

Vision and values in action

What people believe to be valuable guides their actions, whether these values are unspoken and unacknowledged or spelled out clearly. When people express their values and weave them together, they are creating a coherent vision or philosophy. With a shared vision, a movement or collective can advance together.

Here are five examples of deeply considered and coherent visions to guide short- and long-term strategies and action. Find, share, and discuss examples from your own context.

Principles of Earth Democracy

Vandana Shiva is described as “an Indian scholar, environmental activist, food sovereignty advocate, ecofeminist, and anti-globalization author”. This set of principles, summarised from her books, presents an overall philosophy and vision as a rich basis for activism.

Ecological democracy – democracy of all life

We are all members of the Earth community. We all have the duty to protect the rights and welfare of all species and all people. No humans have the right to encroach on the ecological space of other species and other people, or treat them with cruelty and violence.

Intrinsic worth of all species and peoples

All species, humans, and cultures have intrinsic worth. They are subjects, not objects of manipulation or ownership. No humans have the right to own other species, other people, or the knowledge of other cultures through patents and other intellectual property rights.

Diversity in nature and culture

Defending biological and cultural diversity is a duty of all people. Diversity is an end in itself, a value, a source of richness both material and cultural.

Natural rights to sustenance

All members of the Earth Community including all humans have the right to food and water, to safe and clean habitat, to security of ecological space. These rights are natural rights, they are birthrights and are best protected through community rights and commons. They are not given by states or corporations, nor can they be extinguished by state or corporate action, through privatisation or monopoly control.

Earth economy is based on economic democracy and living economy

Earth democracy is based on economic democracy. Economic systems in Earth Democracy protect ecosystems and their integrity, they protect people’s livelihoods and provide basic needs to all. In the earth economy there are no disposable or dispensable species or people. The earth economy is a living economy for the benefit of the common good.

Living economies are built on local economies

Conservation of the earth's resources and creation of sustainable and satisfying livelihoods is most caringly, creatively, and efficiently and equitably achieved at the local level. Localisation of economics is a social and ecological imperative. Only goods and services that cannot be produced locally, using local resources and local knowledge, should be produced non-locally and traded long distance.

Living democracy

Earth democracy is based on local living democracy with local communities – organised on principles of inclusion and diversity and ecological and social responsibility – as the highest authority on decisions related to the environment and natural resources and to the sustenance and livelihoods of people. Authority is delegated to more distant levels of governance on the principle of subsidiarity. Earth democracy is living democracy.

Living knowledge

Earth democracy is based on earth-centred and community-centred knowledge systems. Living knowledge is knowledge that maintains and renews living processes and contributes to health of the planet and people. It is also living knowledge in that it is embedded in nature and society, is not abstract, reductionist, or anti-life. Living knowledge is a commons, it belongs collectively to communities that create it and keep it alive. All humans have a duty to share knowledge. No person or corporation has a right to enclose, monopolise, patent, or exclusively own as intellectual property living knowledge.

Balancing rights with responsibility

In earth democracy, rights are derived from and balanced with responsibility. Those who bear the consequences of decisions and actions are the decision makers.

Globalizing peace, care, and compassion

Earth democracy connects people in circles of care, cooperation, and compassion instead of dividing them through competition and conflict. Earth democracy globalises compassion, not greed, and peace, not war.

The Care Collective

This vision and manifesto circulated widely when 'care' emerged as a central political agenda in 2020 during the Covid pandemic. This short version gives a sense of the principles and practice at its core.

Interdependence: To imagine a world organised around care, we must begin by recognising the myriad ways in which our survival is always contingent on others. A caring politics must first and foremost acknowledge our interdependence alongside the ambivalence and anxiety these connections routinely generate. Recognising our needs both to give and receive care not only provides us with a sense of our common humanity, but also enables us to confront our shared fears of human frailty rather than project them onto others.

Caring kinships: The traditional nuclear family with the mother at its centre still provides the dominant prototype for care and kinship... Yet it is only by proliferating our circles of care – in the first instance by expanding our notion of kinship – that we can achieve the psychic infrastructures necessary for building a caring society that has universal care as its foundation. Diverse forms of care between all human and non-human creatures need to be recognised and valued. This is what we call ‘an ethics of promiscuous care’. Promiscuous care means caring more and in ways that remain experimental and extensive by current standards. It means multiplying who we care for and how.

Caring communities: Questions of care are not just bound up with the intimacy of very close relationships. They are also shaped in the localities we inhabit and move through: in local communities, neighbourhoods, libraries, schools, and parks, in our social networks, and our group belongings. But the deliberate rolling back of public welfare provision [where this exists at all], replaced by global corporate commodity chains, have generated profoundly unhealthy community contexts for care.

Communities that care stop the hoarding of resources by the few. Instead, caring communities need to prioritise the commons. Communities based on care ensure the creation of collective public spaces as well as objects: they encourage a sharing infrastructure. This means reversing the compulsion of neoliberalism to privatise everything.

Seven Principles of Zapatismo

This example comes from a resistance movement in Chiapas state in Mexico in 1994 and draws on the deeper history of the ancestors to guide community-building.

The group primarily consisted of Indigenous tribes with their own customs including Ch’ol, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Tojolobal, Mam, and Zoque. The event made headlines worldwide and sparked a movement for Indigenous rights, autonomy, and social change. The Zapatista Revolution’s uprising, which occurred on the day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect. Zapatistas, as they are commonly known, emerged from decades of organizing among Indigenous peoples to address the systemic issues of poverty, discrimination, and lack of representation faced by Indigenous communities in Mexico.

The Zapatistas’ uprising was a call to action for marginalized communities worldwide and continues to inspire movements for Indigenous rights and social change. Since 1994, the Zapatistas have focused on building autonomous communities that are centred around their Indigenous traditions while seeking to create ‘Un Mundo Donde Quepan Muchos Mundos’ (‘A World Where Many Worlds Fit’), emphasising the dignity of ‘others,’ belonging, and common struggle, as well as the importance of laughter, dancing, and nourishing children.

Obedecer y No Mandar (to obey, not command)

Execute the will of the people, while holding a position of leadership. In Zapatista autonomous communities, leadership positions are short-lived. This reflects the need for leaders to obey the collective desires of the community rather than command them from a position of power.

Proponer y No Imponer (to propose, not impose)

Humility is a key part of life for the Zapatistas and aligns with their practice of debate and self-reflection, and a culture of proposing a path forward and not imposing one.

Representar y No Suplantar (to represent, not supplant)

Before the coloniser arrived, Indigenous people governed themselves. Self-governance for the Zapatistas, grounded in the collective trust of the community to represent what the community wants.

Convencer y No Vencer (to convince, not conquer)

Zapatistas practise dialogue and assembly, which require logical argument, reflection, consideration of many viewpoints, and open discussion.

Construir y No Destruir (to construct, not destroy)

The ethic of anti-destruction and an end to exploitation is a practice in creating the institutions and the world that we want, in relationship to humans and the land.

Servir y No Servirse (to serve others, not serve oneself)

The Zapatista slogan, 'Para todos todo, para nosotros nada' (Everything for Everyone, Nothing for Ourselves), is at the core of this principle of humility. Every Zapatista must find a balance in serving others for the collective while taking care of their individual family work.

Bajar y No Subir (to work from below, not seek to rise)

In Zapatista communities, 'trabajo colectivo' (collective work) is a way of life. This aligns with the mentality of working at the grassroots level for the benefit of your community.

Climate Justice Charter Movement

This is a South African alliance of progressive civil society, faith communities, labour movements, environmental/climate justice and water sectors, formed to encourage a re-alignment of climate justice forces. Their principles and "systemic alternatives for transformative change" define the future they see and how they hope to get there. Their charter provides a guide to specific short-term demands and tactics as well as narratives and long-term strategy. Below are some excerpts.

Principles for deep just transitions

Every community, village, town, city, and workplace must advance the deep just transition to ensure socio-ecological transformation. The following principles shall guide the alternatives, plans, and processes towards a deep just transition in our society.

Climate justice: Those least responsible must not be harmed or carry the cost of climate impacts. Hence the needs of workers, the poor, the landless, people with disabilities, grassroots women, children, and vulnerable communities have to be at the centre of the deep just transition. The benefits of socio-ecological transformation must be shared equally.

Social justice: Climate justice is social justice. Confront all forms of discrimination and oppression as it relates to race, class, gender, sex, and age, to secure climate and social justice.

Eco-centric living: Live simply, slowly, and consciously, in an eco-centric way, which recognises the sanctity of all life forms and our inter-connections and enables an ethics of respect and care.

Participatory democracy: All climate and deep just transition policies must be informed by the voices, consent, and needs of all people, especially those facing harm.

Socialised ownership: In workplaces and communities, people's power must express itself through democratic control and ownership, including through democratic public utilities, cooperatives, commoning, communal ownership, and participatory planning, including participatory budgeting in towns and cities to ensure collective management of the life enabling commons and systems.

International solidarity: Everyone's struggle is a shared struggle to sustain life. In the context of worsening climate shocks, international solidarity is central to the deep just transition as it serves to unite all who are struggling for emancipation and for a post carbon world.

Decoloniality: Colonial, neo-colonial, and imperial domination are driving us towards extinction. This is based on the worship of extractivism, technology, finance, violence, and markets. We will actively delink from this system as we affirm an emancipatory relationship between humans and with non-human nature rooted in our history, culture, knowledge, and the wider struggle of the oppressed on planet earth.

Intergenerational justice: Care for our planetary commons and ecosystems is crucial for intergenerational justice and to secure a future for our children, youth, and those not yet born.