



## Process of Social Transformation

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Humanity confronts existential challenges and unprecedented opportunities. Perhaps for the first time in history, there is a broad-based consensus among all the nations and peoples of the world regarding the common essential and desirable goals that need to be achieved—a rapid end to the worldwide pandemic is the most immediate and urgent. The accomplishment of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals and urgent actions to halt climate change are vitally needed to ensure longer-term human security and ecological stability, sustainability, and resilience.

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There is also a remarkable consensus emerging regarding the essential steps and measures needed to achieve these goals—universal vaccination, the shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy, strengthening of the multilateral system, extension of digital connectivity, and enhanced cybersecurity for all sections of the population, more and better quality education, financial inclusion, equitable tax policies to reduce inequality, respect and protection for the environment, reduction in air pollution, etc.

We also observe an increasing recognition that in fact, the world possesses the essential knowledge, technology, and financial resources to achieve these objectives. The total annual expenditure to support the UN system, including its vital peacekeeping activities, represents less than 3% of the total annual expenditure of \$2 trillion by nation-states on military security. The shortfall in funding available for financing the SDGs is estimated at \$4-5 trillion a year, which pales into insignificance compared with the more than \$250 trillion in global financial assets and the availability of several viable strategies for filling the gap. Similarly, the world possesses all the essential knowledge and technological know-how to supply low-cost renewable energy, generate sufficient food, achieve full employment, deliver quality education, and provide digital connectivity to all.

In spite of this remarkable consensus, progress on the achievement of humanity's shared goals lags far behind the optimal levels of implementation. Yet, something seems to be missing. Something else is needed. Over the past two decades, the World Academy of Art & Science has examined the process of social change from various perspectives, in different contexts and fields of activity. We have concluded that what is missing is clear and complete knowledge of the process of conscious social evolution, i.e. social transformation, or as Jeffrey Sachs terms it: a "theory of change". For the first time in history, humanity seeks to consciously and collectively alter the direction and radically accelerate the pace of social change. We know the goals, we know and possess the means, but we lack the complete knowledge of the process by which we can consciously and collectively act in a coordinated manner for the common good of all human beings.

Society changes, grows, develops, and evolves continuously. Change is incessant in all fields and levels, even during times of social stagnation, including the changes that fortify the past, reject the future, reverse progress, and zigzag back and forth between past and future. Growth is a natural horizontal movement of expansive energies to extend, replicate and multiply present types and levels of activity and organization. Development is a progressive vertical movement from lesser to greater levels of social organization, complexity, integration, and values already prevalent elsewhere, such as the extension of the 1<sup>st</sup> Industrial Revolution from England to the rest of Europe and beyond. Evolution is the creative emergence of new ideas, values, organizations, technologies, and social patterns, as expressed in the social and political transition from monarchism to constitutionalism inspired by Enlightenment ideas and values in Revolutionary France, and the multiple evolutionary transitions from animal power and human labor to steam, electricity, electronics and artificial intelligence spurred by technological advances in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

All these forms of social transition are mostly unconscious or subconscious in the sense that they occur spontaneously at isolated points without a clear master vision of the values, goals, structure, and strategy they seek to manifest. They gradually unfold and spread by a long, slow process of trial and error, experimentation and imitation over decades or even centuries.

Social transformation is a further stage in the series and an exception. It seeks to replace the long, slow trial and error process of natural evolution with a conscious effort to accelerate social advancement. A dramatic example is India's Green Revolution launched in 1966 during a period of severe drought when 10 million lives were threatened by sudden food shortages. Initiated by the government from top-down, it sought to transform India from its dependence on foreign food aid to national food sufficiency within a decade. It was launched by a conscious decision of the government and was made possible by successfully enlisting the support and participation of tens of millions of farmers. The strategy involved the rapid induction of advanced production technologies for foodgrains based on hybrid varieties, combined with the establishment of a national food grain marketing organization to ensure purchase of surplus production and distribution in food-deficit regions, and special purpose corporations for production of fertilizers, hybrid seeds and warehousing. The participation of farmers was secured by guaranteeing producers a remunerative floor price for increased

production, through a national program to demonstrate the new technologies on hundreds of thousands of plots on farmers' lands, and through expansion of agricultural research and extension services. The result was a 50% increase in foodgrain production within five years, sufficient to eliminate the need for foreign food aid, and a doubling of production within 10 years. India achieved an increase in a single decade equivalent to the total production it had achieved during 10 millennia of agricultural development.

Transformation may also take place when what begins as an uncoordinated grass-roots initiative gains sufficient attention and momentum to be adopted and consciously organized on a massive scale. It may spring up spontaneously by the initiative of local leaders, as air pollution control and recycling did in California in the early 1970s, generating spreading waves of awareness and acceptance by local communities, releasing social energies, and spurring rapid social innovation that spilled over to other regions of the country and spread overseas. Based on their initial success, a formulated pattern of values, principles, and organization mechanisms may be consciously replicated at higher levels over an increasingly wide area. The gradual evolution of Silicon Valley out of a small cluster of technology companies, universities, and research institutes quickly morphed into conscious efforts to reshape the region into the world's leading center for technological innovation not only in computing but in distant fields such as the automotive industry and biotechnology as well. At some point, such nascent initiatives acquired the critical mass and intensity needed to attract attention and support from the government, law, and other organized sectors of society. Then we can say the nascent evolutionary movement has become a conscious movement for social transformation.

Efforts at conscious transformation may be initiated locally as applied by the Asian Tiger nations to spur rapid economic development through export-driven rapid industrialization from the 1960s. Or it may emerge from a nascent small-scale experiment such as the recent application of the "doughnut economics" model in Amsterdam. The current worldwide endeavor to accelerate the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy probably represents the greatest coordinated effort of the world community for transformative change on a global scale.

Regardless of the field of application or the circumstances, successful transformation involves several common elements. First, there must be a goal that is widely perceived to be desirable or essential to meet human aspirations. In the case of India's Green Revolution, the goal was complete food self-sufficiency of a country with a rapidly expanding population. Second, transformation requires an effective strategy or method for accelerating the transition. The method adopted in Green Revolution was an integrated approach that included induction of new technology, marketing, price incentives, research, infrastructure development, training, demonstration, and national information campaigns. India's integrated approach soon became the model for similar achievements in many other developing countries. Third, transformation involves a change in organization, such as the political organization for governance by democratic institutions, the organization of economic production into industrial clusters or global supply chains, and the social organization for personal relationships and commercial transactions through the Internet.

Finally, the effectiveness of these three elements depends on a fourth element—a social process for rapid transmission, imitation, and adoption by society at large. The social process for Green Revolution required educating, training, persuading, and incentivizing tens of millions of uneducated traditional farmers to adopt new production methods within a very short time. The transformations that gave rise to the global environmental movement required building widespread social awareness at the household and community level combined with growing support for political action and new legislation, changes in research priorities and methods, induction of new subjects in the educational system at all levels, increasing coverage by the media, invention of new technologies, modifications in industrial processes, development of new types of jobs, creation of new types of businesses, changes in accounting and economic measurement systems, new concepts and methods for financial risk management, alterations in investment behavior and countless other changes permeating virtually every aspect of social life.

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Social transformation may be initiated by pioneering entrepreneurs such as Steve Jobs or Elon Musk or visionary leaders such as Lee Kuan Yew, father of Singapore’s economic miracle, or C. Subramaniam, father of India’s Green Revolution, but it acquires effective power and momentum only when it is backed by appropriate organizational mechanisms and fuelled by the endorsement, rising expectations and overflowing energies of society at large.

These are dramatic examples of what can be done in specific sectors and places. Countless experiments and successful models of this type can help prepare the ground for wider social change. A study of the successful transformations of the past—local, sectoral, national, and international—and the gradual growth and progression of change from one place and one sector to another can yield valuable insights into the process—its onset, stages, drivers, organizational and leadership strategies—relevant for accelerating transformation in countless areas.

But the transformation the world needs today is not limited to any geographic area or field of activity. It encompasses all sectors of society all over the world. Inspired leaders and organizations can play powerful catalytic roles in promoting and supporting the needed change as the UN is doing to support the implementation of the SDGs. But unless and until the need is embraced by a critical mass of informed individuals—political leaders, intellectuals, educators, journalists, business and financial executives, civil society and youth leaders, and representative of the wider population of humanity—it is likely to remain mostly on paper. What the world needs today is a global social movement inspired by high values and backed by the aspirations of youth determined to usher in a better world for all. No representative organization of government presently exists at the global level with sufficient power and

influence to direct the movement. The global multilateral system first needs to be redefined and reinvented to serve the needs of humanity as a whole. No individual group can lead that movement. But individuals and organizations can play a powerful role as catalysts in that movement.

Many organizations are working on goals and strategies for social transformation with specialized knowledge and research on specific fields, regions, and applications. The Academy's emphasis has been on a complete holistic knowledge of the principles on which social evolution and social transformation are based and the application of that knowledge to more effectively address global social challenges.

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