

The Global Flourishing Goals: An invitation

by

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1. The Opportunity

Humankind stands at a crossroads today, confronted by environmental, social, and political challenges of existential proportions. **Flourishing** offers a robust response to these challenges.

Flourishing is envisioned as the next step for human progress. It takes the vision of the SDGs, ESGs, IDGs and the Human Development Index forward and advances the global commitments of governments by providing a framework that not only makes societies richer/healthier/more sustainable/ more peaceful, but also strengthens the ties: between each of us as individuals; between the individual and the community; and between the individual and the planet.

Flourishing as a human being is to live in a state of dignity. Flourishing is thus a state in which individuals contribute to the community, and in which communities foster and reinforce individual dignity, Flourishing involves taking a regenerative rather than an extractive approach to the environment.

Flourishing is thus equally centred on the individual, and on the individual as the constituent element of community. Flourishing recognises that human progress requires more than provision of skills and knowledge; it requires new modes of learning and recognition of the impact that humans have on each other, the place and planet they inhabit.

Flourishing enables individuals and communities to realise their own notion of the 'good life'. This in turn would lead to enhancement of the collective good at every level and strata - from families, communities, workplaces, institutions, and States to the planet.

Crucially, Flourishing allows us to nurture a dynamic, adaptable, and ethical 'civic culture' founded on the core values of human dignity, uniqueness, agency, goodness and mutual responsibility.

2. Defining the Flourishing goals

Flourishing has a rich philosophical heritage. Modern conceptions of Flourishing may be traced back to multiple global philosophical and spiritual heritages, which suggest that the aim of human life is to cultivate a virtuous orientation and goodness of spirit. A synthesis of the literature suggests that Flourishing entails individual well-being not only in material terms but also in terms of health and sense of purpose. Flourishing recognizes the inherent "goodness" of individuals and the interdependence of human, economic and environmental systems. For an individual to

¹ The authors comprise the "Agenda 2050 group" - a community of academics and practitioners committed to promoting Flourishing as a global policy agenda. This paper has been drafted by them solely in their personal capacity and all views herein are their own. The authors wish to thank the wider global Flourishing community whose views and suggestions informed the paper. All authors contributed equally to the paper.

Flourish, they must have positive experiences, make a contribution to the greater good, and exist within a set of institutional arrangements that facilitates these desired outcomes.

This paper thus proposes that policymakers adopt and enable the pursuit by individuals and communities of at least **five sets of goals which may be called the “Global Flourishing Goals”**: (i) **Life satisfaction, including through a comfortable standard of living**; (ii) **Holistic health and well-being**; (iii) **Fulfilling social relationships**; (iv) **Meaning and purpose**; and (v) **Contributing to the flourishing of all lifeforms (including plants and animals)**.

Enabling Flourishing requires policymakers to provide leadership through *equal and unhindered opportunity* to all individuals to express their own agency and find meaningful fulfilment in all their relationships. Flourishing may be a useful way of encapsulating the ‘human’-centred purpose of a number of key international instruments (including the SDGs) into one simple and clear heuristic. Flourishing amounts to a much-needed evolution of leadership practice, policy and politics; one that recognises the vulnerability of the marginalised and under-privileged and provides a clear ethical focus for policy-making.

3. Why Flourishing is critical today

The imperative for policymakers to pursue Flourishing has never been greater. A global policy agenda to enable Flourishing - the “Global Flourishing Goals” - would go beyond raising awareness and social conscience towards the grand challenges of our time.

There is already a sense of urgency to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 by 2050. The pandemic’s uneven impact on different communities has underscored social inequities. Rising nationalism, reduced trust between major poles of power in the international system (as seen in unprecedented military spending), heightened economic inequality, distrust and apathy among citizens about governments and institutions have all underlined the need to redefine “progress” and “development”. The growing debates over child development have been informed by changes in the nature of the family unit and widespread recognition of the community’s role in raising children. The rise in mental health concerns and opioid crisis, disinformation and the challenge of fostering critical thinking, and the crisis of ethics in business (as seen during the 2008 financial crisis), make all the more poignant the need to create a morally centred, socially conscious and human-centred politics. There is an urgent need for regenerative rather than extractive approaches to the environment.

Given the scale of human ambition today from mastering the depths of the oceans to extra-planetary settlement, the interconnectedness we experience due to technology and globalisation, we need to go beyond development and move towards the goal of Flourishing. In the era of artificial intelligence and gene editing, policymakers have a unique role in shaping these emerging technologies in a way that enables Flourishing.

Flourishing can help cohere competing issues, including climate change, rapid urbanisation, democracy, racial justice, and extractive economic systems, come into focus and align. Such an alignment can help policymakers' interventions become more achievable, and make each intervention a force multiplier.

4. Stakeholders and their potential role in Flourishing

The Sustainable Development Goals provided a powerful framework for aligning national interests toward a more sustainable future. Humanity however is driven not just to sustain itself but to Flourish. And to Flourish, an all-of-society approach is critical. The Global Flourishing Goals envision unique yet convergent functions for each stakeholder.

The role of **policy makers** is to develop policy that furthers the proposed Global Flourishing goals in terms of both process and content. In doing so, they create both the conditions and incentives for personal and organisational agency, responsibility and action. **Individuals** are the initiators, exemplars and litmus test for our progress toward flourishing. We propose that the progress on the Global Flourishing Goals be measured at the individual level. If individuals are Flourishing, this enables attainment of GFGs at the community level, and at the level of the political units ranging from small local districts to states and nations. Individuals help create the conditions for families and communities to Flourish and create the political will to shift policy-maker behaviour. Communities in turn would self-define what it means to operationalize Flourishing in their own context. (Note: Communities may be defined by geography, profession or other form of identity. An individual may be part of multiple communities). The community creates a culturally relevant means of defining Flourishing in terms of actions that individuals can take in relationship with one another.

Public, private, third sector **organisations** can provide an opportunity for individuals to develop agency, belonging and connection. They can help individuals aggregate their power. **Movements** have the potential to engage individuals, communities and organisations to galvanise momentum toward flourishing. Movements create belonging, agency and leverage for individuals and can provide a mechanism for both individuals and organisations to create incentives for policymakers and to hold them to account. The **Ecosystem** has the ability to provide the clean resources necessary for holistic health and well-being of all people, plants, and animals. Like individuals, the Ecosystem functions as both an input and a litmus test for progress toward flourishing. By treating the Ecosystem as a stakeholder, Flourishing expands our circle of concern to encompass all lifeforms.

5. Guiding Principles for the Global Flourishing Goals

The Global Flourishing Goals are an attempt to deepen and take forward the mission of the SDGs. They may be framed as a collection of at least five sets of goals: **(1) Life Satisfaction including through a comfortable standard of living (2) Holistic health and well-being; (3) Fulfilling social, political and economic relationships; (4) Meaning and purpose; and (5) Contributing to the flourishing of all lifeforms (including plants and animals).**

Flourishing describes the dynamic state of progress towards these five sets of goals and the capacity to sustainably regenerate the means to achieve the goals.

Thus, for each set of the aforementioned five goals, policymakers are hereby invited to outline specific, measurable goals and underlying indicators guided by the following principles:

Definitional Principle: A focus on Health as a state of well-being.

Expression of the principle in policymaking: Flourishing is a state of holistic individual human health, wherein health is not just a “lack of pathology” but is rather a desired state of well-being. Well-being in turn would comprise both the *current* state of well-being of the individual *and* the capacity of the individual to regenerate resources for *future* well-being.

The capacity to regenerate resources for one’s own well-being would depend on individual and collective capacities for (a) to generate resources efficiently and effectively, (b) to develop new capacities and relationships over time, (c) to see new possibilities, and (d) to evolve by adjusting the anticipated outcomes on the basis of learning.

Ecosystem Principle: Flourishing requires a mutually beneficial, regenerative relationship between humans and nature.

Expression of the principle in policymaking: Flourishing recognizes and honours the unbreakable interconnectedness among people, animals, plants, and planet. In an era of growing population and unbridled consumption, to enable mutually beneficial and regenerative relationships between all people and equitable access to nature’s life-supporting ecosystem requires loving stewardship of resources from the lithosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, and biosphere.

Process Principle: Flourishing requires that the individual and her community is placed at the heart of any policies designed to achieve the Global Flourishing Goals.

Expression of the principle in policymaking: Through a process of invitational inquiry, each individual, within each community, would define their own desired level of Flourishing, across the five sets of Flourishing goals. The Global Flourishing Goals would be set in motion through an all-of-society effort involving governments and civil society. Measurement of progress against the goals would be done as a citizen-to-citizen effort (rather than as a State-led effort). In this approach, citizens report to each other on how far they feel they have progressed individually and as a community (one that they identify with), in light of positive externalities on other communities and the ecosystem. A composite of this measurement would indicate how far we have progressed as a species in terms of Flourishing.

Measurement Principle: The measurement of Flourishing requires indicators and metrics that will be shared for consideration of governments and civil society, as a forward-looking complement to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Expression of the principle in policymaking: The five sets of goals and regenerative capacities of each community in pursuit of the goals would be guided and assessed by a set of validated subjective and objective measures. The progress on Flourishing would be assessed locally and

would be aggregated at a regional (i.e. consisting of multiple nation states) rather than at the national level.

At any point in time, individuals can evaluate their progress towards the Global Flourishing Goals by using the GUARD framework to assess whether their community enables: a context of **Goodness** - security and harmony for their personal Flourishing; celebrates **Uniqueness**-diversity in personal, social and genetic expression; permits social, legal and political **Agency** to make decisions for themselves; encourages **Responsibility** for the planet, through mutually respectful, ethical and rational partnerships; and ensures **Dignity** to be treated as a person with moral and rational standing on par with any other human being.

6. The Invitation

The five sets of Global Flourishing Goals - **(1) Life Satisfaction, including through a comfortable standard of living (2) Holistic health and well-being; (3) Fulfilling social, political and economic relationships; (4) Meaning and purpose; and (5) Contributing to the flourishing of all lifeforms (including plants and animals)** - provide a framework that has the potential to accelerate the next great leap for humanity. Global Flourishing Goals help seemingly overwhelming and disparate policy goals cohere and become mutually reinforcing.

Flourishing is not an ephemeral condition, but is instead an outcome measurable at all levels of society (individual, community, regional, global). Stakeholders at each level of society have a key role to play in Flourishing of our species. Multi-variable issues like climate change, democracy, racial justice, or extractive economic systems, can often seem competitive in isolation. But once the Flourishing lens is applied to them, these issues come into focus and align. Flourishing thus acts as a force-multiplier for every intervention by policymakers, with maximum impact. In recognition of this potential, this paper is an invitation to policymakers worldwide and all relevant stakeholders to co-create a Flourishing future for all of humanity.

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