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Creating our Global Future

Tomorrow's world will  
be shaped by the  
decisions that we and  
others take,  
or fail to take, today.

I think the odds are no better than 50/50 that our present civilisation will survive to the end of the present century

Lord Rees of Ludlow, Royal Society Research Professor of Astrophysics and Master of Trinity College, University of Cambridge, and British Astronomer Royal, *Our Final Century: Will the Human Race Survive the Twenty-first Century?*, London, William Heinemann Ltd, 2003

Societies have failed for four reasons: Some failed to anticipate a problem; some did not perceive it after it had arisen; some did not try to resolve it after they recognised it; and some failed in their attempts to solve it

Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, New York, Viking, 2004



## BACKGROUND

While no outcome is pre-ordained, many decisions have long-term consequences and some overarching trends have already become clear. Understanding these trends and reflecting on the uncertainties that will affect the future are essential for strategic success.

Our task as leaders is to go further. We must shape our world in ways that will allow us to realise the visions that inspire us. Leadership involves vision, the articulation of effective strategies, the ability to inspire and empower others, and the courage to initiate change.

Three core global risks were identified at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in January 2007, before the advent of the global financial crisis:

*The danger of complacency in the face of benign conditions ...*

“The new year will begin with the greatest divergence for a generation between the general view of global risks and risks as priced in financial markets”, Lawrence Summers, then President, Harvard University.

*... compounded by increasing interdependency ...*

“Interdependence is the defining issue of the 21st Century”, Tony Blair, then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Risk conflation and interconnectedness make the world increasingly vulnerable to the cascading nature of risk-laden events.

*... and a fundamental disconnect between risk and mitigation ...*

Although tactical gains have been made in specific areas - such as terrorism, and an improved preparedness for a major pandemic outbreak, we are not addressing emerging risks purposefully or in a focused manner.



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## WHY WE ARE CREATING THE FUTUREWORLD FOUNDATION

The familiar metaphor of the “global village”, unhappily, is flawed. While the global economy is highly integrated and its success has increased material wealth and welfare in most parts of the world, it has failed to create a community of citizens. Our global society is fractured, and there is no global polity.

Correcting this will not be easy: we have not invested the time and effort needed to create the coherent values and norms that bind communities together and allow different interests to be balanced and disputes resolved. Therefore the links we create and the behaviour we encourage are critical.

In the next 25 years:

- *Surging global population (9bn by 2049, up from 2.5bn in 1950), increasing urbanisation and rising consumption will exhaust ground water and destroy marine life, biodiversity and the atmosphere*
- *Poverty – exacerbated in the most vulnerable areas by climate change and environmental degradation – and rapidly expanding urban slums will cause weak states to collapse, and force accelerated migration*
- *These conditions will further weaken the rational-secular paradigm and nourish religious extremism and ideological terrorism.*

These systemic challenges threaten our survival. As long as domestic accountability and local political pressures discourage national leaders from addressing global challenges effectively, the linkages in the complex systems in which we are embedded, or which we have created, either amplify the impact of harmful events (as, for example, when a sub-prime mortgage collapse triggers a global financial and economic crisis; or carbon emissions from successful industrialisation cause climate change, extreme weather events and the destruction of livelihoods); or modulate or disperse their effects. We need norms, institutions and systems of global governance to address the challenges posed by global systemic interconnectivity.

The first step is to understand that much of what any of us does has an impact on those around us, and on those who will follow us in inhabiting the earth.



## VISION OF THE FUTUREWORLD FOUNDATION

To advance the public good and promote human development by balancing individual freedom with community responsibility and respect for the ecosystem on which we depend for our survival

The biggest challenge we have faced throughout history is balancing the rights and the obligations of the individual against those of society. This challenge has engaged philosophers and jurists across the ages, and lies at the heart of the great religions. Ensuring that the pursuit of human welfare and happiness does not destroy the environments in which societies are embedded, has become a second great challenge. All successful civilisations have attempted to harness human creativity by balancing individual freedoms with responsibility for the welfare of communities and the ecosystem upon which they depend.

The glorification of markets and the disproportionate focus on individual freedom over the past thirty years have disturbed that balance - with disastrous consequences. To restore the balance, we must cease the cavalier use of carbon and abandon the illusion that human happiness flows from unbridled acquisition and excessive consumption. We must manage our inheritance better if we are not to destroy it.



## THE FOCUS OF THE FUTUREWORLD FOUNDATION

The principle underpinning the FutureWorld Foundation is that contemplating the future allows us to create it. Because the systemic linkages between different risks can either amplify their harmful impact or modulate or disperse their effects, what we do in regulating and incentivising behavior and adopting effective policies matters greatly. We are not the captives of irrational or irresistible forces and have a responsibility to both avert foreseeable harmful consequences and to craft a better world for future generations.

The FutureWorld Foundation will focus on the five priority areas that can be said to constitute a Global Agenda:

- Delivering [environmentally and socially] sustainable economic growth – for without this, we shall not be able to achieve anything else
- Reducing poverty and improving equity – because exceptional prosperity for the few at the expense of the many is neither justifiable nor sustainable
- Addressing the sources of [global and national] vulnerability and promoting security – for security underpins both community and progress
- Sharing the norms and values that enable global coexistence, and working to reconcile cultural differences – because respect for core values and universal norms allows us to live in harmony, while appreciation of cultural diversity enriches our understanding; and
- Improving the quality of global governance and our global institutions – for most of the important challenges we face in a highly-connected world cannot be resolved any other way



## CREATING THE FUTURE

Creating a better future requires investment in three areas:

- the generation of deeper, integrated insights;
- their effective dissemination in order to influence policy and practice;
- the harnessing of insights and intuition of as many global citizens as possible, by using digital technology.



## CREATING THE FUTURE

### **Generating knowledge and insight**

Academic disciplines segment reality into discrete components and study it through exclusive prisms. Their research is thus of limited use in understanding complex systems. If we are to generate the insights needed to address the systemic challenges we face. We must harness the best available knowledge and integrate it into coherent policies focused on the five pillars of the Global Agenda,

The FutureWorld Foundation will work with leading research institutes and organisations around the world in systematic, continuous programmes focused on the themes of the Global Agenda.



## CREATING THE FUTURE

### Communicating effectively

Much groundwork has already been done in defining the transcendent challenges and suggesting partial solutions, but these studies have not generated the political will required to define clear priorities and implement solutions. Instead of planning forward, policymakers are inclined to address only immediate threats, or to wait until a crisis has already erupted and then to seek remedies.

Academic publications are important to researchers, because they advance insights in specific areas. Policy journals are read by a small number of dedicated persons and their impact can be considerable. Papers, reports and policy proposals flowing from our programmes will be published in these journals.

To educate policy-makers, corporate decision-makers and citizens and promote investment in solution-seeking, the knowledge and insights we generate must also be disseminated in innovative and entertaining ways through broadcast and digital media. The FutureWorld Foundation will partner leading media companies to achieve this.



### Harnessing the wisdom of crowds

But this is not enough. We also need to address the challenge of global governance and overcome the “democratic deficit” by involving citizens of the world more directly in shaping our collective future.

In 2004, James Surowiecki suggested, in *The Wisdom of Crowds*, that crowds are capable of making better decisions on a wide range of issues than experts, if the crowds are characterised by diversity of opinion, independence and decentralization, and if their views can be effectively aggregated, “to turn private judgments into a collective decision”.

He made the remarkable assertion that such a crowd “hold[s] a nearly complete picture of the world in its collective brain.” This may be metaphorical rather than accurate, but it’s a powerful insight nonetheless.

Successful decision-making mechanisms must function well under conditions of uncertainty, because the future is inherently uncertain. The Foundation’s assertion that contemplating the future allows us to create it, is thus ideally suited to approaches based on tapping the collective wisdom of diverse, independent, decentralised individuals assembled in crowds, provided there are means of effective aggregation to enable collective decisions to be made.

Much of Surowiecki’s book focuses on what are now called predictive markets. These serve important purposes, provided the four characteristics described above are present, and suggest that there may be another way to approach the challenge of global governance and the management of global risk. Therefore, we need to go one step further.



### FutureWorld

The FutureWorld Foundation has commissioned the building of an Internet-based virtual FutureWorld, to allow networks of global citizens to use their collective wisdom to create a better [virtual] world. The basic framework is that of the existing world order, reflecting the pillars of the global architecture – the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Bank Group and the World Trade Organisation – but citizens will be able to find novel solutions to challenges within these rule-based constraints. The virtual institutions, practices and systems that emerge from the FutureWorld will inform (and perhaps shame) democratically elected politicians, technical specialists and bureaucrats, and help us to overcome the inertia that frustrates us today.

In the light of three elements – declining electoral participation in the “real” world, growing enthusiasm for participation in virtual worlds and the collective wisdom of crowds – the potential utility of a FutureWorld metaverse becomes clear. This metaverse will be an environment in which diverse, independent, decentralised individuals can assemble in crowds and, through their avatars, create the future by managing and mitigating virtual risks, building virtual institutions of global governance, and addressing the challenges of the global commons.

FutureWorld is the finished product, but it will need a phased implementation if it is to be effective. The millions of players that we hope will engage in FutureWorld will need access to the knowledge and information that will allow them to engage effectively. Therefore, in parallel with creating FutureWorld, the Future World Foundation will launch a Global Agora.



The Agora will be a virtual town hall and community library for inhabitants of the global village. It will make use of information technology to enable people to keep abreast of the process and substance of globalisation, provide insights into global governance, and facilitate democratic participation in transnational policy-making.

The Global Agora will make available, through one portal, a comprehensive array of information on key global issues, helping to improve transparency around these matters for citizens, experts and policy-makers. It will be a unique gathering point for world opinion, and will open debates to broader participation, provide feedback to governments and international organisations and simplify access to analysis of key issues.

**Directory**

The portal will provide direct links into the open document rooms of international organisations and national ministries with responsibility for global issues, thus aiding navigation to sites that are currently fragmented and difficult to locate. Building on the request from the G20 to create a community of think-tanks, the site will also link leading think-tanks, research institutes, relevant non-governmental organisations, advocacy groups and specific-issue sites.

**Public notice and comment area**

Users will be able to comment on draft proposals promulgated by international organisations, and other matters affecting the global commons. Appropriate formal and informal channels will be developed to funnel discussion and commentary into the international policy-making process.

**Library**

A library will contain current periodicals and scholarly articles, business-, labour- and civil society position papers, and other analyses of a wide range of key global issues

**Interactive spaces**

Experts, policy-makers and policy-influencers will be able to discuss key issues in the Members Area, and citizens will be able to interact with one another in chat rooms devoted to areas of the Global Agenda.



## TARGET OUTCOMES

A steady stream of well-researched, integrated insights into each priority area on the Global Agenda flows into the public domain.

Effective communication, partly through the information portal of the Global Agora and partly through scholarly publication and innovative media communication, results in these insights being widely understood, galvanising citizen action.

The FutureWorld metaverse becomes a testing ground for new ideas, emerging solutions, experimental global structures and systems, as well as a forum for exchanges among millions of young (and older) global citizens grappling with the challenge of creating a better future. It captures world opinion, opens key debates to broader participation, and provides a unique mechanism for public feedback to governments.

These activities generate the political will required to address global challenges more effectively, and result in a more equitable and sustainable distribution of obligations and opportunities across the global commonwealth.





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