

FOREWORD

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What is sufficiency?



Mahatma Gandhi's wisdom should continue to guide us as we explore the vexed question of Sufficiency. He reminded us that Mother Earth has enough for everyone's need, but never enough for everyone's greed.

The question before us is whether the dominant global economies system

is compatible with Sufficiency? The driver force behind the dominant capitalist economic system is consumerism. The higher the levels of consumption, the happier corporations are to see their products dominating markets leading to higher profits, and faster economic growth measured as GDP. This despite the unanswerable scientific evidence that the quest for higher economic growth rates and high consumption levels is pushing our planet out of its safe operating space. Humanity has already breached six of the nine Planetary Boundaries of the safe operating space for a liveable planet¹.

Sufficiency is an attitude of mind. In the village culture of my childhood in Limpopo Province of South Africa, we were brought up to be satisfied with whatever we received – from small gifts to the food set before us at meal times. Unhappy people were known to always compare what they received with what others got. The saying was that: *Sijagobe a se khore* – a greedy person is never satisfied. Both Mahatma Gandhi and African ancient wisdom teach us the same lesson – sufficiency is in the mind.

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A mindset of sufficiency is linked to our understanding of what it means to be human. Human beings are one the species on Earth that is wired to be in relationships with other humans. We cannot survive and thrive in isolation from other humans. From the cradle to the grave, we rely on the support of others. To be human is to be interconnected and interdependent with others, within the web of life. In Africa this understanding is called Ubuntu/Omenala/AjobiBiakoye. We are defined by our 'being', not by our 'having'.

The Covid pandemic also reminded us, often in very painful ways, how being within supportive loving relationships shapes our sense of wellbeing. The lower than expected mortality rates from COVID in many poor African settings, has yet to be explained by scientists. But there is suggestive evidence that communities that rallied together to support the

most vulnerable, fared better than those without networks of support. Sufficiency comes from our being nested within loving supportive complementary relationships.

It is also now well documented that indigenous communities across the globe comprising no more than 6% of the global population, effectively steward 80% of critical ecosystems hosting

biodiversity resources essential to sustaining life. The footprint of these indigenous communities is light due to their embedded cultural orientation of sufficiency and acute awareness of the importance of embracing life beyond human life. Indigenous cultures are also anchored by acute awareness of intergenerational interconnectedness, mutual

¹ Stockholm Resilience Centre.

responsibilities, and understanding, that human beings are part of nature. Humans do not have dominion over nature. They regard all life as sacred and deserving of the same respect as human life. Critically important is the understanding that as part of nature we do not own the land, but the land owns us as the source of our life and of its sustenance.

In 2009, scientists mapped nine planetary boundaries for the first time, to set out what constitutes safe operating space for our planet. The nine planetary boundaries are: climate change; the erosion of biosphere integrity; stratospheric ozone depletion; ocean acidification; atmospheric aerosol loading; bio geochemical flows in the nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) cycles; chemical pollution (introduction of novel entities in the environment); land-system change; global freshwater use. Human life can only be sustained within this safe operating space. But our human footprint continues to grow, threatening our very sustainability.

Measurements of changes in planetary boundaries have been done for the first time in September 2023. These measurements indicate that we have breached six of the nine planetary boundaries, namely: climate change; biosphere integrity (including biodiversity), freshwater availability, land use, nutrient pollution and human made waste such as plastics. The driver of these breaches is over-consumption of goods and services beyond

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human need. The more we consume, the higher the growth, regardless of the impact of what we consume on our wellbeing and our planet.

The planetary emergencies upon us today are evidence of humanity operating beyond the safety margins of our planet. Climate change with droughts and floods is causing enormous human and other species suffering. Continued burning of fossil fuels despite the knowledge and technological competence to transition to renewable energy sources, is setting off temperatures rises that have breached 1,5 degree Celsius. Inappropriate political and economic models have created inequities in societies at national, regional and global levels, are fuelling wars. Insatiable global arms industrial complexes thrive by perfecting the production of more and more lethal weapons.

Biodiversity loss is decimating landscapes and sources of freshwater such as the Amazon region. Global greed is turning the Amazon, our biggest planetary lung, into a carbon emitter. Deforestation and production of soybeans, palm oil, and cattle grazing have degraded the Amazon. Global pandemics are also reminding us that our planet is out of balance. These planetary emergencies are warning signs for us to return to the essence of our being – embracing our interconnectedness and interdependence within the web of life across time and space.

The good news is that the winds of change are blowing in many areas across the globe, and they are gathering momentum. The inspiration comes

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from indigenous communities and their leaders who are speaking up. I was recently at a Bioneer Summit in San Francisco and was inspired by listening to the growing chorus of indigenous voices from across the globe who are calling us to come home – home to nature-based solutions, wisdom, intelligence, and the joy of living in harmony with nature.

As a member of the Planetary Guardians established in 2023, with a Vision of “*A bright Future where People and the Planet Flourish*” I urge everyone, everywhere to be a committed guardian of our planet. Planetary Guardians are an independent collective of eminent people, including retired public leaders, scientists, business people, with a Mission to “elevate the science to make the Planetary Boundaries a measurement and operating framework for the world to urgently restore a healthy relationship with our planet.”

Brazil, as the host of COP30 in 2025, as well as key member of the G20, is an ideal country to pilot some of the proposed interventions to halt the degradation of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity. Brazil is the most advanced large country that is making the transition from fossil to renewable energy. 83% of its energy is sourced from renewables, and it is committed to completing the process of full renewables by 2030. Brazil has a strategic plan and a commitment for reforestation of the Amazon and restoration of life giving ecosystems and biodiversity. The Planetary Guardians are committed to support this great transition which will have significant global impacts.

Costa Rica is another country that made a decision in the 1940s, not have a military but to invest its public resources in high quality free education and wellbeing for all citizens. That decision has paid huge dividends. The country is also well on the way to full circular economy and the transition to renewable energy sources.

The African continent with its Agenda 2063 has huge opportunities to make the transition from extractive wasteful economic models to leveraging its abundance of land, sun, wind and biodiversity to become a flourishing youthful continent. A critical success factor for Africa is transitioning from old post-liberation leaders, who are married to extractive economic systems, to harness youthful skilled, creative, professional leadership, to lead the continent to prosperity in the second half of the 21st century. Transformation of dominant extractive economic models would also need to change towards inclusive bottom-up socio-economic development processes, that leverage science and technology. Protection of local ecosystems and cultural heritage are critical to promote shifting towards sufficiency mindsets.

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We all need to break free from the trappings of over-consumption and learn anew how to live within the means of the safe operating space

set within scientifically mapped and measured planetary boundaries. We need to break free from extractive economic systems that promote wasteful consumption driven lifestyles. Embracing sufficiency borne of healthy relationships with self, family, community, wider society and ecosystems would see us thrive and flourish.

This FACTS Issue on Sufficiency will challenge us to re-evaluate our relationships with material goods and services. There can never be enough for us to consume material goods at the current rates. We need a shift in our mindsets about how much is enough. We have to embrace sufficiency as a way of life in a world where there is wellbeing for all within a healthy planet.

