, 1997) I will highlight misunderstandings driven by either paradigmatic differences or perhaps an excusable lack familiarity with related and critical research. My intention is to provide a positive critique and rereading of the WBE for the authors of *Giving Substance to the Wellbeing Economy* as well as Neil Gray (Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy), and others engaged and enthused by the hope of developing an economy that serves the planet and society.

I will show how changing paradigms or mindsets¹ creates the conditions to start acting like we are in crises and hence enact the legislation and adopt the policies at the speed and in the scope and depth required to solve the planetary emergencies and social injustices caused by extractive economic systems. In doing so I hope to contribute to closing the gaps between words and meaningful action, highlighted in the open letter sent on the 13th July 2023 to the First Minister Humza Yousef by the Wellbeing Economy Alliance and signed by over 200 campaigners, economists and academics. The need for this letter also talks to concern over 'Wellbeing Washing' a term used by WeAll's Michael Weatherhead at a recent symposium exploring how to operationalise wellbeing in fisheries.

I would like to reiterate that it is welcome that the authors of the *Giving Substance to the Wellbeing Economy* paper are engaging with this issue and have made a valuable contribution. While I will argue that their approach is flawed, it remains a serious and important attempt to contribute to the debate around the WBE and shows their desire to use their power to address wicked inequities in Scottish life. I critique this paper here in the hope of creating a better shared understanding of how to create an economy that delivers a social justice on a healthy planet.

THE WELLBEING OF THE PLANET AND SOCIETY AS SYSTEMS GOALS

So taking a step back, what is a WBE? WeAll define it as:

“A wellbeing economy delivers social justice on a healthy planet. It prioritises meeting our needs before our wants. And this includes human and planetary health. Access to nature, true participation, connection with communities, fairness through our institution and dignity to all.”

These are paradigmatic, structural and institutional level ideas, not ones suggesting that all we need to do is provide extra finance to fix complex and hitherto intractable problems. This vision also reorientates our view of the relationship between the economy, planet and people so that the economy’s role is to deliver the goals of social justice and a healthy planet. The economy is not the master, it is the servant to these others. This is point often missed.

In choosing social justice as what should be delivered, this economic vision sets equitable and fair distribution of prosperity as a goal and recognises that injustices are caused by the current system and must be designed out, not just mitigated. For examples, there is no room for accepting poor wages and conditions in the Global South as a hidden price for increased tax take from global entrepreneurialism. Just as a Circular Economy seeks to design-out waste, a Wellbeing Economy designs-out injustice.

The use of the words *healthy planet* in the above definition, also represents an essential design parameter and if properly understood, places restrictions on human activities because our world has boundaries (Rockström et al., 2009) within which it is safe to operate. There is only so much climate change we can cause, only so much plastic we can release into the environment and only so much of the planet’s finite freshwater resources that we can deploy for farming before humanity crosses these boundaries. In surpassing these, as we have done, through

the actions of extractive industrial economies, our planet’s regenerative capacity has been damaged and therefore so has the health of our world. A healthy planet and its ecosystems can provide and replace only so much stuff and absorb only so much pollution before it gets sick.

The WeAll definition also requires us to recognise that we should expect everyone’s *needs* for a safe, healthy, fulfilling life to be delivered, not everybody’s *wants*. These needs include; access to nature, true participation, connection with communities, fairness through our institution and dignity to all. However, these mustn’t be seen as outcomes, because as outcomes, we allow the thinking that the means justifies the ends. They don’t. Instead, these needs are design principles that must be integrated into how the economy delivers social justice on a healthy planet as well as what it delivers.

From these simple and powerful ideas runs perhaps the most fundamental misunderstanding of the WBE: It is not an economic vision that sets desirable wellbeing related outcomes for the economy. Instead, by reorienting our understanding of the relationship between the economy, planet and people, recognising hard ecological limits and setting a hierarchy on what the economy must deliver, it sets a new systems goal.

This point is related to what is often missed in the discussion around the importance of GDP growth. This is not just something that is important to countries and whose subsequent measurement provides an indicator of progress, though this is undoubtedly true. Instead, its importance it that it has come to represent the predominant global economic system goal.

Why do systems goals matter? It is because all the infrastructure, institutions, flows of information, materials and processes within a system act to achieve its goal. So, changing the goal means all these elements of a system then move to work towards this new goal.

To illustrate the power of this leverage point let’s consider how we could build an active travel network connecting every home and business and home in the Scotland. The fastest way to do this is to redefine the goal of the roads system,

not try and build new infrastructure. Edinburgh City Council did something similar during the covid crises through its 'Spaces for People' scheme which reallocated existing road space for walking and wheeling. This crisis-oriented systems goal approach delivered 39km of segregated cycle infrastructure plus 54 other improvements for £5million within a matter of weeks. Compared to this, the business-as-usual approach used for the City Centre West to East link (CCWEL) which is delivering less than 4kms, will cost £19.2 million and despite initial approval being granted in 2014, is still not complete.

A Wellbeing Economy is not therefore a different perspective on the current economic system where we change our governmental focus toward more socially-just or environmentally-protective outcomes. It is not a best-of-all worlds middle way, where growth-based global capitalism of the right is reengineered to produce the social justice of the left and planetary health of the Greens. Instead, it requires a shift in understanding of the relationship between the economy and our planet and people, and that the economy's subservient role is to support thriving societies based on the gifts possible from a thriving planet.

This reorientation should make us reaffirm our understanding that humans are part of the ecosystem, not distinct from it, not masters of all we survey. The three spheres, people, planet, profit, are not equal: the planet comes first as it provides all the conditions and materials to support life and all the things that are exchange in any economy.

So, as the Wellbeing Economy seeks to set a new systems goal, let's move to a detailed analysis of whether the vision and understanding set out in *Giving Substance to the Wellbeing Economy: A discussion paper* recognises this or whether it ultimately represents business-as-usual approach where the same outcome can be expected?

WHAT DO WE WANT THE ECONOMY TO DELIVER?

In *Giving Substance to the Wellbeing Economy* the authors ask "What do we want to the economy to deliver" and answer this with:

"To eradicate poverty, including reducing financial pressures on those who are 'struggling to get by', and to deliver our environmental ambitions, including Net Zero and biodiversity. In summary an economy that serves people and the planet."

Exploring this from a systems perspective, there are two encouraging parts to this: 'What do we want to the economy to deliver'; and 'In summary an economy that serves people and the planet'. These words recognise the subservient role of the economy, its job is to deliver, and this fits well with WeAll's vision explored above.

Distilled down, their two outputs of the economy are that it should 1) eradicate poverty and 2) deliver on the environmental ambitions set by Scottish government. These are not however at the same scales as ensuring a healthy planet or delivering social justice nor do the Scottish Government's ambitions reflect what science tells us is necessary. The second output also highlights the false 'Us vs Nature' dichotomy, where the earth's role is to deliver what we want from it, as we define it. Net Zero is also a hugely contested notion, that relies on what remains as speculative technologies or unavailable land to remove carbon pollution. Net Zero is not a vision for a healthy planet.

The authors go further and set out that "Alongside these the wellbeing economy should also ensure the financial capability of government to fund high quality public services, strengthen communities and support a good work-life balance". Indeed, governments should fund high quality public services, but I will leave the Modern Monetary Theory-based critique of this phrase to others.

Taken overall, however, their vision and desired outcomes explicitly represent a business-as-usual approach: grow the economy, tax it and then redistribute, with the needs of the economy taking pre-eminence. Their WBE *delivers outcomes* rather than *predesigns the economy* in order to build social justice and ensure a healthy planet. The mindset from which this emerges

(the belief in the pre-eminence of the market, of tax and spend and uncritical of growth or globalisation) then restricts them to solutions which rely on growth, tax and spending.

This mindset leads policymakers to the view that to increase biodiversity we have to bring in private finance to replant trees, paid for by marketing the resultant carbon credits. Being growth-oriented obscures policies such as stopping muirburn, protect the land from sheep and deer and letting nature take its course. This mindset creates opportunities for entrenched interests in finance, energy, food or housing construction as these provide comfortable, well understood routes to growth and taxation.

Ideas for supporting prosperity in local communities and business in ways not reliant on servicing existing hierarchies but instead entrenching them through equitable access to land and democracy are excluded because this development path for Scotland is unfamiliar, requires comfort with heterogeneity and loss of control. The business-as-usual vision is more open to fraud and false carbon and financial accounting and tax evasion. The other to local wealth building, resilience and thriving, year-round local economies.

MEASUREMENT MATTERS BUT IT DOES NOT NECESSARILY CHANGE OUTPUTS

Giving Substance to the Wellbeing Economy does helpfully address how commentaries on the WBE and/or wider critiques of our current system, are often reduced to debates about growth and growth in GDP in particular. It is something I am guilty of above, but have hopefully explained why it is so important. To be clear, WeAll's visions is agnostic on growth, the crucial point is that GDP growth in of itself must be replaced as the economy system goal.

It is encouraging to read the initial recognition that GDP is a flawed metric. GDP growth-based economies treat all growth as valuable; be it the

money spent helicoptering in a bottle of wine to a super-yacht or on more health equipment to manage heart attacks caused, in part, by poverty, or sales of wood-based insulation derived from local forestry sources. Robert Kennedy said it best during his 18 March 1968 speech to the University of Kansas (available in various places online); listing to him explain this still brings me goose bumps.

It should also be noted that whilst this section of the *Giving Substance* paper gives a nod to alternative measures, it can be accused of doing so rather half-heartedly. The assessment ultimately can be reduced to 'alternatives are harder so we will have to stick with what we've got'. It is perfectly possible, as they point out, to develop measures compatible with a more complex systems goal that recognise the interplays and contingencies inherent within it. In doing so, we move away from a simplistic uncritical number to more human, connected measurements where success represents deep seated improvements in our wellbeing and that of society and nature.

Measurement is clearly important and can indicate progress (or not), however the relationship between your goals and what you measure is complex. You can measure the wrong things in the wrong way, the right things in the wrong way or because you don't understand the relationships between them you can measure outcomes that are incompatible with your plans to improve them.

In focussing on poverty and the climate crises, the author choose laudable outcomes. However, according to decades of data and many expert-produced critiques, these outcomes are unlikely to be achieved by focussing on GDP and economic growth as the mechanism for progress. This is because poverty and environmental crises are in part *caused by* the current pursuit of economic growth. In essence it is like measuring success in a game of football by counting the number of player injuries.

As such the proposed economic solution to poverty and environmental crises don't recognise the reinforcing feedback loop that exists between them. Under current scenarios, more growth means more environmental damage, meaning

more tax is needed to mitigate and adapt to climate change, in turn reinforcing the idea that we need more growth and round and round we go. The demand for amelioration and adaptation solutions, just as with demand for health services caused by growth in sales of alcohol or high fat, high salt foods is called failure demand, an idea captured expertly in WeAll's report of the same name (2001). In turn, Forbes, McKee and Thomson attempt to address these concerns by exploring the notion of good and bad growth, and by seeking to decouple the good that a growing economy brings from the accompanying negative impacts. Whilst logically appealing, these are well known and rejected ideas.

GOOD GROWTH BAD GROWTH: WHO DECIDES?

Creating a *good vs bad growth* dichotomy is important for business-as-usual thinking as it allows the current system to be perpetuated by promising that if you know the difference between the two you can then just focus on the good growth. Various academic movements that critically examine growth have, for decades, discussed this notion. Part of their concern is that governments and business end up trying to justify the growth of all sectors, business and entrepreneurialism as being good.

For example, growing the amount of natural gas used, according to the oil and gas industry is good because they claim it is an intermediate fuel that is better for the environment than coal. Then coal is good, just for now, as it keeps the lights and heating on. Helping to grow a international cyanide-based home insulation company is good because their products reduce heat loss and so on. Where is the line? What are the criteria for determining good from bad? Are all companies worth supporting because they provide jobs? There is considerable subjectivity here and potential for abuse. Either way, growing the economy as currently delivered ignores the very clear fact that our planet cannot support an economy of its current size, let alone one that grows further.

THE DECOUPLING FALLACY

This takes us to the issue of decoupling: the idea that economies can keep growing if they break the relationship between GDP and the inputs required for this growth (the iron, the oil, the fertiliser etc) and its negative environmental impacts (greenhouse gases etc). In *Giving Substance to the Wellbeing Economy*, the authors step into this debate by stating "the solution to this isn't less economic growth, it is to take steps to ensure these other measures grow faster than GDP". This argument is based on the hope of being able to grow the economy and not damage the planet or society. Again, this is born of a world view that ensures solutions keep coming back to growth.

This thinking and the hundreds of examples of it I have seen embedded within national, substate and organisational Net Zero transition plans, ignores the evidence that decoupling is not happening at the scale or extent required in the time we have available to avoid 2C degrees of warming. Or even 2.5 degrees. This is a summary of the literature examining the relationship between materials (the stuff you need to make stuff), the greenhouse gasses caused by extracting, making, shipping, using and disposing of stuff, and GDP. For example, by analysing the results of 835 studies examining decoupling, Wiedenhofer et al. (2020) and Haberl et al (2020) summarise that, based on current observations, we cannot expect to decouple material usage, GHG emissions and GDP growth quickly enough globally to meet our emissions targets. This is the vital conclusion to which policy-makers must listen. What this means is that we cannot 'green' or 'inclusively' grow our way out of the environmental crises. To think we can do this is to ignore the science and wish away these crises.

This is the vital conclusion to which policy-makers must listen. What this means is that we cannot 'green' or 'inclusively' grow our way out of the environmental crises. To think we can do this is to ignore the science and wish away these crises.

Indeed, this was also the conclusion of the advice given to the Scottish Government by the Decoupling Advisory Group in 2020 whose

report for Zero Waste Scotland *Building Back Better: Principles for sustainable resource use in a wellbeing economy* (the author of this paper was also a member of the Group and contributing author of the final report) included 43 recommendations for action at Scottish Government and local authority levels which, if implemented, would embed the principles of both wellbeing and a circular economy into Scottish politics at a strategic and policy level. In effect, it helped to set a benchmark against which future policies could be judged.

Turning now to the specific policy agenda set out by Forbes, McKee and Thomson to realise their poverty alleviation and net zero outcomes. I hope to show how the applying the principles of the WBE and adopting leverage point approach leads to more powerful structural and upstream solutions.

THE POVERTY TRAP: ULTIMATELY, IS NOT ALL ABOUT THE MONEY

“Put simply, without the money to pay for it no one gets less poor.”

What do top line GDP and Poverty statistics tell us about this view? For 1999/2000, tax revenue in the UK represented 35% of GDP; in 2021 it had grown to 36.7% (hence tax receipts have grown relative to the size of the economy). But the economy has also been growing, from £1,689 billion in 1999 to £3,131 billion in 2021. During a similar period, overall poverty rates have been stable at 1 in 5 people and 1 in 4 children since 2004 (Commons library, 2023)². The Resolution Foundation expects that across the UK, 800,000 extra people will fall into absolute poverty, due to the cost-of-living crises by 2023/24 (Brewer, Fry, & Try, 2023).

There are different statistics for relative and absolute measures of poverty and appalling regional difference within and across countries. But the broad relationship remains: rising GDP and rising relative tax take are not reducing poverty levels. Perhaps 36.7% is not enough,

perhaps GDP is not high enough? Or perhaps the assumptions underlying what causes poverty – that it is linked to lack of money and materials (hence its name, the Material view of poverty) is flawed or too simplistic and other solutions are required. The authors recognise in their discussion paper that poverty has structural determinants and as such is a crisis that governments have significant powers to address. However, their material view has been rejected as a meaningful understanding of this experience and the conditions that create it.

In opposition to this understanding, the *capability* view argues that in analysing poverty, the focus should also be on what people are able to do and be. Poverty, by this view, is not just about lack of money, it is the poverty of having low expectations, little or no agency, severely limited opportunities for different forms of living and the lack of community, non-market assets required for good health, fitness, socialising and creating. Focusing on a lack of money leads to a narrow set of financed based temporary fixes representing low power leverage points. The solution put forward in the paper, “Increasing wages, targeted social security support and reducing household costs – in particular, energy costs”, are the ways many governments have tried to address income inequality. They are however incapable on their own of tackling poverty and addressing the cost of living crisis because they feed money into a system designed to continually extract more and more wealth from households in the name of GDP growth.

For example, you can raise the real minimum wage to £30 an hour but if we don’t address house prices and energy dependency then all you are doing is subsidising landlords and global energy and food corporations (which the authors do address but is often absent from the debate). The economic system focussed on growth and always seeking new places to extract wealth remains poised to take the £30 and then celebrate the higher tax return from rising rents, energy sector and bank profits. This approach is policy equivalent of giving hungry people a fish (of course this is most welcomed when you have no food) all the while encouraging the system that allows the global fishing fleet to empty the oceans. Giving them a fish then a bigger and then a bigger, polluted fish wrapped in plastic, will never

eradicate poverty. All it does is alleviate hunger, whilst also contributing to long term ill health.

At a deeper leverage point, we address poverty through our understanding of its upstream causes. In terms of food precarity, for example, this would lead us to address poverty through addressing our complicity in the global food system, including retailing, and how this dictates what is in our food, its quality, freshness and nutritional values. We would examine how we value meals and mealtimes, how we address time pressures on families so making learning to cook and enjoy mealtimes together possible. We can address ill health through addressing land costs and institutional power so that building companies don't have to make a choice between reasonable profit or high insulation standards and they can build new homes with enough space for a dinner table. Capability poverty can be better addressed through increasing what people can do and be, though localisation, decentralisation and democratisation.

We could continue to focus improving health as a condition of poverty through more funding for the NHS to deal with the heart attacks caused by economic activities that increase GDP (alcohol, processed food sales, annexing urban land to build new flats etc). Or we could, as part of the answer, address issues such as availability of time and places to exercise by supporting the local democratic structures that allow communities to decide what sports facilities they need, then run them themselves. Focussing on access so people have places to play, run, walk, jump throw, cycle, spectate, coach and volunteer, safely and out the rain. Unless we address ill health, despair and loneliness that underpin substance abuse, it is hard to imagine how people blighted by these issues can take advantage of better jobs and rates of pay.

What I've described above represent the principles of the WBE applied to one type of failure demand. If used, these principles design out the causes of poverty, inequality ill-health and lack of participation in society. They are design criteria for an economy that delivers social justice on a health planet. In the final section, I repeat the form of analysis above to highlight how different paradigms lead to different solutions to the climate crises.

PLANETARY HEALTH: CRISIS #1,

"Secondly the focus on tackling the climate emergency through the energy transition is critical."

Whilst it is critical to tackle the climate emergency, doing so through the vision of the energy transition that planned by the Scottish Government is not the most powerful way of achieving this. The current approach is a technology first approach, where the engineering to be relied upon is nowhere near ready for the scale required of it in the time available. Re-entrenching the power of the oil and gas industry via CCUS and hydrogen will not deliver social justice on a healthy planet. It will re-enshrine energy dependency perpetuating of the cost-of-living crisis.

It is certainly worth acquainting yourself with the statistics on actual success of long-term sequestration of carbon via CCUS, how fast this capacity is growing and how much land we need if we think we can offset by planting trees whilst we build the renewable energy infrastructure. We can believe in unicorns all we like, but we can't try to ride them to work, particularly when the health of our planet, the sustainability of our society is at stake and the cost-of-living crisis is biting so hard.

Neither are we moving to a Circular Economy anywhere near fast enough to reduce the demand for more materials to build more energy infrastructure. Systematically accumulating waste and physical destruction are incompatible with a health planet and social justice.

For developed countries the most powerful approach to tackling the climate emergency is by recognising planetary boundaries, rejecting the need (or more accurately, the want) for ever increasing material abundance and facilitating an equitable distribution of goods and services to achieve climate justice. In a wellbeing economy, we would relish getting to the point of 'arrival'

(Trebeck & Williams, 2019), where we all have sufficient for our needs. This thinking allows us to then set new systems goals for our economy where new technologies work towards achieving these goals.

CRISES: WHAT CRISES?

Following on from the earlier discussion around the lack of crises orientation, arguably the next most powerful step to take is to act like the climate emergency is an emergency. Four years after the Scottish Government announced we are in a climate crisis we are still doing business as usual and there is nothing in current responses or that suggest that people are truly recognising poverty and environmental destruction are emergencies and that they should respond to as such.

Each week now we hear of an increasing intense environmental disaster unfolding closer to home that significantly affects a community's ability to thrive or disrupts a global supply chain. Every day, one in five children in Scotland are living in damp bedrooms and suffering from the poor-quality insufficient food and highly stressed home lives that come with living in poverty. It was one in five 20 years ago and doubling GDP and increasing the amount and proportion of tax take since has not changed this. None of these is a crisis for tomorrow.

So, before policy-makers set out details of how to increase wages or productivity or which renewable energy technology they favour, their mindsets need to include a crisis-orientated sense of urgency, ruthless prioritisation and focus to how they will govern, legislate, regulate markets and allocate funding.

We may already reached the tipping point where we will inevitably lose the Amazon rainforest to dieback and the Greenland ice sheet. If you think we are not in a crisis of the same magnitude and bigger than Covid, then either you're not up on the latest science or are choosing to ignore it. If you do know about this and believe it and think we can green grow our way out of this, then you're not up on the established social science or

are choosing to ignore it.

So, beyond the need for ruthless prioritisation, crises requires confident, muscular governments prepared to make difficult decision as what assets need to be co-opted to address the emergency. This includes adopting a bounded form of capitalism where the competitive spirit of the market is focussed around delivering the products and services required to deal with the emergency. This was how governments responded when the WHO declared Covid a public health emergency.

How might this work for the renewable energy transition that is undoubtedly required? A recent analysis of the policy conditions capable of ensuring sufficient green hydrogen is produced to meet its share of global decarbonisation models³ could find only two examples from history: Vaccine roll out during Covid, and the conditions created by the US government to manage the arms industry during the Second World War. Both are stories of bounded capitalism in response to a crisis.

Acting like we are in crises, in the way we did over Covid, would see us using emergency powers to speed up dramatically local scale renewable energy technologies. Let's take wind turbines as an example. If we did this right it would invest in R&D to build a competition which would see collaboration to choose a winning design that all manufacturers can make if they choose to, and where they can compete by making more at lower prices and to higher quality. It would see us pushing emergency powers through parliament to heighten insulation standards and setting up of a national insulation company quickly in requisitioned manufacturing sites. It would ensure that that application for repowering existing windfarms have different, less onerous planning requirements than the original applications. It would use big carrots and big sticks to set up the supply chains. It would mean not giving money or attention to areas of the economy that work against the immediate goal, no support for companies generating tax revenue from junk consumption, that sucks up investment capital and time.

Bringing social justice to the fore of the response to the climate emergency leads to a

greater understanding the importance of local solutions supported by global collaboration. Social justice predesigns collaboration and participation and bring to the fore repair, servicing, remanufacturing as more social forms of value creation that create new skills, markets, communities and business.

From there, how we address the energy system starts to look very different. It allows consideration of solutions that address both the Just Transition and cost of living crises where government policy focusses on creating energy independence at a household and community level through ‘fabric first’ approach, with local energy systems and energy storage second. It is these sorts of initiatives that bring jobs, good ones where people live. These jobs provide services for the communities and downscaled and empowered by local democracy and decision making allow smaller businesses able to compete against the large corporations rather than relying on subcontracts. This approach looks to address the cost-of-living crises by reducing bills, driving out costs, local wealth building, and recognising that the important thing about wages is that they are fair and can pay for what is needed. This is not the same as increasing take home pay or topping them up through benefits. It puts our economic future in those we can trust, not in global organisation who have shown repeatedly that they only thing we can trust them to do is to act in their self-interest.

SUMMARY

REFERENCES AND COMMENTS

1. Mindsets and Leverage Points: Mindsets are the beliefs and cognitive capacities people bring to contexts within their lives and frame what actions and solutions they perceive as possible. They are learned and malleable, and so can be changed. They frame how we interpret and understand the situation in which the mindset is triggered, and in turn constrain what we can propose as solution. Because of this their importance is that represent the most powerful systems change leverage point. Meadows explains through her Leverage

There is much to welcome in the paper *Giving Substance to the Wellbeing Economy*; it sees senior politicians trying to engage seriously with the biggest challenges of our time. But it also represents a widespread problem with the representation of what the Wellbeing Economy really is. Seeing it as a ‘good’ growth-based economy with nicer outcomes, is either co-option of this school of thought for an existing orthodox economic vision, or more simply, it is a misinterpretation and misunderstanding of what the WBE proposes based on the dominant mindset or paradigm.

Ultimately, this reflects a vision for green growth with some paternalistic redistribution, a plan that has been rebutted by extensive research and years of observation in the real world and which does not have an adequate answer to environmental or social emergencies. As such, this misinterpretation of what a Wellbeing Economy is does not represent a crisis-driven reorientation of the economy nor does it sufficiency reflect the core goal of deliver social justice on a health planet where our needs for dignity, participation in society, being well fed, warm housed, healthy and safe are guaranteed, not at the mercy of tax collection.

This paper sought to show how mindsets matter in allowing an understanding of a WBE that truly ‘serves people and the planet’ and what the deeper leverage point solutions can be. It also sought to help align the interpretation of a growing number of authors and interested parties around an understanding that the WBE by explaining that’s not a business-as-usual tax and spend economy seeking to produce wellbeing. Instead, it seeks to set a new systems goal and through ensuring that access to nature, true participation, connection with communities, fair institutions, and dignity to all, are designed into the economy through every policy and structure, it delivers planetary, personal and social wellbeing for all.

points framework, those places (fulcrums or acupuncture points) where relatively small interventions can have large impacts on a system (Meadows 1996). Whilst we often talk about systems change, leverage points provide a framework for how to enact it. The solutions typically discussed to address poverty for example, tax changes, subsidies and welfare payments represent what Meadow shows are the least powerful points; forms of minor, temporary change to system that still causes the damage you are trying to mitigate. They are the policy equivalent of giving the hungry a fish (of course this is most welcomed when you have no food) all the while encouraging the system that allows the global fishing fleet to empty the oceans. Giving them a fish then a bigger and then a bigger, polluted fish wrapped in plastic, will never eradicate poverty. All it does is alleviate hunger, perhaps whilst also contributing to long term ill health.

2. For a recent examination of Poverty in Scotland please read, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/deepening-poverty-scotland-no-one-left-behind> . Whilst the authors main recommendations would be welcome, I believe it still falls well short of what is required to eradicate the conditions that create poverty.

3. The models here limit hydrogens role to energy storage and heavy transport, not for hydrogen heating or use in personal transport

4. The focus in building quality removing the need for heating/cooling or mechanical airflow

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