

A just transition: economy, ecosystems, equality

Transition means change!



Published by groundWork
August 2021



ground**Work**

Tel: +27 33 342 5662
www.groundwork.org.za

This booklet is part of the resources that groundWork is producing for its Environmental Justice School for Activists.

This booklet aims to help us understand what we mean by a just transition. To do this we need to understand how the economy works and what is wrong with it. We can then look at a different type of economy that offers a better way of living well for us all.

Written by Jeanne Prinsloo with the valuable assistance of Elda Lyster

Illustration: Tammy Griffin

Design and layout: Toni Olivier



We can't look at Just Transition until we understand more about the economy, so let's focus on that first.

Tough economic times

SA economy should recover strongly next year, predicts economist

Cash needed to grease wheels of economic growth

Economy has grown by 0.7%

SA faces economic crisis



Hey, Sipho, all the time people are saying the economy this, the economy that. But, serious, what is this thing called the economy really?

Ja, Thandi. I know. We all hear it from politicians and business people all the time, but what does it mean? What are they talking about?



And what I want to know is what does it have to do with me?

Good questions, guys! So how do we begin to understand this? It is a complicated idea and so we need to put together the bits that make it up. Here we first look at:

1. The word 'economy', what it can mean, and different kinds of economies: household, national and global economies
2. The ecosystem

Then we move to:

3. The five components of any economy
4. The extractive economy
5. A regenerative economy

If you understand these ideas, you'll know what we mean by

6. a just transition!



The Economy



What does the word economy mean?



The English word 'economy' comes from ancient Greek and is made up of *eco* (home) + *nomy* (management). So, the word 'economics' first meant managing the home. You can think of 'home' as being a household, a district, a country or the whole planet. The

word 'economy' now is mostly used to talk about managing all the resources of a country or even the world.

Now, as you can imagine you can manage the home (or the country or the world) well or badly. It all depends on *how* you do it and *why* you do it. Nowadays, most of us think that the economy is about money or trading or stock markets. This is just one way of thinking about the economy. Economies can be looked at in many other ways. For example, instead of asking about money in the bank or investments, you could ask different questions like:

- ▶ *How healthy is the soil—or the water — or the air that the home has?*
- ▶ *How healthy is the soil — or the water — or the air of the country you live in?*
- ▶ *How healthy is the soil — or the water — or the air of the whole planet Earth?*

It depends on what you think the purpose of the economy is. The purpose can be to turn all the resources into profit for a few rich people (this is known as the extractive economy). The opposite purpose can be to use land, resources, life and work for the good of the whole planet Earth and all people on it (this is known as the regenerative economy). A regenerative economy builds a healthy ecosystem.

Ecosystems



Eish, the what-system?



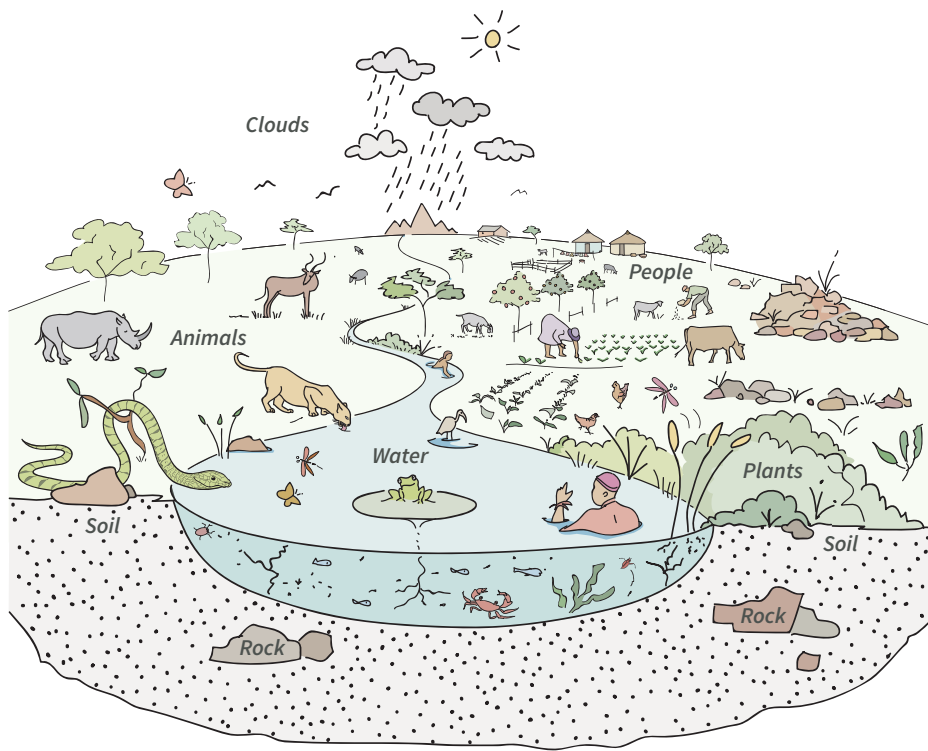
Ecosystem is a word that also comes from ancient Greek: *eco* (home) + *system* (together). It means all the connections in the 'home'. It includes everything that exists in a place: plants, animals, people, water, soil, rocks and air. But, most importantly, an ecosystem is about how all these are connected to each other and depend on each other. How we manage any one of those things will have an impact on other things in the ecosystem.

Why do we need to know about this ecosystem? It just sounds complicated.



Well, it's a strange word, but what it means for us is that everything in the system is connected to everything else. An ecosystem is a community of all living things (plants, people, animals, insects, fungi, bacteria) that share the physical environment of nonliving things (sunlight, water, air, soil, rocks, minerals and the climate). An ecosystem can be as small as a puddle or as large as the Pacific Ocean or the desert or the whole planet.

The main point to remember is that all the elements of an ecosystem are inter-related. They all depend on one another.

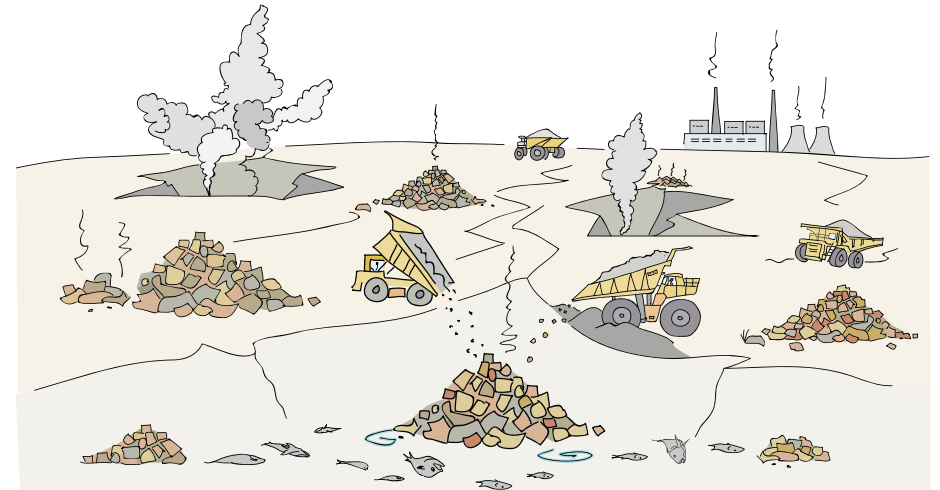


ECOSYSTEM

If you upset one part of an ecosystem it then breaks the system. Just think what happens when droughts destroy the plant life. Animals that depend on plant life have nothing to eat. Fruit growth depends on insects like bees to pollinate the trees. If all the bees got wiped out by disease, there would be no pollination and no fruit! Think about how this then affects the rest of the ecosystem?

Some people have a long relationship with the ecosystems that they are part of. They know how to be in harmony with their environment and nature and they leave zero waste, just like in nature.

Other groups of people manage the environment badly and they damage the ecosystem. They strip the natural resources which cannot be renewed, and dump their waste everywhere. This is a disaster for the ecosystem.



So are you saying that the economy should be about managing resources for a healthy environment and everybody's well-being?



In a perfect world, yes!

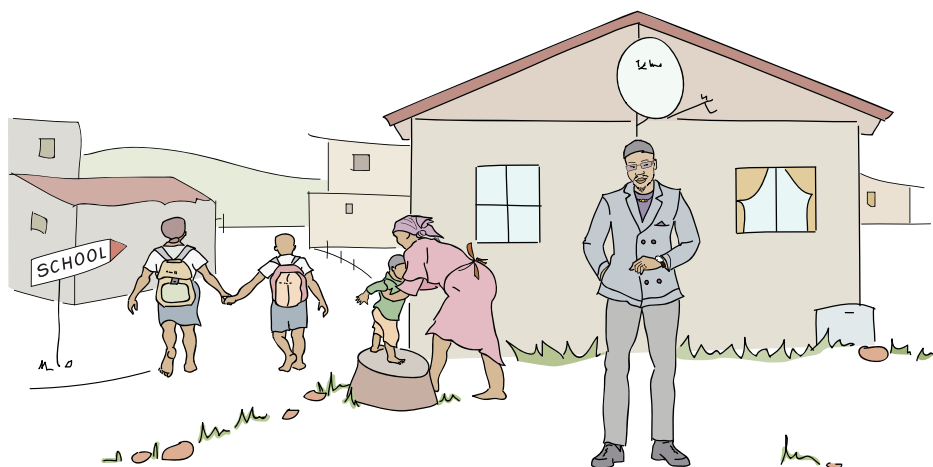


So, why then are there still so many poor and hungry people? Why do rich people have so much? Is it because some people are not doing their jobs properly, or what???

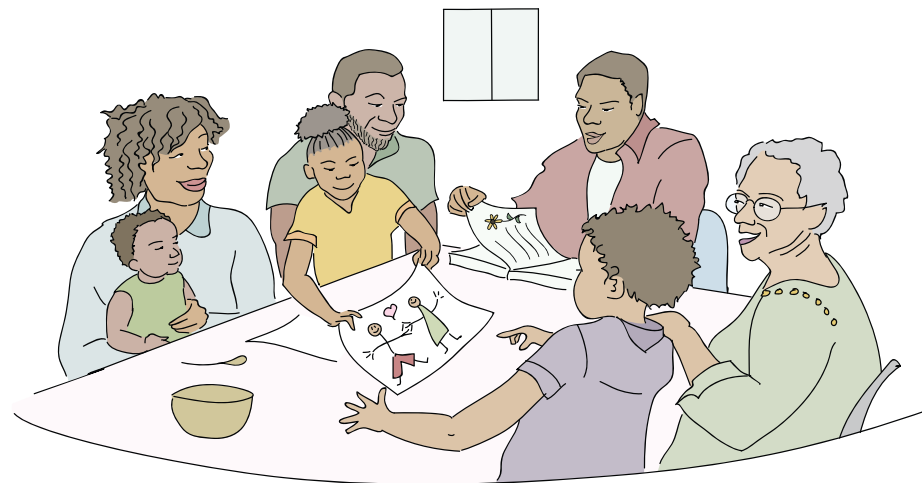
Good questions! To answer them, let's try to understand how the economy works.

Different types of economy

First think about how different households manage their resources. In some households one person, sometimes the mother but often the father, makes all the decisions. He will say who must do what, how the money must be used, who will benefit the most, who must be punished, and so on. He can even just use the money for his own pleasure and no-one is allowed to argue with him.



In another household, people will talk together about how to manage things and they will decide on what is most important and how to share resources.



It is the same for the economy of the country and the whole world. There are different kinds of economies. We live under a capitalist economic system like most of the rest of the world. Capitalism came to South Africa with the settlers. People have come to accept it as normal over time, but there are other ways to organise society and we will look at another economic system on **page 25**.

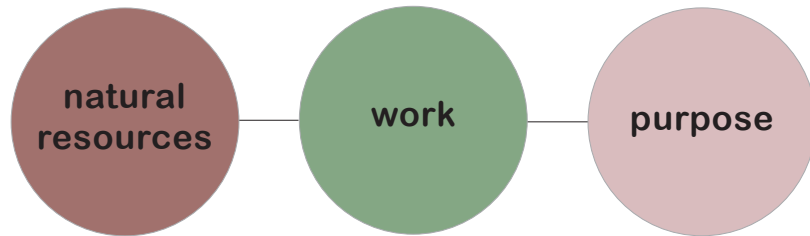


Eish! I need some more explanation!

Components of the economy



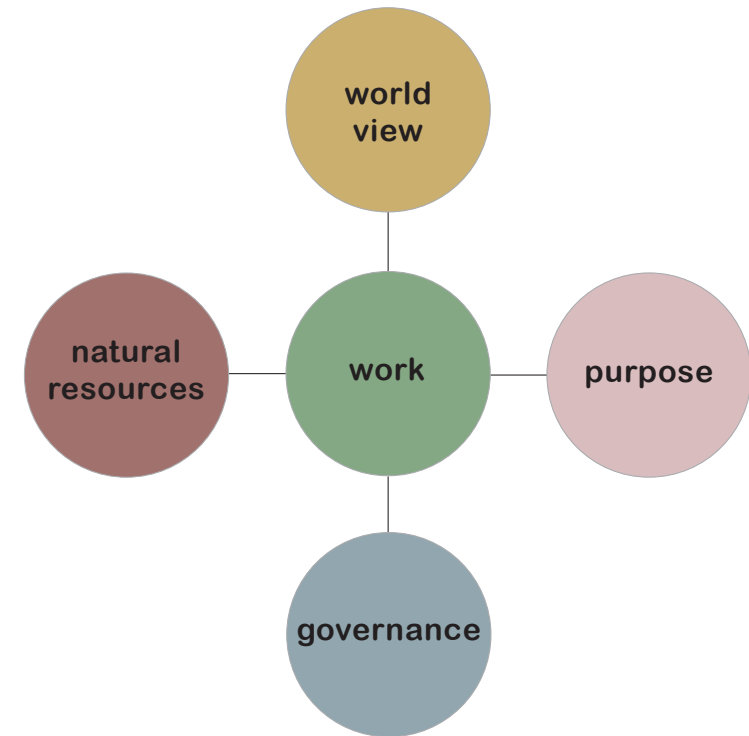
Well, here's a way to think about the economy. All economies are built from the same components.



To start with, all environments have some **natural resources**. They will be different in different places. Minerals are natural resources. So are water, air, soil, plants, animals and many other things. In all societies people 'do' something with the natural resources. In other words, they work with them, and in all societies people work. And the **work** they do always has a **purpose**. So, for example, a peasant farmer will use seeds, water, and organic compost (natural resources) to plant and harvest crops (the work) to provide food for survival and a good life (purpose). Nutrients (goodness) are put back into the soil in the form of compost and manure.

However, if we think about mining, it is the rich mining corporations who organise how the natural resources are extracted and processed by workers. Their purpose is not a good life for all. They are interested in profit and a good life for themselves.

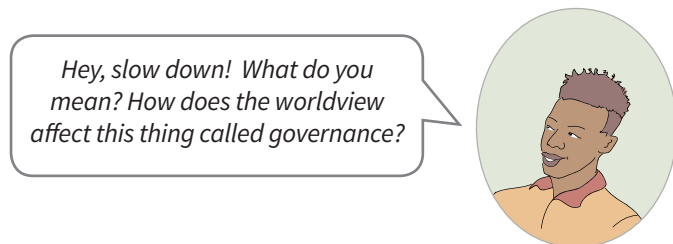
As well as the first three components, there are two more: worldview and governance. The fourth component is the **worldview** which explains how people make sense of the economy that they are part of.



A **worldview** is how you look at the world, how you think it works, why things happen the way they do, and what your purpose is. When it comes to the economy, the worldview includes the ideas we have about the economy from family, school, religion and the media. We are told how the economy must work, and what activities are part of it. A capitalist worldview is based on the idea that bosses are entitled to make a profit from the labour of workers and that more and more goods must be produced all the time so they can make money.

The fifth component is **governance** or how the economy is organised and managed. When you think about governance, think about what it takes to run a government or an organisation. The idea of governance includes what people who are governed expect, the decisions that are made, and what is expected of leaders. In other words, governance is the act of governing and controlling — through making policies, establishing processes of control, and deciding who has responsibilities.

Of course, the way governance is carried out depends on the worldview because the kind of worldview determines the kind of governance.



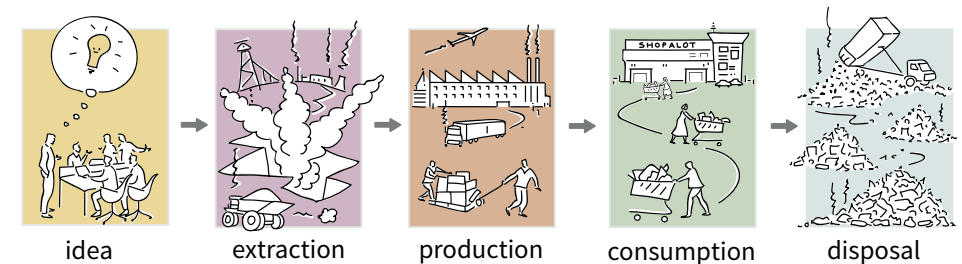
Right, let's look at this more carefully. We will look at two different kinds of economy, the **extractive** economy and the **regenerative** economy.

The extractive economy



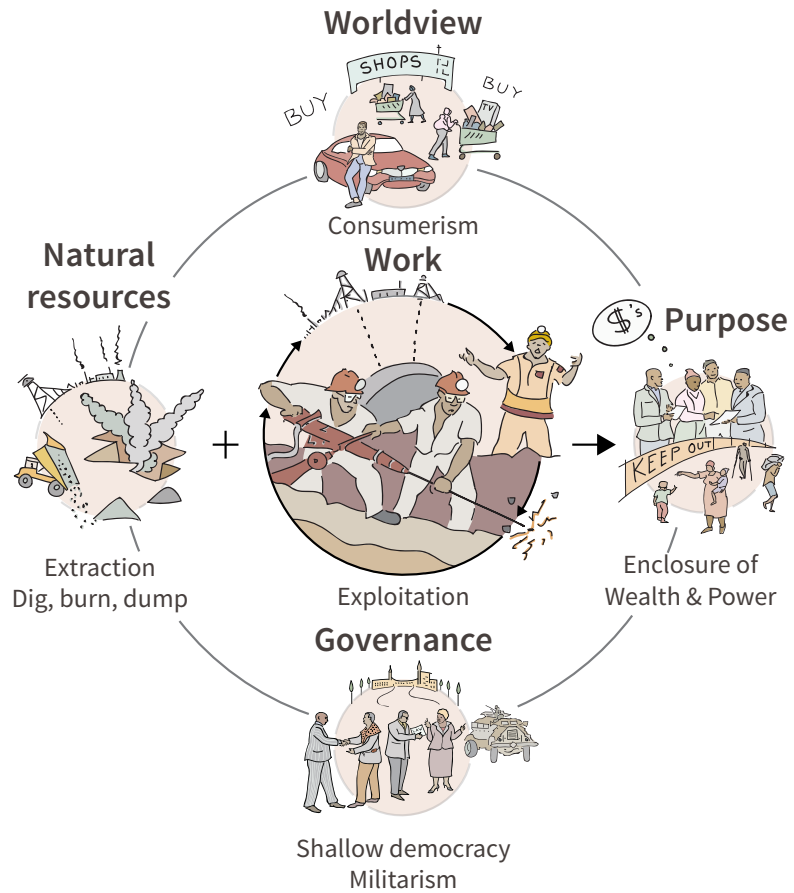
The dominant economy (capitalism) that we, and most of the world, live under is also called the extractive economy because it takes things out of the earth as if they are unlimited. This is done through activities like mining, drilling and deforestation without caring about the consequences.

The extractive economy is also described as 'linear' because it operates in one direction only, like a line. Things are taken out of the earth again and again without putting anything back. The first step in an extractive economy begins with an idea to make money for a few.



Extract means to take out, for example, a dentist extracts your tooth. Extraction here means taking out (and not putting back).

EXTRACTIVE ECONOMY



Extraction of natural resources

The extractive economy takes advantage of the natural resources which are taken out from where they exist naturally. They are not replaced. Here are some examples of how an extractive economy works.

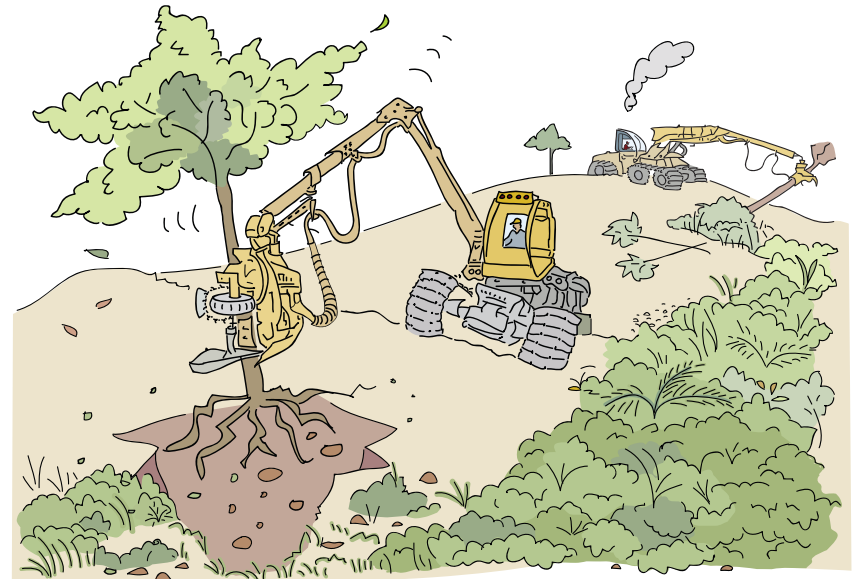
Mining

Mining is all about digging up the ground to get a particular mineral from under the ground. All the left over waste is just dumped close by. Whole mountains get blown up with explosives. Rivers and lakes depend on mountain rainfall, but this can't happen if mountains get blown up and flattened.

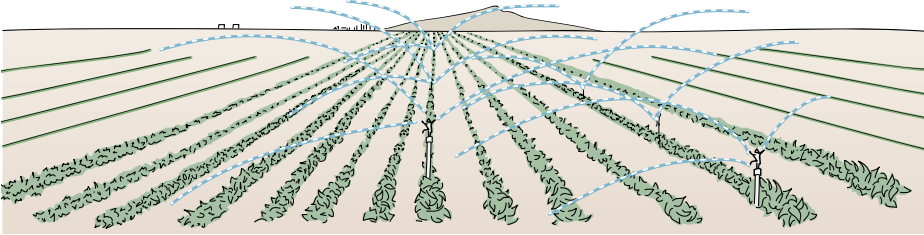


Deforestation

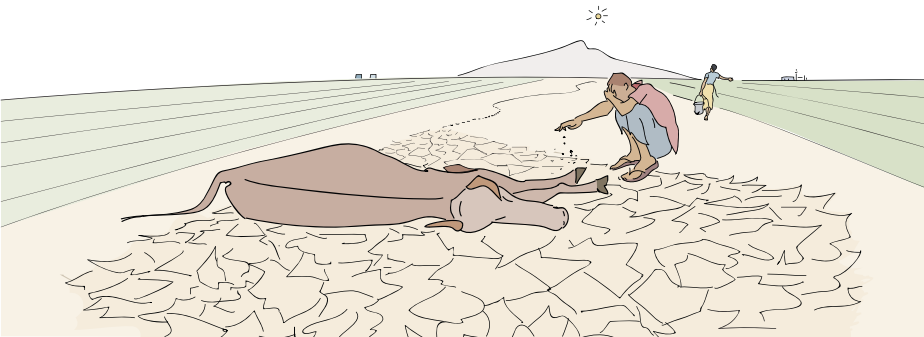
Forests are the lungs of the earth. They get clear-cut (all the trees chopped down at the same time) and the land is then used for other purposes, like planting sugar or cotton, or running cattle for the fast food industries. These take all the goodness out of the soil.



Taking water



Industries and commercial farming suck up huge amounts of water from the rivers, lakes and dams, and often they throw their waste in them too. This means that people further downstream have no water or have to use polluted water for all their needs.



Extraction of labour

The extractive economy needs human labour as well. It extracts and exploits labour from workers. The workers have no choice but to earn a wage for their labour in order to survive. They cannot choose not to work as they need money to survive. They are paid less than their work is worth because the owners and bosses want to make profit. Exploitation of labour can take many forms, from slavery to child labour to waged labour. Waged labourers often have to do almost any kind of work to earn some money to put a roof over their heads and food on the table.



The extractive economy, industrial production and waste

The extractive economy is based on large-scale industrial production. It depends on extracting resources and exploiting the workers. It is an economy that produces waste. For example, we dig up oil and coal. We burn it for energy and then dump the waste anywhere and everywhere: on the ground, in the water and air and also the lungs of the children who live nearby the waste.



Extracting resources and exploiting labour produces an industrial system of ‘**dig, burn, dump**’. We **dig** up the minerals, we **burn** the fossil fuels, we **dump** the waste. Even when it comes to food, we mainly do not grow our own food. Instead, the food industry, which is based on large-scale commercial farming of monocrops, exploits the land for its nutrients and depletes the soil.



Purpose of the extractive industry

The main purpose of the extractive economy is to make profit. It closes in the wealth and power for the few. People who benefit from this system believe that this is the only way to do things. Capitalists justify the system. They say it is the best economic system. They say the wealth trickles down to all people. They say there is no alternative. But we must judge the extractive economy by what it does! Many people who do not benefit from this system are led to believe that this is the only way to do things. This could be because they do not know of any other way, or because they feel powerless to change things.



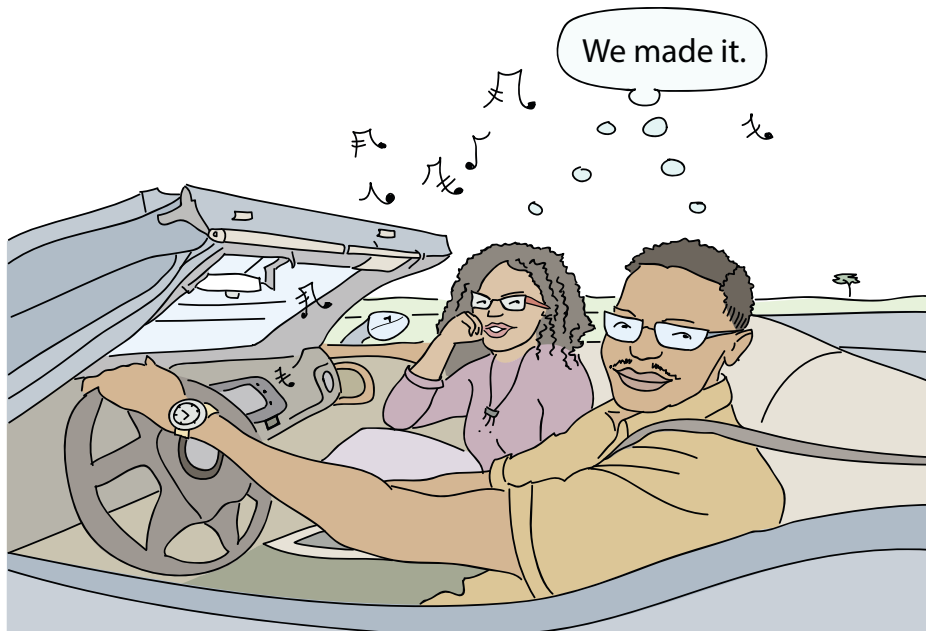
Worldview of the extractive economy

The worldview or the culture of the extractive economy is about consumerism. Consume has different meanings. We talk about consuming (eating) food. Consume also means using or using up. We talk about consuming energy; a task can be time-consuming; and fuel consumption in cars and other vehicles. It can also mean buying goods and services. This is how it is used when we talk of a consumer society.

This worldview persuades us that if we can buy possessions (consume) we will be happy. As the saying goes, “Money is king!” It also takes the view that we can keep on making more stuff and use it for a while before we just throw it away and it ends up in landfill sites. There is always talk about ‘growing the economy’ as though it can grow and grow without end. No thought is given to the environment and the ecosystem. When one place is exploited and trashed, industry moves on without thinking about the lives and the environment it leaves behind.

The worldview of the extractive economy persuades us to 'buy into' the idea of unnecessary consuming. People are judged as successful if they have lots of money and lots of expensive things. In a consumer society people value riches and not qualities like caring for others, sharing, kindness, etc.

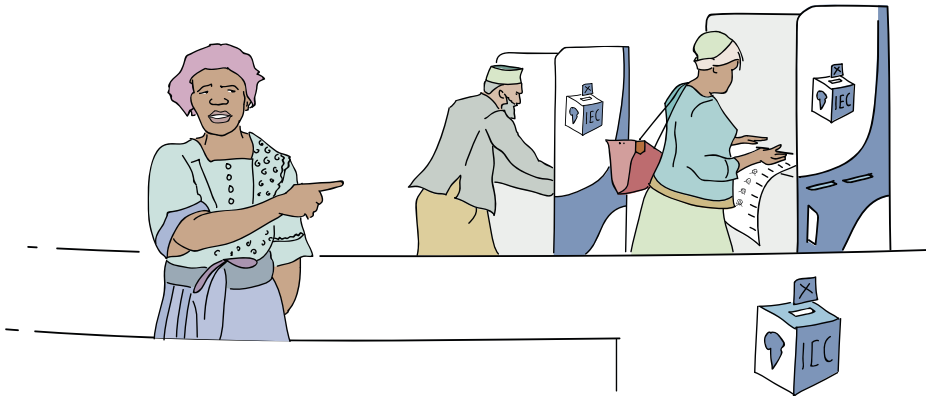
The extractive economy is driven by a selfish worldview. It does not worry much about communities, except that it needs to keep workers healthy enough to work hard and to keep it going. Often people buy things that they cannot afford and do not need because they have been tricked into believing that it will make them happy.



Governance in the extractive economy



You would imagine that governance and its rules would stop the exploitation of people and the environment. But, if the purpose of the extractive economy is wealth for the rich, government makes sure it happens. It protects the economy. It uses tough and visible policing and even violence when it is challenged. Just think how striking workers or protesters are treated. Think of the Marikana massacre! That is an example of well-organised and systematic violence by the state to protect the interests of big business. We think we have democracy, but the economic system controls this too. We have a very shallow democracy. Shallow democracy means that we vote once every four years but do not really have a say in how decisions are made.



This understanding of the extractive economy is very depressing but, also, never forget that people have always resisted and mobilised against injustice.

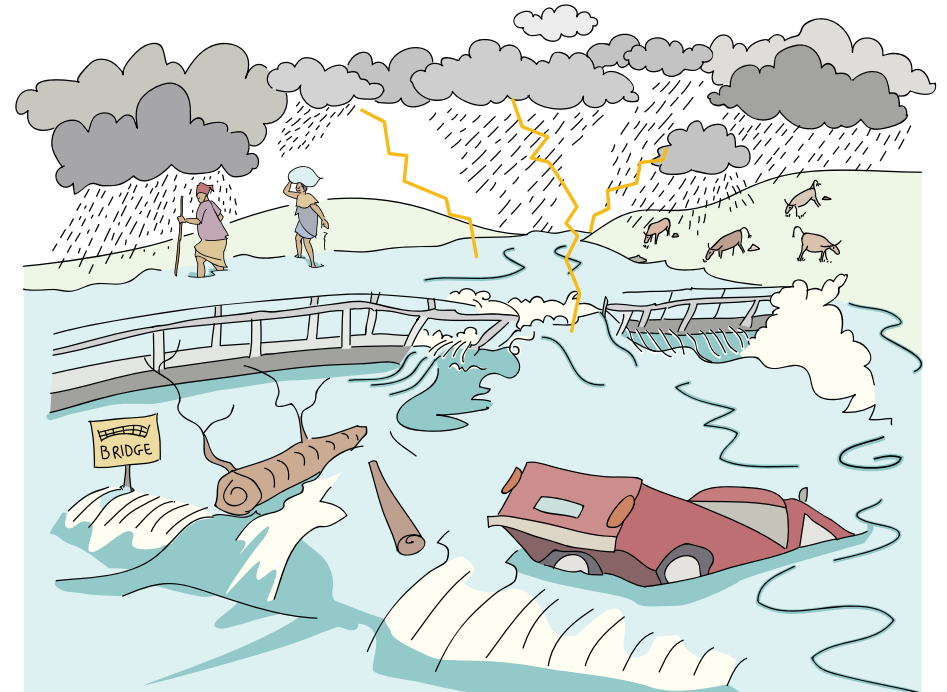
Summary

To sum all this up then, the extractive economy causes damage to the environment. It damages everything: the land, the air, the water, plants, animals, and the people living in it. The extractive economy works by taking out and harvesting resources. It keeps on extracting until it can no longer get enough resources out to make plenty of money. Corporations then just move on and leave their waste behind. Here are some examples:

- ▶ Coal is dug out, the heaps of waste are left behind, and workers are left stranded
- ▶ The soil is farmed using monocropping so that it is not renewed, but it is left barren
- ▶ Forests are cut down and they cannot regrow
- ▶ Workers are involved in work accidents or get industrial diseases — they cannot work anymore and are sent back to their families



The extractive industry causes pollution in the air, water, land and in some people's bodies! It is an unfair system that keeps the poor poor. This has also caused climate change, and if climate change is not halted, we will not survive on planet earth. We are facing a climate catastrophe!



The natural balance has been disrupted in so many places across the planet. Communities have become fragmented and no longer see themselves as collectives who can work co-operatively. Excessive carbon and greenhouse gases have been emitted into the atmosphere. This is responsible for extreme weather conditions (floods and droughts) and climate change. Half the people in the world don't have enough to eat or a nutritious diet. Can destroying the lives of people and life on the planet then really be justified? How can the capitalists in charge of this system justify the destruction of people's lives and of the planet?

What we say is that we need an economy that restores the ecosystem. It must renew and regenerate it. It must build the soil, not take out all the goodness. It must make sure that the forests grow again and that water and air are healthy. It must allow people to work in a way that does not destroy their health and their souls. It must work towards greater equality and contribute to a just society. We are talking about a just transition from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy. We are talking about our survival on earth.



A regenerative economy



Regenerate, revive, renew

A regenerative economy? So this is a different one. A new one! So what is this one like?



I don't know, Thandi. Maybe we must think about that model, about the five components of an economy. We need to look at them in a new way, neh?



OK, then. So where would we begin? Haai, maybe we should start with the idea of ubuntu?



Thandi and Sipho have got this right. They have started with the fourth component we talked about earlier. Thandi has come up with the idea of *ubuntu* as a worldview. This is a perfect way to begin to think about the kind of economy and lives we want! There's also another African word, *ukama*, that comes from Shona. A great word — it's like *Ubuntu Plus*! It means that past, present and future generations are all related. Importantly, it also means we are all related to the natural world. It means that we must not care only for ourselves and other humans, but also for the entire natural world. All things in the ecosystem of the Earth are tied together and depend on each other to exist, survive and thrive.

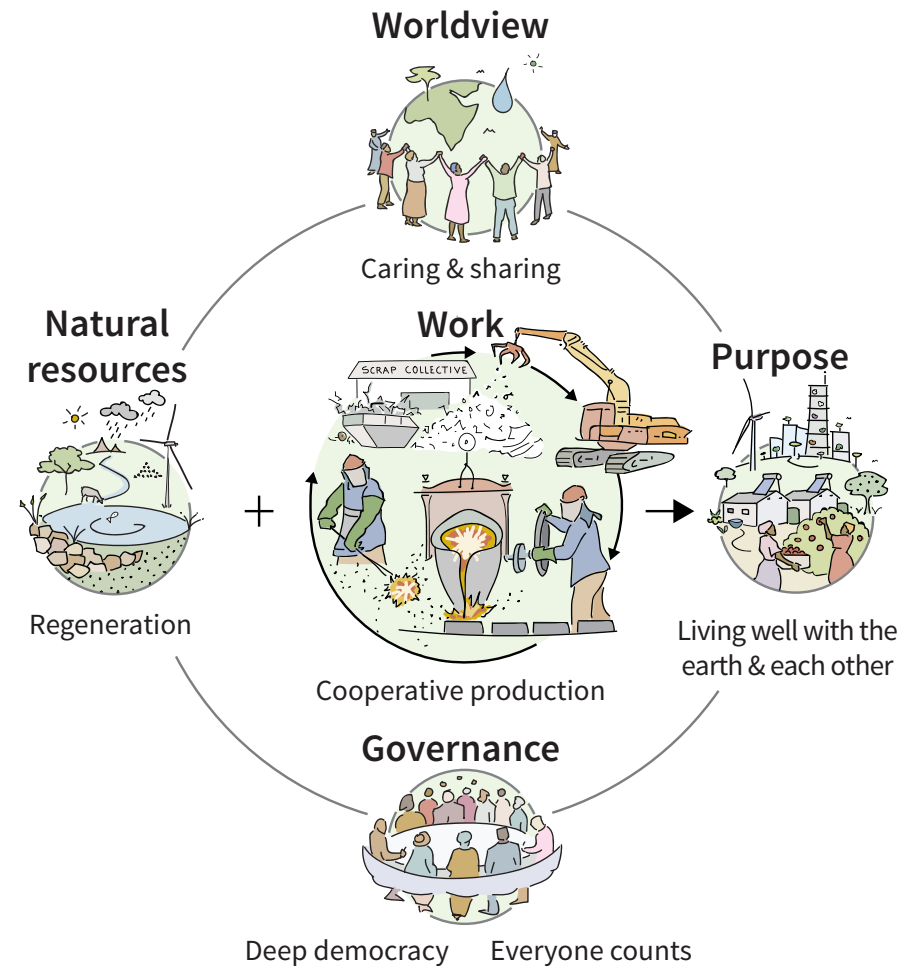
In much the same way, groundWork describes environmental justice as “people living well with each other and the earth”.

There is also a strong environmental justice movement in Latin America called *Buen Vivir*, which is Spanish for “good living” or “living well”. It does not mean living well through having loads of material goods, but it means living well in community and in harmony with nature. It is similar to *ukama*. In the end, it all comes down to relationships between people and the natural world!

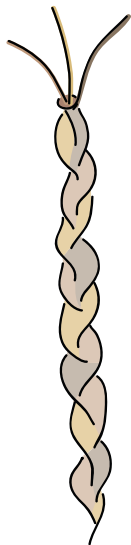


The **purpose** of an economy that regenerates and does not destroy must be to restore the ecosystems for the good of all people and their well-being. People must **work** willingly and democratically with the **natural resources** to rebuild the soil, the forests and the rivers so that we can live and work in harmony with the natural systems. A regenerative economy holds/represents the **worldview** that nature is precious and we must respect the natural ecosystems for the benefit of all. **Governance** needs to be more deeply democratic and respectful of all kinds of traditions and cultures. Note that we are using the same five components of the economy to discuss the regenerative economy.

REGENERATIVE ECONOMY



Eh, this is big stuff! How does this work on the ground then?



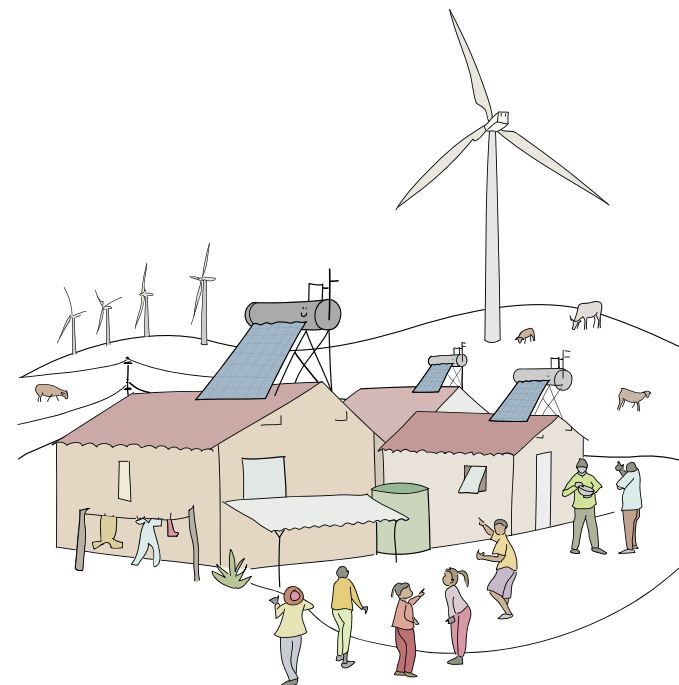
Purpose of the regenerative economy

Let's start with the purpose of the regenerative economy. It's like a plait (*ukuluka*) made from three threads that are strong together, but each strand is weaker on its own. The purpose is to

- ▶ Restore the natural balance — so the ecosystems can be renewed
- ▶ Create communities who can face challenges and stay strong and committed; and
- ▶ Promote equality and justice among all people

Natural resources

This means we must get away from only extracting resources. We must also build up and regenerate the **natural resources**. We will, of course, carry on using natural resources like water and forests and land and some minerals, but we need to work towards a renewing economy. So, we need to use natural resources only in ways that meet our needs. This economy needs to use natural resources at a rate that works with the natural cycles but does not use them up. We also need to change from fossil fuels (coal, oil, gas) to renewable energy sources like wind, solar (sun) and hydro-electric (water) power. Otherwise we cannot avoid a global climate catastrophe — the earth will survive, but not much else!

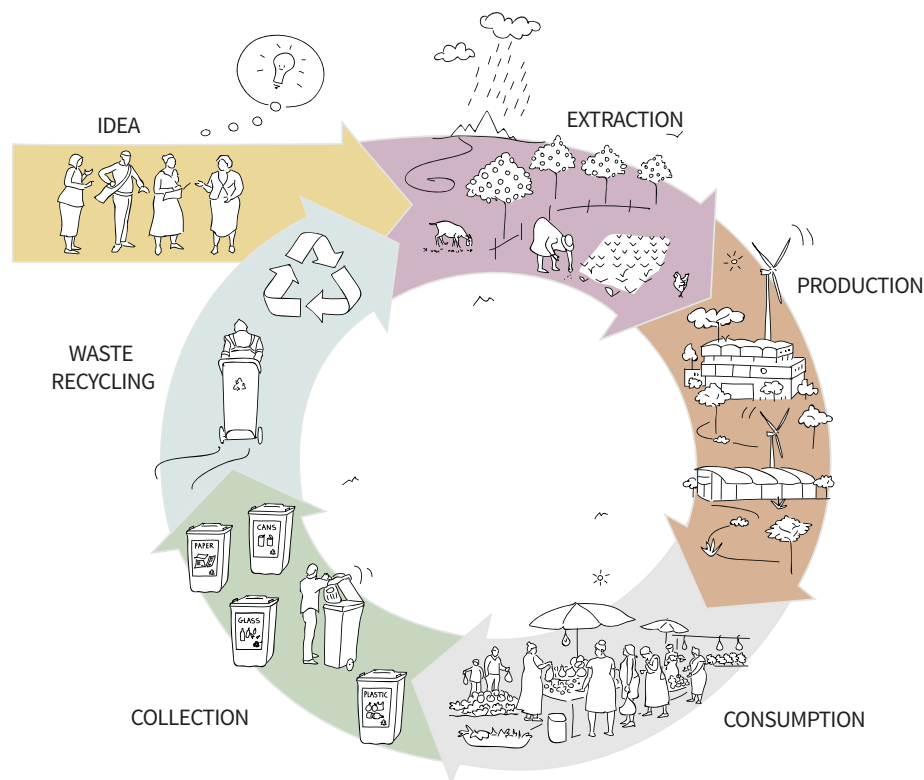


Worldview

If we want to do this, the way we work with the natural resources must fit the different worldview of the regenerative economy, (one of *ukama*). This economy will then be governed in a very different way from in an extractive economy! We need different relations between people and with nature. A regenerative economy must be based on caring and respect for each other and the world we depend upon. Instead of being driven by a consumer culture, we should see ourselves as one part of the living world. We should also understand that we cannot continue just extracting and producing more and more goods. The resources of the world are not infinite — they are finite.

People sometimes refer to the regenerative economy as a circular economy rather than the linear economy we described above.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY



Here are some principles of a regenerative economy. See if you agree with them and you can also add some more.

- ▶ There should be zero waste — there is no waste in nature
- ▶ Relationships should benefit all, not only the wealthy few — we must move away from selfish competition
- ▶ We must recognise that all things are linked
- ▶ We must protect biodiversity and cultural diversity. In other words, all the plants and animal species, environments and ecosystems found on Earth, as well as the variety of different human cultures and languages must be given respect

Work

If we lived with a regenerative economy, just think about what would count as **work**, the middle component. Work can be thought about as a system of co-operation, about all the things we do. Work is seen as much more than the jobs people do or as being employed for a wage. Our work is everything we do, from bringing up our children, caring for the community, making things we use, teaching people, living well in our society and doing things for its good.

Governance

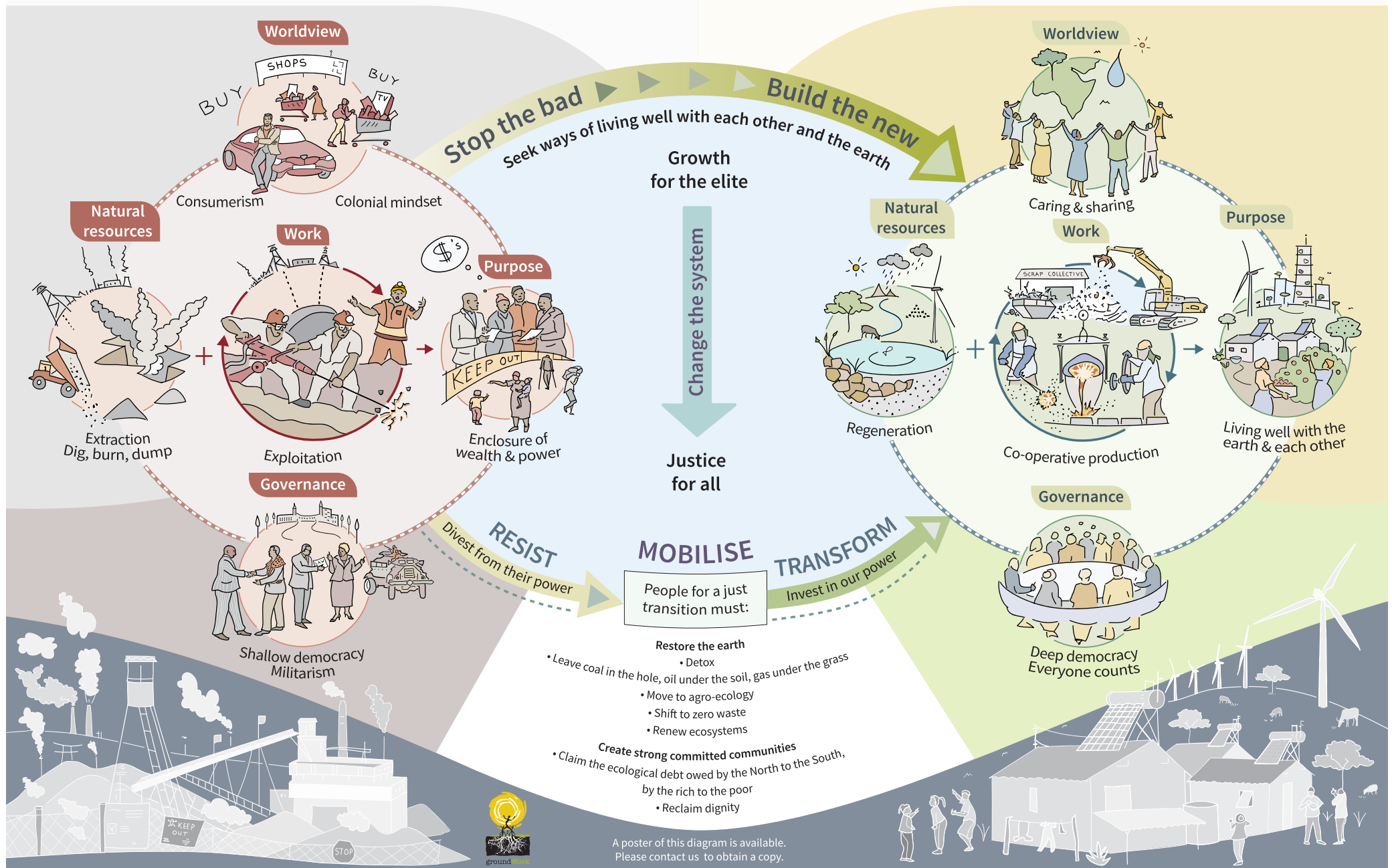
What would make up **governance** in a regenerative economy? First we need a deeper democracy. People should have a voice and control the decisions that affect their daily lives. Some decisions can be made at a street level, others at other levels. So, for example, water should be controlled at the level of the watershed that it covers. All the people who are affected by a watershed and who care for it should be involved.

Humans have caused great ecological damage. We cannot now say that we will start to try to have less impact. That on its own would be the easy way out and it wouldn't work. The damage has been built up over the last 500 years. Now we must have a greater impact on the planet in the next few decades than the western empires, colonisation and industrialisation have had over the past 500 years. It is no good saying, 'It's not our fault!' We must make a greater impact for a different purpose. We have to live in such a way that we undo the damage.

Towards a just transition

Extractive economy

Regenerative economy



A poster of this diagram is available.
Please contact us to obtain a copy.

Just transition



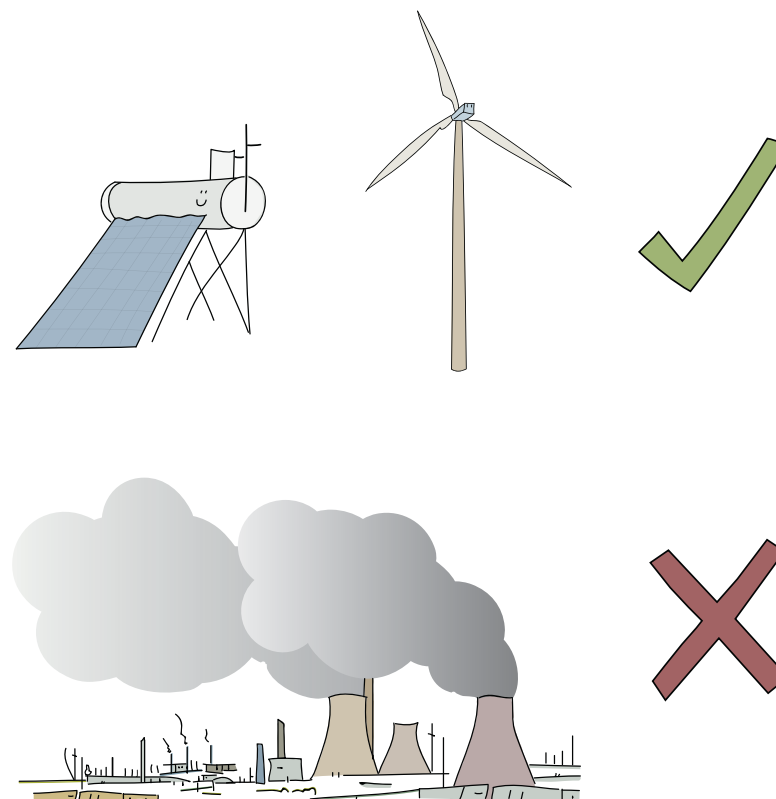
So we are talking about change, neh? About a transition!

Yebo, Thandi. We are talking about a **just transition**.



The word transition comes from Latin. Trans means across. Transition means to go across from one state to another. The name of the Transkei meant across the Kei River. The name Transvaal meant across the Vaal River. These were the names the settlers gave to these areas. A transition for the economy means changing from one kind of economy to another.

A transition from an extractive economy to a regenerative one will not be smooth and there will be battles and hardships. A just transition means a break with and within the present economic order. It will not take place quickly either because rich and powerful people who benefit from the extractive economy have lots to lose. They will not want to change their capitalist worldview. But the time has come to organise and build social movements. We will need to develop shared visions of a different future. These movements will be marked by struggle, but the struggles will be different to the struggles so many people already face daily. These daily struggles are caused by the global economy we have now. We have to create new societies and new economies, as we have done before in human history. If this feels impossible it only shows how successful the extractive economy has been in persuading us that there is no alternative.



A lot of talk about a just transition is about a transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy. But there are many other parts to a just transition. If energy is in the hands of a few people who want to make big profits, this will be a transition of ONLY one component of the economy, but will it be a just transition? Think of this: if those few people change from fossil fuels to renewable energy, which of the three strands of a regenerative economy will it meet:

- ▶ Restore the natural balance — so the ecosystems can be renewed
- ▶ Create strong and committed communities
- ▶ Get closer to equity for all people

Yes, it will help to restore the natural balance and it is vital that it be restored. But it will not have any impact on communities, and it will not change the gap between the rich and the poor. A just transition must be based on two sets of collective rights: the rights of the earth and nature, and the right of people to the resources they need to live well with each other and the earth. To exercise these rights, people must hold the necessary resources in common, not privately. Key among the resources is land, which should be shared out much more equally. The same applies to water and air. There should also be equal access to technology like the internet — and access to knowledge in general should also be more equal!

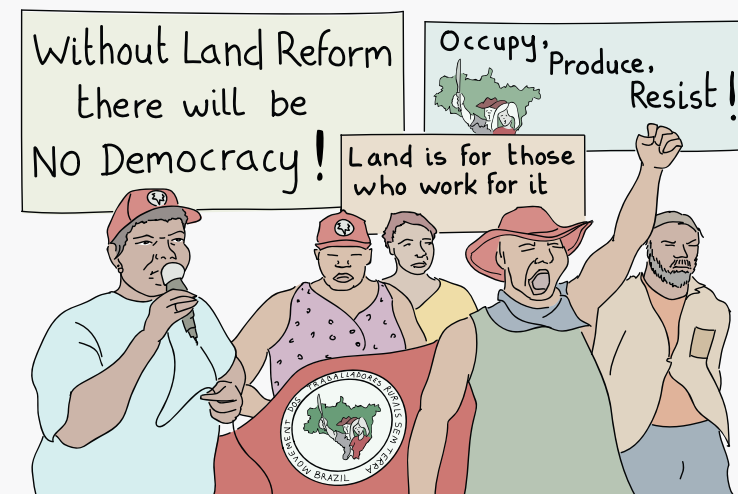
If we are not prepared to govern, we are not prepared to win! We must work to develop self-governance. And we must not just govern according to the structures we already have. We must remake governance to be more democratic and ecologically sound. We can conduct civil disobedience campaigns and we can make the rules we need. We must show that we are able to govern ourselves better than the existing governance by the state and corporates/big business. The Landless Movement in Brazil is described in the box opposite.

The model of a just transition is here to help us think. We do not have all the answers and no-one can be sure of a single right way to do things. *Ukama*, *ubuntu* and *bon vivir* can help us think about our pathway and we will need to make decisions on the way. We might not know how to achieve a just transition quickly, but there are many examples of regenerative practices at a local level that can inspire us to act. People are resisting the economic system that exploits them. Below you will read of some examples of how people are challenging the existing forms of production.

Just transition probably sounds like a very difficult or impossible task. And it really is a huge challenge that will take time and struggle.

The Landless Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST)) is an inspiring powerful example of resistance. Brazil has the most unequal distribution of land ownership in the world. Two per cent of its landowners hold 60 per cent of its arable land. About 90 million people are landless peasants or slum dwellers excluded from land by this concentration of ownership. The

MST is made up of these rural peasants and they have challenged these inequalities by direct action. There are now over 1.5 million people who live in 30 000 separate settlements. They were



established by direct occupation of underused farmland. In this way they have redistributed land to rural workers for small-scale farming. They practice agro ecology (so the land is cared for) and self-governance. These settlements practice deep democracy and self-governance. Their mottos tell you about their worldview and purpose.

Check out www.mst.br if you would like to learn more about this movement.

Food sovereignty

Food sovereignty is an idea/concept that is different from the food system that produces most of the food across the world. When corporations control the food system they put profits first. They are not so worried about the need to make food healthy and available to all.. Nor are they concerned to look after the soil and the ecosystems.

Food sovereignty puts people, their health and the land before profits. It is a system that encourages people to grow food in ecologically sound ways that are sustainable. It encourages local production of food, seed saving, producing indigenous foods, and using farming methods that work better in droughts and are climate resilient, among other strategies to ensure food sovereignty.

People can practice food sovereignty in different ways. This can include:

- ▶ growing food to sustain a household
- ▶ community food gardens
- ▶ exchange programmes for sharing seeds, knowledge and ideas
- ▶ working together to develop shared projects where the land, the work and the benefits are shared by a larger group of farmers

Here are some examples of inspiring projects that are based on the ideas of food sovereignty and the regenerative economy.

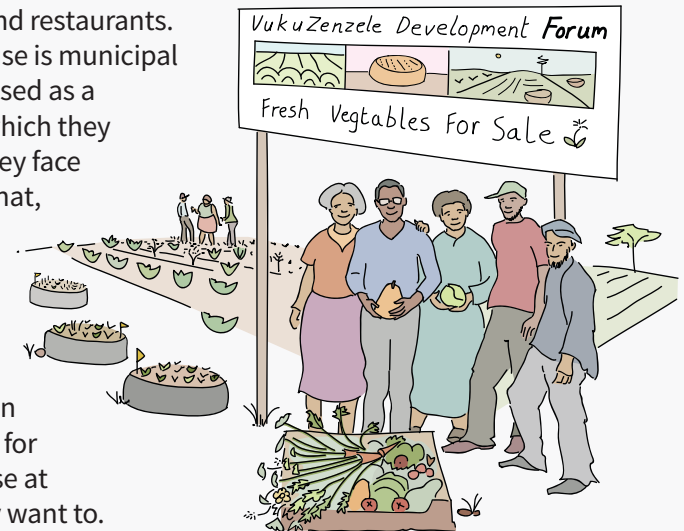


Moyo lives and farms on vacant municipal land along the Vaal River. He lives alone and two friends live close by in the houses they have built. His food gardens ensure that he has enough food to feed himself and some extra to exchange with others or to sell for a living. He grows tomatoes, gourds and squashes as well as sorghum. He harvests the sorghum and dries it for porridge and beer throughout the year.

He also grows an indigenous type of sugar cane 'Ntsi' that the local communities love so he eats some of it and sells the rest in order to obtain other goods he needs. Moyo and his friends add fish to their diet which they catch in the Vaal river.



The Vukuzenzele Food Garden Project includes vegetable and indigenous gardens established by a group of people in the Vaal community. They grow a wide range of fresh produce for their families and also supply the local food corner shops and restaurants. The land they use is municipal land that was used as a dumping site which they cleaned up. They face the challenge that, because they do not own the land, they do not feel secure. The municipality can decide to use it for another purpose at any time if they want to.



The Women's Leadership and Training Programme (WLTP)

encourages sharing land, seeds, ideas. WLTP is a women's rights organization working with communities in KwaZulu Natal. They organise exchanges and have trained girls and young women who have now established 100 home gardens in Centocow and Hlokozi using sustainable methods. Gardeners work on their individual plots and meet monthly in 'working parties' for learning and support. They share nutritious meals and recipes to promote traditional food and medicines. They also discuss how to grow them and exchange seeds and cuttings.

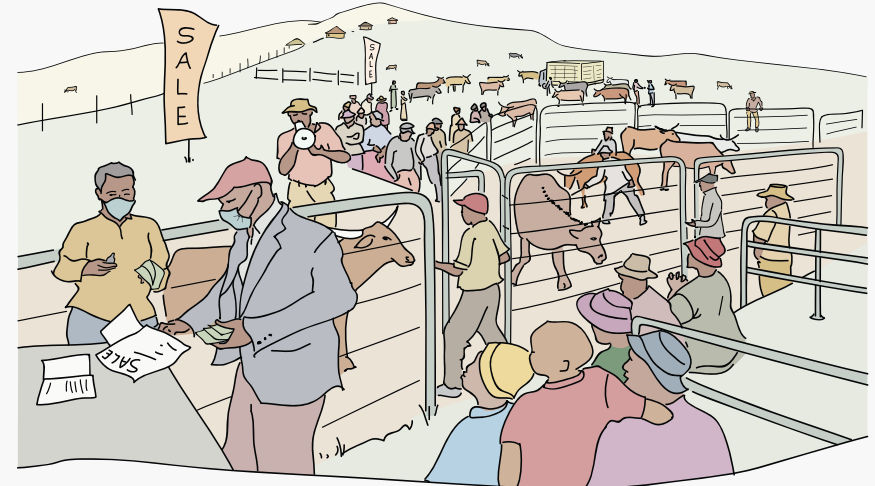


Communal livestock farming

The foothills of the Drakensberg Mountains near Matatiele have rich grasslands and plenty of rain and the people living there relied on a traditional livestock economy. This was ruined when the apartheid labour system forced men to leave the rural areas for work. The management and governance system deteriorated and alien trees like wattle invaded the landscape. The grasslands deteriorated with overgrazing and erosion.



Local communities, NGOs and government institutions have come together to form the **Umzimvubu Catchment Partnership**. They have worked to clear the alien trees to restore the natural healthy grassland. They are working to restore traditional grazing associations which manage the use of the grasslands. These are great, but that is not all.



The cows are healthier and the quality of the meat is very good, but if the farmers have to walk their cattle to markets for two days, they lose their good condition and so the farmers don't make the money their cattle are worth. The partnership decided to address this problem. One of the partners called Meat Naturally Pty came up with a different model. Instead of the cattle going to market, they bring the people that buy cows to the people that have cows to sell. They then take a small commission on the sales. They hold auctions where the farmers live, and the buyers transport the cattle away.

There were three auctions during COVID lockdown. Around 540 animals were sold for a total income to the farmers of more than R3.6 million. 194 farmers — 23% of whom are women — sold cattle at these three auctions. Restoring the land and co-operative labour have ensured their livelihoods are sustainable.

Zero Waste is the target!

In addition to food sovereignty, a regenerative economy aims for zero waste. Municipalities and national government follow a waste management model that simply dumps waste in waste sites. The waste sites are poorly managed and recyclable materials are lost. This model fits the extractive economy model, certainly NOT the zero waste aim of a regenerative economy.



The VaalPark Recycling Centre in Sasolburg, South Africa, is a good example of a regenerative practice.

In 2014 waste pickers from the South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA) around VaalPark developed a new strategy. First they negotiated with the local municipality to persuade them of the benefits of the project. Then they sourced two wheelie bins each for 3000 households in Vaal Park. One was for waste that could be recycled and the other one for non-recyclables. In this way people were separating the waste at source.

Then, the waste pickers have also set up a recycling centre. Every Thursday they go door-to-door to collect the recyclable waste. They take it to the centre and sort it. They end up with a lot of recovered waste to be recycled. They sell this to a middleman who comes to the recycling centre and buys the recyclable waste from there. The money is then divided equally among the waste pickers. In this way the municipality and VaalPark community work together with waste



pickers. It includes separation at source, door-to-door collection, more sorting in a co-operative way, and profit-sharing. Not only does this project aim at zero waste, but it is also a showcase for democratic practices and co-operative work among the waste pickers.

Summary

A just transition to a state where we can live well with the earth and ourselves will need us to do the following:

1. Rapidly cut fossil fuel burning and emissions to zero
2. Ensure that people work through organisations that are democratic (not controlled from on top) and have shared control of resources
3. Restore the land so that it can absorb and store carbon (a green house gas). This means we have change the way food is mostly grown
4. Claim the debt that industrialised countries of the north owe to the countries of the south

A regenerative economy must deal urgently with climate change. To do this we need to change the systems we have that function badly or not at all (local government, water, health, agriculture and so on). They need to change to systems that are necessary for a just society. This means lots of practical work too:

- ▶ putting in better infrastructures
- ▶ restoring services
- ▶ moving to new ways of growing food and to growing new crops

Elected government officials and civil servants must do their work and we must deal with corruption. To do this we need confidence in our vision. It means we must spend time listening, learning, thinking deeply and exploring what the alternatives might be. At this stage we don't have all the answers. We are sailing into new waters. We will need to think and plan as we go.

Aluta continua!



We wish to acknowledge Movement Generation. Many of the key ideas here were informed by their remarkable work on just transition.



<https://movementgeneration.org/>



To learn more about the topics covered
in this booklet please visit

www.groundwork.org.za/ejs/resources.php