Global Challenges Foundation

A Bottom-Up Approach

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The submission calls for addressing global challenges and the world's most pressing threats by organizing people through a grassroots movement and creating alternative leadership. It is a civil society solution, based on regeneration of communities. A new not-for-profit organization with "well-being of all" and "responsible living" as core values will create pilot community centers that offer benefits/assistance to local people aligning with it's vision. Small initiatives for sustainable living will gradually be taken up in these centers. Tools, best practices, and ideas generated from success of these centers will be made available worldwide for replication. This is expected to lead to unprecedented exchange of ideas, and cooperation between people across nations. New community leaders will emerge, who will have the power to influence government, business, and media through the member network.

1. Abstract

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY HAVE FALLEN SHORT

Science and technology have brought mankind to an amazing place. But it has not been without some remarkable failings. We can predict weather worldwide for example, but our rivers are polluted and under-ground water is depleting. We have sufficient food, but hundreds of millions are hungry and more than twice as many are obese. Anyone with an axe to grind can get some serious weapons in their hands. Oddly enough, the brilliant minds in our publicly funded universities are not drawn to address these problems.

Modern conveniences have made our lives very comfortable, but we know very little of how our needs are met. Our cities especially are very vulnerable to disruption, because all their basic needs (food, water, oil & gas, electricity) are met from far away places.

We know a great deal about everything today. We can look inside our body, reattach severed limbs. But there is also an over-dependency on experts. For things as simple as diet and nutrition, exercise, healing, stress management, we go to experts. But when we put more trust in outside counsel than in ourselves, we diminish our own intelligence and we lose personal power.

TOP-DOWN WON'T WORK

People's faith in government is misplaced. They elect representatives and trust them to know and do what is best for them. But these representatives are people too, and they naturally value their personal benefit over that of their constituents. Thus we have this situation today where government and big business work for their mutual benefit at the expense of people and the planet.

The scale of the problems today requires so much to change that a solution can not be expected from nation states. They see no imminent threat and the easier thing to do is to stay the course. Why cause hardship to people when there is no short term gain. This has been validated by the ineffectiveness of United Nations.

NEW LEADERSHIP

The change that is needed can only be brought about by enlightened leadership. There are awake people in every society, albeit very few, who like to alleviate suffering wherever they see it. They do whatever little they can to improve the lot of others. They volunteer in local activities. They support organizations such as the UN, United Way, Salvation Army, Doctors Without Borders, Red Cross, etc. Some are great visionaries and inventors. Our wish is for these people to come together for betterment of their neighborhoods. If this could be done, they would emerge as new leaders, fit to lead humanity forward.

THE INSTITUTIONS

We suggest creation of a not-for-profit organization whose core values will be "Well-Being of All" and "Responsible Living". It will seek to address the most pressing threats and risks to humanity by organizing people through a grassroots movement and creating alternative leadership. This organization will:

1. create tools and processes for community building
2. let these tools and processes be used freely worldwide
3. help create some pilot community centers

4. facilitate conversations between community leaders to form national agenda/ policy
5. influence government, business, and media by the power of its membership network

In order to stay true to the vision, the articles of incorporation will lay down some unique qualifications for the board of directors. The board will add/replace its members (directors) with two thirds majority in a transparent selection process. Apart from this, the organizational structure will be no different than a typical non-profit of similar size.

COMMUNITY CENTER

The community centers it will seek to build will serve local people who align with its values. The center will offer compelling benefits (described later) thus drawing people to it. They will need to register with the non-profit and pledge their support for its vision. This is how community will start to build. Ideas and local initiatives for sustainable living will be introduced in these centers. No support from government would be required, but members can solicit local government support if they want.

These community centers will be operated democratically by the members. We suggest later a way to check corruption that has direct voting at its core.

This does not address co-operation between nations. We leave that to the United Nations. If a country does not permit people to organize, we are not looking to force it upon them. We want to lead by example. Our model does however enable cooperation and assistance between communities across nations.

We will proceed without help from governments. But in the long run, we expect that local governments will themselves co-opt these community centers and open membership to entire community.

2. Description of the model

Although the rate at which humanity is killing each other is declining (Ref 1), there is still too much of it. The role that nation states and big business play in causing suffering and destruction on the planet is well-documented, and there is no need to repeat that here. It is an enormous task to overcome governments, big-business, and a largely unconscious people. Government and business will not change fast enough. But we believe people can.

Is it possible get a majority of people interested in this conversation, have them start caring about our common future, have them give up instant gratification in favor of long term benefit? We believe it is possible to do through community.

THE POTENTIAL OF COMMUNITY

Most people are busy with their personal lives and have not contemplated their relationship with land and people that contribute to their lifestyle. They don't know who grows their food, who makes their clothes, who cleans the streets, etc. They pay their taxes and think that they have done their duty. The government should do all that is necessary for them to have a good life. But this approach does not work. In fact it has put us in a perilous place.

Imagine, instead, that when I came to live in my neighborhood, it was necessary to join the local community center. I had to register with it and tell something about myself, such as where I grew up, my interests, my work, etc. I could also mention what help I needed. The center would grant me access to resources such as library, preventive and primary care, post-office, employment and training resources, etc. It would inform me of my duties as a responsible citizen of the community, such as recycling rules, etc. Through the center, I could find local vendors, service providers, activity partners, friends. I could come to know if community or some members were seeking help. I could learn about local public initiatives, and volunteer my time with those I felt synergy with them. This to us would be a very fulfilling way to live.When we contribute to society we feel good about ourselves. We can then open up to caring for people and places beyond our borders, especially if there are those amongst us who already do that.

Numerous studies have shown that humans are not bad at caring for strangers.

(Ref 2 and 3)

But there are free-loaders amongst us too, which puts the co-operative people at a disadvantage and causes resentment and disharmony. An excessively centralized government can not handle this problem, and in fact exacerbates it. We see evidence of this as people are increasingly voicing their opposition to welfare policies. The community can handle this problem very well because it can distinguish between free-loaders and those that genuinely need help.

As technology is playing an ever increasing role in our lives, a big gap has opened up between those who are proficient in technology and those who are not. Moreover technology is advancing rapidly, and many do not have the mental capacity to keep up. On the other hand, there is a need for skilled labor to build resilient communities. Construction, renewable energy, local farming, maintaining playgrounds and green areas, recycling, etc. are a few of the fields in which abundant local employment opportunities can be created.

Industrial farming is a major cause of pollution, which can be mitigated by movement towards growing locally. There are companies that have partnered with retailers to grow locally (Ref 4). Communities can learn from such businesses and replicate the model as a cooperative.

A community can take great initiatives towards sustainability. For example, it could set a goal of sourcing 50% of its fresh produce locally. It could make arrangements to buy electricity from renewable energy sources, compost all its bio-waste, etc. These activities raise awareness.

THE SOLUTION: PEOPLECENTER

PeopleCenter will be a non-profit organization that will seek to unite people across nations. It will have Well-Being of All and Responsible Living as its core values. It will seek people with similar values and empower them, thus creating ‘responsible leadership’ in local communities.

To preserve purity of vision, the articles of incorporation would mandate that the governing board be comprised only of people who have demonstrated all of these:

1. Success in their profession
2. Long term association with a non-sectarian charity
3. Having lived for at least 2 years each in a developed and developing country
4. Interest in environmental issues and sustainability
5. Interest in government or community

In addition, diversity of professions will be required to constitute the board. Board meetings will be public. The board itself will choose its members for a term of 4 years, subject to candidates' eligibility. The entire process will be transparent. Board members will be required to disclose their tax returns in every year of their term and for the following 5 years. Super-majority (say 75%) will be required for actions such as changing eligibility criteria, removing a member before term, etc.

The board is not elected by people. Magna Carta was not written by public consensus. Because of the gravity of situation, we need a board that is visionary. PeopleCenter founders will be the initial board members, and they will augment the board as they see fit.

The board will invite business leaders and social activists to declare support for PeopleCenter. They will advance its cause amongst their base.

WHAT PEOPLECENTER WILL DO

This will be a very transparent organization. It will rely heavily on technology. Through a global outreach, it will seek people who align with its values and urge them to become members. It will connect nearby members with each other and encourage them to start local conversations. A web portal will facilitate exchange of ideas. Members could seek support for their communities from other communities. The portal would also be used to operate the centers.

SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES

1. Drafting a manifesto conveying values and vision
2. Creating a **Community Center** model in accordance with manifesto
3. Choosing a few communities to run pilot centers
4. Capturing baseline metrics of health/economic indicators in these
5. Helping in pilot execution
6. Building web-site and processes for direct voting
7. Monitoring/Evaluating the pilots and making plans to scale up
8. Engaging members in creating a national agenda
9. Encouraging other community building initiatives to join its platform
10. Seeking support from business community

THE COMMUNITY CENTER

The success of the Community Center will be a function of its membership and participation. The Center must offer something compelling to attract people. Some suggested activities and services are listed below:

1. Preventive healthcare
2. Primary healthcare
3. Job fares
4. Skill development
5. Soup kitchen
6. Arbitration of disputes

7. Computer literacy
8. Public meetings
9. Recycling/Composting
10. Child day care
11. Exhibitions
12. Theater/Arts
13. Sports

The center is to become a meeting point for PeopleCenter members in the community, so it will be open early morning to late night. It will rely heavily on volunteers. Every member will have an account of hours volunteered. It will be debited when the member utilizes a service, such as child-care.

The center would aim to meet its energy requirement through renewables.

FUNDING

There will be a membership fee, but it will not be able to cover all the costs. PeopleCenter will have to fund the pilots. Subsequently, say after 3 or 4 years, communities will have to raise funds themselves, from local organizations, businesses, and private donors. They will be able to generate some income too, for example by rental of space and equipment etc. Funding should **eventually** come from tax revenue. We are not advocating for an additional tax. We are for reallocation of tax revenue.

OPERATING MODEL OF COMMUNITY CENTER

Each Center would abide by the values of PeopleCenter, but will be free to decide its operating structure. Membership will be small to begin with, and a simple structure would suffice. Once membership increases to thousands though, more structure will be needed.

Since it is not uncommon to see well-intentioned people fall prey to the temptations of power, PeopleCenter will propose a model on following lines:

The Center will have:
a council: for decision making
an executive head: for executing the decisions
three judicial heads: to resolve disputes in neighboring communities, not this one

1. Every 50 to 200 neighboring households are differentiated into a ward.
2. In each ward, members choose by simple majority: two captains for the council, an executive head, and 3 judicial heads
3. A candidate can not stand for multiple roles
4. The council deliberates and decides some matters on its own; on other matters, decision is by direct vote
5. Any decision to do with allocation of money is decided by direct vote
6. For the direct vote, one captain conveys the pros of the proposal to the ward, the other conveys the cons
7. Vote is electronic and can be recast till closing
8. People can assign another person in their ward as proxy
9. There is minimum vote percent (say, 20%) for validity

The executive head would make appointments to executive positions. Any decision of executive head can be overturned by direct vote by members.The reasons it has been so designed are as follows:

1. Small ward size ensures that there is a personal relationship between the representative and the constituents
2. Having two reps decreases dependence on a single person
3. Every matter should not be put to direct vote because people don't have time for that
4. Electronic vote saves people time and effort
5. Ability to change vote means voters can act on last minute information
6. Proxy is for people who are not familiar with the issue or don't have the capacity to understand it
7. The judicial heads resolving disputes in other communities reduces chances of nepotism and adds an external check. It also conveys that communities must serve each other.

This operating model could be a possible way to form local governments in future. It is not essential to our solution.

ENTHUSIASM AS A DRIVER

It is enthusiasm that is the key to success. With the community center, we seek to generate enthusiasm in people. It is fun to meet with like minded people and work together for common good. The little successes will generate enthusiasm. Then people will go on to do bigger things. This is how the movement will grow.

The Center would remind members that is important to enjoy the work they do. The planet preceded humans by a billion years and it will survive humans. The motive for action is to preserve the beauty of life on earth during their lifetime. The community center would be a joyful place that will inspire people to their highest potential.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

There is no better example of a sustainable system than the natural world. It has no central controller, and every animal has to fend for itself. In a pack or herd, each animal performs some useful function. So it should be with humans too. Every person must perform some function useful to the society. The center will see to it that every member willing to work finds some steady employment.

Those who do not have the mental or physical capacity to do any useful work can also join the Center. The Center will decide how it wants to support them. This is to demonstrate that the community can take care of the less fortunate.

WELLNESS

We expect this to be the primary driver for the Center.

Every person is unique, with distinct genetic makeup, inclinations, habits, aptitude, skills, desires, likes, dislikes, etc. One person loves carrots, another can't stand it. One person is allergic to gluten, another is allergic to dairy, and so on. For this reason, there is no single preventive healthcare methodology that works for all. Moreover, if a best practice is expensive, such as fresh food, what is a poor man to do?

Our popular culture impresses upon us that there are experts who can tell us how to solve our problems. While this is true to some extent, a side-effect of this has been that most people live without awareness of their own actions. When they run into a problem, they look to experts for help. The experts are typically experts in a limited field, so their advice can be a hit or a miss, or even harmful. My mother had high blood pressure, so the doctor advised her to eat less salt. She did as told, and after some time, she became delirious because of lack of salt. She had to be admitted to a hospital, where she was hooked up with an IV of saline solution! While this may be a statistically rare case, if you look at the prevalence of lifestyle illnesses today, you can not doubt that something is not quite right in our current methods for disease prevention and management / cure.

We propose that people would be healthier and happier if they acknowledged and remembered that they are the only true keepers of their good health – physical, mental, and emotional. They can seek professional advice when they need to, but the ultimate responsibility lies with themselves. They are the CEO of their self. However, merely understanding this is not enough. For lasting change to occur, there must exist an ecosystem of wellness. This is what the Community Center will aim to create, in partnership with PeopleCenter.

This would entail:
1. Determining locally appropriate best practices for physical,mental, emotional health
2. Encouraging users to experiment and discover what works for them
3. Knowledge sharing
4. Nurse practitioner (and mentor) on staff
5. Focus on children and youth, because grown ups are resistant to change
6. Developing local youth as leaders / health advocates / entrepreneurs
7. Restaurant (or community kitchen) to serve ready-to-eat healthy food at affordable price
8. Database of local service providers
9. Continuous data collection
10. Activities such as Nature Walks, Exercise, Yoga, Meditation, Cooking classes, etc.

PeopleCenter would assist by:
1. Creating attractive content, digital and print
2. Engaging role models/celebrities

There is nothing as empowering as being able to take charge of one's health.

SOME COMPLEX ISSUES:

The Cure for Medieval Mindset

Regressive groups such as the Taliban maintain their grip on society because of access to arms. But all arms are manufactured in other countries. If the arms producers (and governments) want, they can work together to cut-off the supply. This is what a responsible leadership will do. Then alternatives to Taliban will have a chance to emerge.

Assistance to Developing/Under-Developed Nations

The developing and under-developed nations have a poorer record of environmental protection and social welfare than developed nations. They are under greater population strain. They continue to be used by developed nations.

Their governance is poorer. They have more ethnic conflicts. They have more exploitative leaders. Clearly the challenge is greater in these nations. But there is hope too. Not having support from the government, their people have a greater bond with community. If their communities are adopted by communities in developed world, the one-on-one engagement will be of greater assistance to them than the "aid" given by world bank and IMF which is largely misappropriated.

We are familiar with one such project where a community in USA has co-opted a community in Cameroon to create employment opportunities, health center, and library (Ref 5)

The developed world should also do its part by not exploiting these nations, which it eventually will with new leadership.

Towards Self Governance
When a central government has excessive power, there is greater scope for corruption. It becomes easier for special interests to dictate policy. Government and special interests want to maintain status quo. A lot of businesses actually profit from people's misery (healthcare, weapons). Many others cause misery by trying to maximize profits. Their interest is at odds with our core values. But they happen to be in control today.

We are confident that the people will eventually prevail and move towards strong local governments. PeopleCenter would be a stepping stone towards that.

3. Motivation

PeopleCenter, the non-profit, does not need governments to cooperate. It sidesteps government and goes directly to people.

A) CORE VALUES
'Well-being of all' and 'Responsible Living' are the primary core values of PeopleCenter. The required qualifications of board members will see to it that these values are preserved.

You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. In this spirit, we are attempting to make it easy for people to improve their own lives and go towards a better future. But they have to walk the walk eventually. All spiritual teacher say that change begins from within. Charity begins at home. This is the very essence of our model.

B) DECISION-MAKING CAPACITY
The board will be much like another non-profit board, so decision making can not be obstructed.

C) EFFECTIVENESS
What gives us confidence that this will work? Can we get sufficient people interested? How is this going to mitigate Climate Change?

We do not claim that our model is the most effective, but we do claim that any effective solution will need to have transformation of people at its core.

Healthy Communities is not a new idea. The village has been a self-sufficient, resilient, and sustainable unit for centuries. There are thousands of initiatives already ongoing for building community. By way of our model we are directing attention and resources to the process. If we can't get sufficient people interested, we will have to think of creative ways to get them interested. Influencers can be engaged. More professionals can be hired for marketing and promotion. **It is much easier to effect change at local level than national and global.**

Man's creativity is boundless. When people from diverse backgrounds collaborate on a single platform with common goals, extra-ordinary strides can be made. If TV shows such as 'Who Wants To Be A Millionaire' and 'Jeopardy' decide to always have at least one question on issues of sustainability (e.g.: on which day in 2017, 85% of all the electricity consumed in Germany was produced from renewables), sustainability would slowly become a mainstream conversation.

Social activism will fail if it addresses only part of the issue. Well-being of all being a core value, PeopleCenter will encourage members to find holistic solutions. For example, if a polluting industry is to be stopped, alternative employment opportunities should be created.

There is evidence that people's behavior can be altered. 40% of people in USA used to smoke in the 70's. A concentrated effort to alert people to the dangers of smoking (coupled with government policy) has brought down the rate to 15% in 2014. With the power of social media, change can now happen even faster.

As more people decide to reduce their energy footprint, industry will adjust itself in response. Infrastructure (such as better public transport) will come up.

PeopleCenter will find businesses that are more in alignment with its values, and be their advocate (for free). Centers will so the same with local manufacturers and suppliers.

Social frictions are often economically driven. A resilient community will have a healthy economy and consequently less crime and social unrest.

Religious conflicts are the toughest problems to solve. Our hope is that some people in the midst of these conflicts will see the value of peaceful coexistence, and when they do, they can gather local support for it. Subsequently they can solicit support of international community too. Cessation of hostilities could start community by community.

There is a risk that some nations or groups of people will be against our core values. But if the rest of mankind is united in its commitment, this will not be a difficult problem to solve. If their behavior is a threat to larger interest of humanity, United Nations can initiate military action.

D) RESOURCES AND FINANCING

One of the biggest cost-items will be the development and maintenance of technology component. However several successful tech companies are aligned with PeopleCenter values already, and we expect them to support it wholeheartedly. They will help in minimizing costs and covering them. Since the same platform will be used by all communities, this is excellent utilization of resources.

PeopleCenter does not need a $25 billion budget like UNDP. Its scope is very small, and its budget will likely be in the vicinity of $50 million. Given the core values and transparency at PeopleCenter, this should not be difficult to raise.

The strategy is not to have thousands of people working full time to build communities. Instead, it is to have people who are already gainfully employed to volunteer their time.

The youth are idealistic and full of energy. We expect that the centers will find ways to engage them. PeopleCenter will have a youth wing that will focus on advocacy amongst youth.

The community center model is intrinsically equitable. After pilots have been implemented, community members will fund the center – through member collections, services, grants, private donors, etc. In the long run however, we expect that community center will open itself to all people (not just PeopleCenter members), and local tax revenue would fund it.

E) TRUST AND INSIGHT

With its limited scope, there is no reason for PeopleCenter to not be transparent. The technology driven framework will also make it easier to implement transparency – both at PeopleCenter and at community centers. Of course the board will have to stay vigilant.

F) FLEXIBILITY

This is another area where our proposal stands out. As a non-profit, PeopleCenter can adjust course easily. The community centers operate under control of local people, so they are flexible too. The platform will enable communities to interact with each other and help each other, even across national boundaries.

G) PROTECTION AGAINST THE ABUSE OF POWER

There will be no potential for abuse of power for a considerable time. That is because PeopleCenter will have no power till it has mobilized millions of people. Even then, it will be the community leaders only who will have power. PeopleCenter can only issue guidance to centers, and so it won't have any power to abuse. In fact, once community centers are vibrant and self-sufficient, they will not tolerate any non-sense from PeopleCenter. They will simply disassociate from it.

Abuse of power at Community Centers is not an issue because the scale is small and members can deal with it themselves. Despite that, we have suggested an operating model. Centers can use that or whatever else they deem appropriate.

It is possible that some community centers decide to limit membership to a certain group or ethnicity. Though such an act would run counter to the core values of PeopleCenter, it is within the realm of possibility. In such a case, others could form their own community center which is true to the values of PeopleCenter.

H) ACCOUNTABILITY

PeopleCenter seeks to create personal accountability in people. They can monitor how well they are doing with respect to their pledge to live responsibly. What is their footprint. What have they done for well-being of others. Are they healthier. From time to time, they would answer these questions for themselves. They would make "pledge partners" and hold each other accountable.

When decision-making is local, it is easy to hold leadership accountable too.

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