

The Future we Choose

*Surviving the Climate Crisis by **Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac** Feb 2020.*

*Figueres was UN Executive Secretary organising the Paris Agreement of 2015 with Rivett-Carnac as senior political strategist. I write this summary to encourage you to **obtain and read this important book**. It has a powerful and inspiring **message, that there still is the possibility for us to build a fulfilling and sustainable future**, and I do this for the sake of my grandchildren. John Baxter 2021*

Assuming that the science about warming was agreed on internationally in Paris, the book starts by emphasising that **net zero emissions or carbon neutrality must be achieved by 2050 at the very latest**. The 2020's must see CO2 emissions in decline, halved by 2030, halved again by 2040 and net zero by 2050. If done this will **give us (only) a 50% chance of escaping** the worst impacts which are: The melting of Arctic sea ice and the destruction of boreal forests in Canada and Russia and of the Amazon tropical forests – if any of these go, precipitable (not gradual!) rises in global temperature will follow. However 1.5 deg.C. is still achievable, but major transformations are needed. These are: Massive reforestation, a rethink of agriculture, the end of coal use, the abandonment of fossil fuels and of the internal combustion engine, all to be done before 2030.

And if we do not

Then we can expect massive air pollution, extreme hurricanes and tropical storms, infrastructure destruction, coastal cities flooded, millions displaced and many will die. If the Antarctic ice sheet melts, then sea rises of over 5 metres can be expected while an acidifying sea may leave no fish or coral. Droughts and extreme heat waves will follow, triggering mass migrations to less hot areas as water scarcity, sectarian violence, war and food shortages multiply. The social media will hysterically spread false news even as disease carried by mosquitos and ticks thrive, while antibiotics fail and ancient microbes are released from the permafrost. What is more as time passes all these features will escalate in their severity.

The World We Must Create

It is 2050. Emissions have been successfully halved every decade since 2020. The air is moist and fresh because of huge urban and rural tree planting. Cities are transformed, following Madrid's lead. 50% of arable land is now forest and trees. Farming is regenerative with groves of nuts and fruit, orchards and timberland. No monoculture. Instead there is a mixing of perennial crops with more crop rotation on large farms and more emphasis on high tech small farms as in Holland. Food is still expensive, so growing your own makes sense everywhere, even on rooftops and buildings. High speed rail networks replace flying and their construction produces new jobs. The focus is on electricity from wind, solar, geothermal and hydro. Homes provide their own power so energy is basically free. Localised desalination provides hydroponic gardens. It is also a new era for the developing world as technology allows improved sanitation, education and health care. International travel is transformed. Air travel is now very costly.

Extreme weather however continues. Glaciers are melting and the sea rising with severe droughts and desertification in Western US, the Med and parts of China. Refugees are a huge problem. Automation and 3D printing help build affordable quality housing quickly. A new bottom line is needed and heeded. Is it good for humanity whether profit is made or not?

Who We Choose to Be

Change how you behave using yourself as a catalyst for overall change. The mindset you cultivate is vital. We need to dig down to the roots of who we understand ourselves to be. Our economies have been built on: Extract resources boundlessly, use them inefficiently, and discard them wantonly

- all done within a deeply exploitive ethos. Soon there will be little left to do this. We are inextricably connected to all of nature as stewards. Three fundamental mindsets are needed: **Stubborn Optimism, Endless Abundance, Radical Regeneration**. Scientific Understanding and spiritual insights are converging on the reality of human nature's interconnectedness. Nothing is permanent, everything is changing. So we need move from defeatism to optimism, extraction to regeneration, from linear to circular economies, from individual benefit to long-term good for us all.

Stubborn Optimism

Psychologists know **attitudes can be transformed** by first identifying thought patterns, then becoming aware of these unconscious patterns and then cultivating a more constructive approach (as in mindfulness training).

Learned reactions govern how we respond to situations. Re Climate Change our reaction is helplessness. But we can learn to see that we can make a transformative difference to the future of all life. We are NOT powerless. See what has been done. Already 50% of UK energy comes from clean power, 100% in Costa Rica, and California aims for 100% clean energy. Tipping points are non-linear. We must take the many uncertainties in our stride. Be optimistic because failure is unthinkable. Hope is an axe you break down doors with.

Here the book describes how Christiana took over after the disaster of Copenhagen in 2010. In Dec 2015 195 nations adopted the Paris Climate Agreement unanimously. Most now think it is impossible to transform the world economy in a decade, but we cannot afford fatalism. **We face the greatest challenge of human history.**

Endless Abundance (Our opportunity to see amazing alternatives)

We need to discard the zero-sum paradigm that if one wins the other will lose. The perception of scarcity is often wrong. If we collaborate we find enough. Altruism breaks out with hurricanes and disasters, (also Covid19). We are faced with global scarcity, birds, insects, forests, mammals, and of atmospheric space for CO2. All CO2 emissions bring us closer to disaster and these are mostly caused by developed countries (US, Europe, China) Economic growth has been linked to fossil fuels. We produce from .04 to 37 tons of CO2 per person. We cannot though speak of "fair allocations". With Amazon deforestation and Artic ice melts we are ALL under threat. Collaboration (with China) not competition is needed to create abundance. Reducing emissions is for the self-interest of nations as well as the planet. **Decarbonising economies can bring more and better jobs**, air, transport, agriculture and better urban life. Take **solar, wind, wave, earth heat, all endless energy sources (unlike fossil fuels)** Add to these, human creativity, innovation, solidarity, the internet. **These all can give us ENDLESS ABUNDANCE.** A minor role remains for competition, but greater shared benefits come from collaboration. Co-create knowledge, goods and services with open access for the good of all. **Another person's success is not our loss but our growing, collective success.** Either we all win or we all lose.

Radical Regeneration

As managers of fertile soils we have been remarkably effective at extracting trees and nutrients leaving depleted topsoil. We cannot continue with extraction. We need to go for regeneration. Also amid this crisis we need to replenish ourselves and protect ourselves from breaking down. They suggest meditation and mindfulness training can help - along with gardening, music, exercise, walking – **whatever replenishes your soul, do it regularly and intentionally.** Note how nature and our bodies regenerate. Instead of strip-mined mountains, destroyed forests and depleted oceans, imagine millions of rewilding projects recovering forests, wetlands, grasslands, coral farms and oceans. Another world is possible and is on her way.

Ten Actions to stop filling the atmosphere with greenhouse gases. We need to find a myriad small solution. We need a fairer economic system (see Kate Raworth, Doughnut Economics) that does not strain the social net further. An everyone everywhere mission with a **dive into doing** as soon as possible.

1. **Let Go of the World.** Retire fossil fuels from their use in providing Energy, Transportation and Agriculture. Personally, focus on where you are going, not where you have been. Get to know neighbours, share your views with them in person.
2. **Face Your Grief but Hold A Vision for the Future.** We cannot hide our sadness over what has already been lost, but we need to concentrate on the vision for a regenerative future. For example in London 70% of the space used for parking cars could be used for rewilding, growing food, and building sustainable housing. Like Martin Luther King we do not know what might happen but we need to **hold on to our dream**.
3. **Defend the Truth.** Force your mind down paths you are not used to. Learn to distinguish between real science and pseudo-science. Do not give up on climate deniers. Treat them with love, care and attention.
4. **See Yourself as a Citizen, not as a Consumer.** Purchasing, using and throwing away as the fashion industry has encouraged also with its high energy using supply chains which reach across the world and back again. Reclaim your idea of a good life. Become a better consumer. Buy good quality and find out where products come from. Dematerialise. Define ourselves not as owners of things, but as beneficiaries of services. Learn to recognise what is enough.
5. **Move beyond Fossil Fuels.** (See Mark Carney) Avoid high-carbon assets. The move must be made in a planned, measured way. Stand up for 100% renewable energy. Vote for leaders who promote clean energy. Make a time-bound ambitious plan. Remember we have 30yrs to get to net zero. 50% reduction in next 9 years. Think about flying, driving, heating and cooling your house.
6. **Reforest the Earth.** In 2018 12 million hectares of forest were lost. Plant trees. China since 1990s has planted 100 million hectares of trees. Ethiopia (and India and Pakistan) have also planted. Trees also clean air and regulate water flow. However, Brazil and now China are increasing meat and dairy. We could feed the world adequately by making selective improvements in agricultural productivity, sharply reducing food waste and changing our diets. Let nature flourish. Cattle, ponies, pigs and deer free grazing create a mosaic of habitats. Go plant based and eat very little meat. Plant-based meat replacements will soon be here. Boycott products contributing to deforestation. Nestle were made to change after activism.
- 7, **Invest in a Clean Economy.** Straight GDP growth needs Sustainable Development Goals. Put Your Money Where It Matters. Money and momentum will move towards those building a clean economy. Economists increasingly consider the **17 Sustainable Development Goals** to be sensible objectives.
8. **Use Technology Responsibly.** Artificial Intelligence informed energy grids can redesign a better flow of energy. AI can both threaten jobs and provide new opportunities in a regenerative economy. Population is edging towards 9 billion, possibly 10 billion. AI may be the key in showing us the way ahead if applied to Climate Change.
9. **Build Gender Equality.** Nations with greater female representation have smaller climate footprints. Women in work and in society are more likely to vote for environmental protections.

10. Engage in Politics. Get involved and elect only leaders who see far reaching action on climate change as their absolute priority.

The book ends with a checklist of what to do next and a useful list of organisations and websites.

The first thing I suggest you do is order your copy of the book. It is not long (200p) and very readable

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Recommended Climate Change Sources

Visit the Authors's website wechoosethefuture.com for videos.

David Wallace-Wells. *The Uninhabitable Earth, A Story of the Future*. 2019. For a full, detailed and meticulously documented account of where we are going if we do not change radically.

Mike Berners Lee. *There Is No Planet B. A handbook for the Make or Break Years*. 2019. Lancaster University Professor. Careful, accurate and readable. At times amusing.

Consult the Government's independent **Climate Change Committee** website.

The committee consists of our top climate scientists chaired by John Selwyn Gummer, Lord Deben.

See their **2020 Sixth Carbon Budget. The UK's path to Net Zero.**

This must read for all in politics shows how close they are to Figueres and Rivett-Carnack. It states:

"The report includes new advice to the UK Government on securing a green and resilient recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. It recommends that Ministers seize the opportunity to turn the COVID-19 crisis into a defining moment in the fight against climate change. Although **a limited number of steps have been taken** over the past year to support the **transition to a net-zero economy** and improve the UK's resilience to the impacts of climate change, **much remains to be done**. For the first time, the Committee sets out its recommendations government department by government department.

The Committee's new analysis expands on its May 2020 [advice to the UK Prime Minister](#) in which it set out the principles for building a resilient recovery. In its new report, the Committee has assessed a wide set of measures and gathered the latest evidence on the role of climate policies in the economic recovery. Its report highlights five clear investment priorities in the months ahead:

1. Low-carbon retrofits and buildings that are fit for the future
2. Tree planting, peatland restoration, and green infrastructure
3. Energy networks must be strengthened.
4. Infrastructure to make it easy for people to walk, cycle, and work remotely.
5. Moving towards a circular economy.

There are also opportunities to support the transition and the recovery by investing in the UK's workforce, and in lower-carbon behaviours and innovation."