

RADICAL FUTURES TOOLKIT SERIES



# *Living* *in a* **Degrowth** **Economy**

SHADO MAG X DECOLONISING ECONOMICS  
X A GROWING CULTURE X PEOPLE & PLANET

# *What is Degrowth?*

Degrowth is a practice, a process, and movement which challenges the capitalist obsession with GDP growth and instead prioritises ecological sustainability, economic equity and collective care and dignity.

Gaining popularity in the early 2000s, degrowth builds on critiques of capitalism, colonialism, and extractivism. It envisions a world where resources are shared equitably, work is restructured around care and community, and economic systems are designed to sustain life—not profit. It requires a transformation of values and practices at the personal, local, national, regional and global level.

# *Origins of Degrowth*

**Degrowth is a response to the contradiction of 'sustainable development'** - acknowledging that even 'green' growth traps us in a system of endless production and consumption, where resources and labour are exploited to ensure the wealth and power of the few.

As prominent degrowth scholar Jason Hickel argues, clean energy alone won't solve the climate crisis if it's still tied to an economic model dependent on endless growth.

Degrowth critiques Techno-optimism – the belief that technological progress can solve a majority of human problems, overlooking the root cause of global inequality and overconsumption in the Minority World\*: capitalism itself. Many of the 'solutions' to climate change fail to address its root causes, ignoring the fact that scaling up renewable energy still requires significant mineral extraction from the Majority World\*\*.

***We use the terms Minority World and Majority World instead of Global North and Global South to more accurately reflect global power dynamics.***

# *Origins of Degrowth*

While Global North/South are often used in discussions of extractivism and racial capitalism, they can reinforce a static-geography based framing. In contrast, Minority/Majority World expose how capitalism and systems of oppression are driven by a small minority of the world's population - whose interests dominate global systems and suppress voices of the many.

This framing also reminds us that these dynamics are not just about where power is located, but how it operates. Systems of domination exist within countries too - including extractive elites in the Majority World who align with global capitalist interests. This analysis points to a class-based, systemic structure rather than fixed geographic blocks.

\*Minority World: countries commonly labelled as “developed,” and emphasises that while these countries tend to impose their will on the rest of the world, they are, in fact, the minority.

\*\*Majority World: countries commonly labelled as “developing,” who in fact make up the majority of the world’s population.

# *Unpacking 'growth' + Capitalocentrism*

Our current world is dominated by Capitalocentrism – where all of our economic activities are framed through the lens of capitalism.

*In the capitalist system, 'growth' is revered as the ultimate goal, even when it results in the harm of the environment and marginalised peoples.*

But as shado's contributing editor Elia J. Ayoub argues in this 2021 article, "the word 'growth' gives this extremely damaging phenomenon a linguistic way out. It provides a kind of false bargain." (The Emotional Case for Postgrowth, shado mag)

# *What's the difference between Degrowth and Postgrowth?*

Elia J. Ayoub explains that the words 'Degrowth' and 'Postgrowth' are often used interchangeably, even though they are distinct... "I view postgrowth as including degrowth, and degrowth as helping lead to a postgrowth world."

*Postgrowth is a worldview beyond the narrative of the (economic) growth story. It seeks to shift beyond growth-based thinking.*

*Degrowth involves intentionally downscaling production and consumption to increase human well-being and ecological conditions.*

A lot of this work involves imagination and world-building, resisting urgency culture. As Elia points out, "we should be alarmed by what's happening, but this doesn't mean that there is nothing on the horizon for us to work towards. This is why I promote Solarpunk as well. We need to be telling better stories of our present and our future if we wish to make it easier for everyone to join us in this existential struggle."

# Degrowth and Postgrowth continued

*“What makes Postgrowth so effective? It’s a strategic tool for dismantling capitalocentrism.”*

“By advocating for postgrowth, we put major polluters in a more defensive position. They will have to come up with reasons why they oppose an obviously better vision of the world. They do not have the tools at their disposal to tackle this because doing so requires dismantling their own business models, and they will never do that unless they have no other choice.” - **Elia J. Ayoub**

Postgrowth shifts the narrative, making it harder for big polluters to hide behind greenwashing or vague “net zero” goals.

**Postgrowth also resists guilt narratives**

→ It rejects the idea that ordinary people must shoulder the blame for ecological collapse.

→ It exposes the false “choices” between jobs vs. the environment.

→ It disrupts corporate co-option of climate messaging

# *Solidarity* *Economics 101*

Solidarity Economics offers a practical framework for implementing degrowth/postgrowth by prioritising interdependence and collective liberation. It provides practical, community-driven alternatives to meet peoples' material needs and address systemic inequalities.

At [SolidarityEconomyPrinciples.org](http://SolidarityEconomyPrinciples.org), you can find a list of some of the key guiding principles of Solidarity Economics – a resource that was drafted by a group of organisers with long and deep experience working in worker cooperatives, cooperative and solidarity economy networks, and building grassroots movements in the US and Canada.

# ***Solidarity Economics 101 continued***

**Some of the key principles they include are:**

**Building relationships based on solidarity and cooperation, not competition**

**Centering decisions and organising work at the most local level, led by those directly impacted**

**Practicing democracy in all aspects of work**

**Incorporating disability justice principles into work and treating access as a value, practice and culture**

**Committing to racial justice within and outside orgs, shifting power and addressing legacies of harm while creating opportunities for repair**

**Embracing conflict as generative and clarifying**

**Creating abundance by cooperating to access resources across all levels - internationally, nationally, regionally and locally**

**Sharing information with each other**

# *Decolonising Economics toolkit*

**Decolonising Economics**, a group committed to building a solidarity economy rooted in racial justice principles, explains that “solidarity economies **are transformative – they redistribute power and resources** to those who have been most harmed by white supremacy, settler colonialism, patriarchy, ableism, and capitalism – and meet an immediate material need for a community. They are not symbolic, but actually delivering the housing, food, education, culture, and other needs humans require to thrive. **They challenge the power of systems based on individualism, profit, and private property.**”

*You can read more about this on their Nourishing Economics' website.*

# **Decolonising Economics toolkit**

***Other helpful starting points include:***

## **New Economy Coalition's Resource List: Solidarity**

**Economies 101:** resources to learn more about solidarity economies movement vision, values and practices – from the basics to movement foundations, frameworks and theories of change, to SE models and sector case studies.

## **Movement Generation's From Banks and Tanks to**

**Cooperation and caring: A Strategic Framework for a Just Transition:** a booklet unpacking what a Just Transition entails, helpful for those wishing to better understand the extractive economy.

# *Decolonising Economics continued*

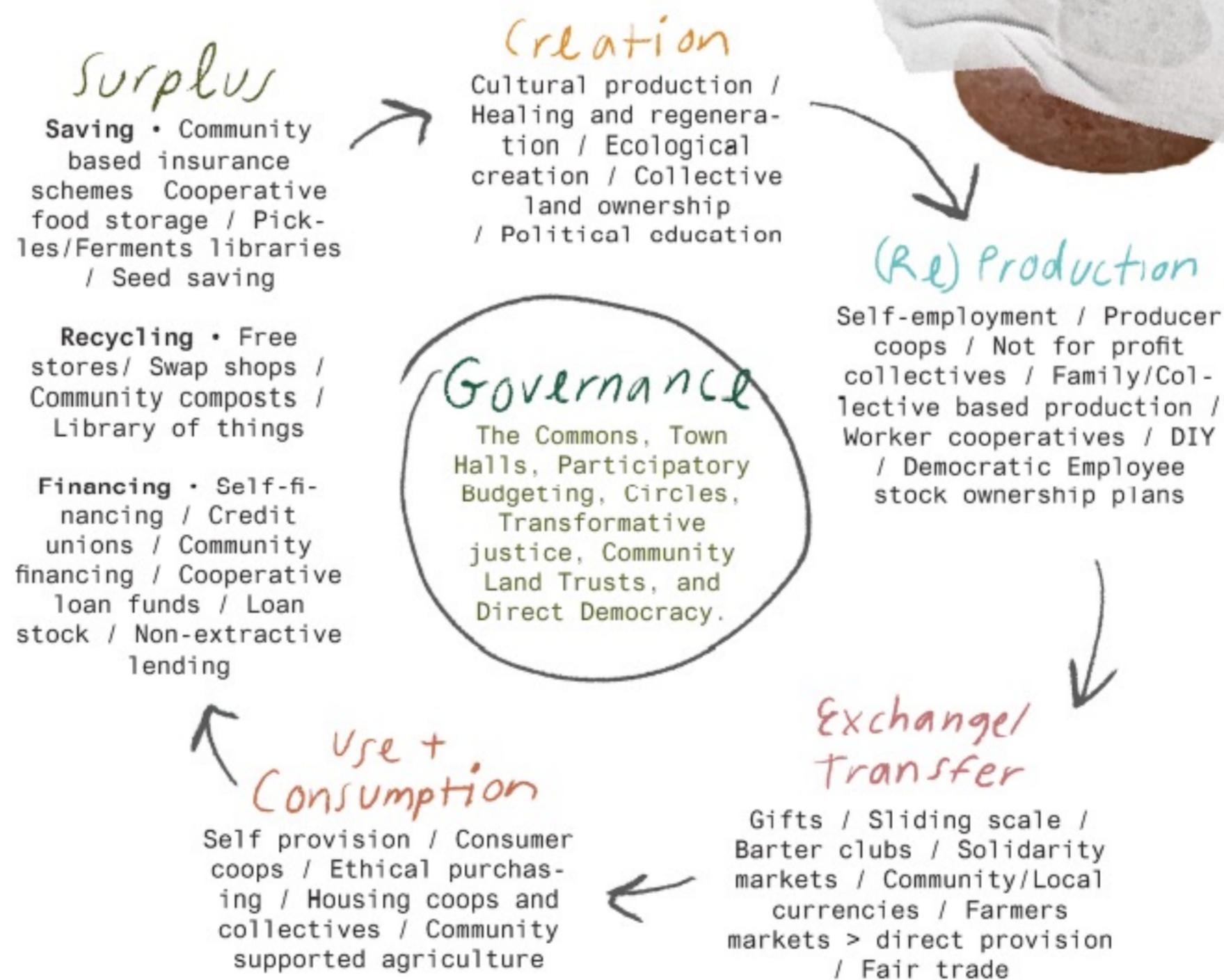
A zine that Decolonising Economics created in collaboration with Migrants in Culture, they put forward the following important questions for people to consider on their journey with solidarity economics:

*'How might we structure our world?'*

*'How can we manage our shared resources and nurture our relationships in nourishing and regenerative ways?'*

# Decolonising Economics continued

*The figure below, included in their zine, references SolidarityEconomyPrinciples.org and offers a glimpse into what answers to this look like:*



\*www.solidarityeconomyprinciples.org has served as a guide for this section and a reference for the figure above.

A CASE STUDY

# Offers & Needs Markets

*One example of a Solidarity Economics tool in practice that Decolonising Economics shares in workshops is the Offers & Needs Markets.*

While certain elements of Offers & Needs Markets have blossomed throughout history throughout many parts of the world (for example: Indigenous sharing circles) – this particular facilitation exercise was designed by the Post Growth Institute, enabling and encouraging people to locally exchange passions, skills, knowledge, resources, opportunities and needs without the exchange of money – avoiding co-option by capital and environmental exploitation.

By reframing markets outside of the capitalist economy, Offers & Needs Markets showcase the abundance available through community relationships.

*You can sign up to train in Offers & Needs Markets : <https://offersandneeds.com>*

A CASE STUDY

## *A Visit to Can Decreix*

Another example of Degrowth in action is Can Decreix, or the House of Degrowth, which is an off-grid, low-tech living lab with a clear mission: to live less, but with purpose. shado editor Zoe Rasbash recently visited and wrote about the centre, which was founded in 2011 as a hub for exploring, experimenting, and practicing organic agriculture and agroecology, eco-construction, and renewable energy – as well as a centre for research and activism around ideas of degrowth.

The community uses solar ovens in summer, harvests wood to fuel stoves that provide both heat and cooking power, and grows food without chemical fertilisers or pesticides. Waste – from food scraps to wastewater – is repurposed and reused, ensuring nothing is squandered. Even cleaning products are homemade from plant matter, ash, and clay to

keep chemicals out of the environment.

With reduced waste, solar-powered electricity, a repair shed, and a sociocratic approach to collective decision making, Can Decreix has developed an iterative model of how to foster resilience and connection with the earth and each other.

# Further reading & resources

## Readings

- The Emotional Case for Postgrowth - by Elia J. Ayoub
- Is living low tech the answer? - by Zoe Rasbash
- Less is More - by Jason Hickel
- The Future is Degrowth: A Guide to
- a World beyond Capitalism - by Matthias Schmelzer, Andrea Vetter & Aaron Vansintjan
- Decolonial Ecology: Thinking from the Caribbean World - by Malcom Ferdinand

## Zines & Toolkits

- Solidarity Economy Showcase: a zine by Decolonising Economics + Migrants In Culture from their Nourishing Economics programme, which was a series of retreats, workshops, hang-outs, community dinners and collaborations between 2023-24 of BPOC solidarity economy organisers.
- New Economy Coalition's Resource List: Solidarity Economies 101: resources to learn more about solidarity economy movement vision, values and practices - from the basics to movement foundations, frameworks and theories of change, to SE models and sector case studies.
- Movement Generation's From Banks and Tanks to Cooperation and caring: A Strategic Framework for a Just Transition: a booklet unpacking what a Just Transition entails, helpful for those wishing to better understand the extractive economy.

# *Further reading & resources*

## *Podcasts & Audiovisual Resources*

- Explore community resourcing with two special videos from Decolonising Economics on the African diaspora and trans liberation:
- **How to Sustain Social Movements Through Community Provision** - Oct 2022 webinar where Nonhanhla hosted a webinar with Zahra Dalilah, in conversation with Axmed Maxamed on community resourcing within the African diaspora. They speak about how their grandmothers had been using saving circles such as pardner and susu and the parallels between this and the mutual aid movement in the African diaspora currently.
- You can also download the **Resourcing Your Community: How To Sustain Social Movements** toolkit here.
- **Trans Community Resourcing** - Dec 2022, Nonhanhla co-organised an event in partnership with UK based trans organisers on trans Community resourcing. Bringing together Qween Jean and Ceyenne Doroshow, who recently utilised community resourcing to buy a trans-led community housing project in New York, with Chloe Filani.
- Watch Decolonising Economics' series, **Economics of Queerness**, where LGBTQ+ Black people and people of colour explore the ways to create alternative economic systems for our communities. They include videos about organising for solidarity systems, organising over decades, and organising across borders.

# Definitions

**Degrowth:** a practice, a process, and movement which challenges the capitalist obsession with GDP growth and instead prioritises ecological sustainability, economic equity and collective care and dignity.

**Postgrowth:** a worldview beyond the narrative of the (economic)-growth story. It seeks to shift beyond growth-based thinking.

**Solarpunk:** a movement that imagines a world where social, ecological, political and economic systems are completely transformed - creating a bridge between human society and the natural world. It's about living in resistance to harmful systems while crafting the alternatives - creating futures rooted in

ecological harmony, mutual aid and radical care.

**Mutual aid:** A voluntary exchange of resources and services for mutual benefit. Rooted in community care and solidarity, it is an alternative to state or charity-based models of support and 'service delivery', and has long histories in Majority World, queer, disabled and working-class communities.

**Majority world:** countries commonly labelled as "developing," who in fact make up the majority of the world's population.

**Minority world:** countries commonly labelled as "developed," emphasising that while these countries tend to impose their will on the rest of the world, they are, in fact, the minority.

# Definitions

**Techno-optimism:** the belief that technological progress can solve a majority of human problems, overlooking the root cause of global inequality and overconsumption in the Minority World: capitalism itself.

**Capitalocentrism:** a term popularised by Gibson-Graham (a pen name shared by feminist economic geographers Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham), referring to the dominant representation of all economic activities framed through the lens of capitalism.

**Extractivism:** a model of economic growth based on the large-scale removal and export of natural resources, often from the Majority World, for the benefit of global capitalist markets. It is deeply tied to colonial and neocolonial histories

and continues to drive ecological destruction and dispossession.

**Solidarity Economics:** a practical framework for implementing degrowth/postgrowth by prioritising interdependence and collective liberation. It provides practical, community-driven alternatives to meet peoples' material needs and address systemic inequalities.

