

U.N. University: Five Deep Changes Urgently Needed for a Sustainable World and How to Achieve Them

New 'Theory of Deep Change' says future depends on transforming fundamental assumptions, structures behind today's global crises

BONN, GERMANY, April 9, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Amid deepening inequalities and

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*Caitlyn Eberle, co-lead author,
UNU-EHS*

escalating crises, including climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, a new United Nations report presents a bold approach for change.

The 2025 Interconnected Disaster Risks report, *Turning Over a New Leaf*, issued by the [U.N. University's Institute for Environment and Human Security](#) (UNU-EHS), shifts focus from diagnosing problems to mapping out solutions. It establishes that many of today's solutions are surface-level fixes and that to create lasting change we need to question the societal structures and mindsets that perpetuate these challenges.

“Society is at a crossroads,” says Prof. Shen Xiaomeng, Director of UNU-EHS. “For years, scientists have warned us about the damage we're doing to our planet, and how to stop it. But we aren't taking meaningful actions. We know climate change is worsening, yet fossil fuel consumption keeps hitting record highs. We already have a waste crisis, yet household waste is projected to double by 2050. Time and again, we see the danger ahead, yet we keep moving towards it. Why?”

To answer this question, the report offers a more holistic analysis of what lies at the heart of human actions, and how true change can be achieved, and it also gives real-world examples of positive changes that have been made around the world and can serve as a model and source of inspiration.

The previous edition of Interconnected Disaster Risks had warned about irreversible risk tipping points. This year's report offers a path forward: The Theory of Deep Change (ToDC), which dives

into root causes of global problems, and identifies structures and assumptions in society that allow them to persist, relating their model to a tree, where the visible outcomes are the fruits, but the real issues lie at the roots: Rotten roots produce rotten fruits.

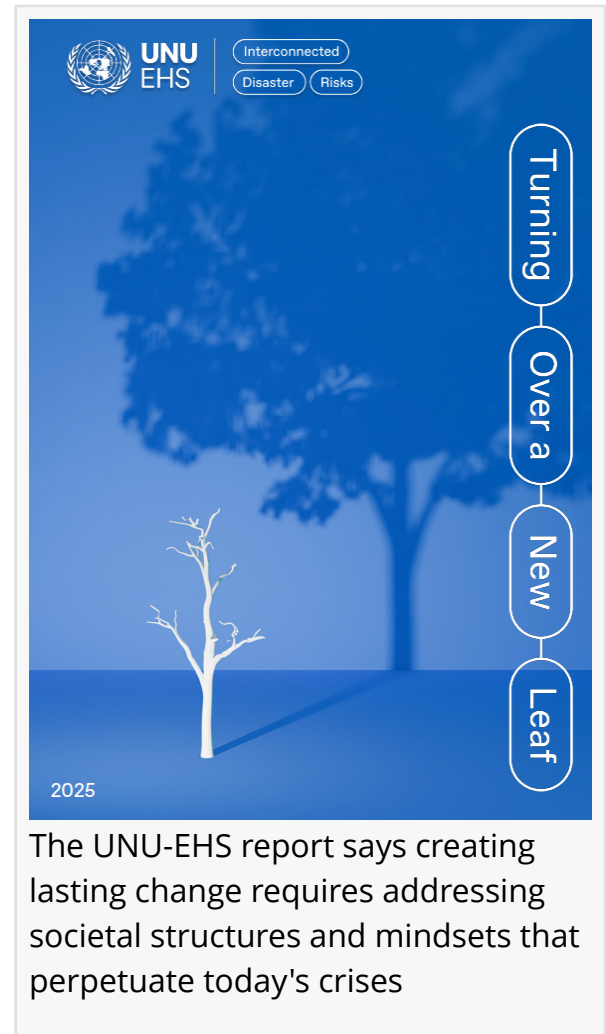
True change, the report emphasizes, starts at the roots. Without rethinking the values and mindsets underpinning these systems, the systems themselves will never change. Interventions such as recycling or conservation will remain inadequate because they are superficial fixes that do not address the root causes of waste and biodiversity loss. Society cannot recycle its way out of the plastic crisis without questioning why so much plastic waste is produced in the first place.

Caitlyn Eberle, a lead author of the report, remarks: "There are many people who are trying to change the world for the better. But trying to do the right thing can seem like an impossible challenge, and when we feel as though things aren't moving in the right direction, it is easy to feel defeated. Our report shows that many of the actions we take, as well-intentioned as they are, won't work as long as there is a whole system working against us. We need to go deeper, envision the world that we want to live in, and change the structures to match that vision."

Recognizing and going beyond superficial fixes

Solar geoengineering is one example cited in the report of how not addressing the deep roots of a problem can cause even further risks. Currently, there is growing interest in research and deployment of solar geoengineering technologies, such as spraying aerosols into the Earth's stratosphere to reflect sunlight back to space and lower average global temperatures. Hailed as a solution for climate change, this approach could have unpredictable impacts on weather patterns all across the globe.

But additionally, seen through the lens of the Theory of Deep Change, solar geoengineering is also an attempt to leave the current system in place rather than committing to the real solution. By addressing the negative consequences of human actions (global warming), instead of the actions themselves (burning fossil fuels), it is a superficial fix. Moreover, when executed by individual governments or companies, it is also an example of a unilateral decision being made in one part of the world that could have far-reaching consequences for others.



The report outlines five areas where deep systemic changes are urgently needed:

- * Rethink waste: From trash to treasure
- * Realign with nature: From separation to harmony
- * Reconsider responsibility: From me to we
- * Reimagine the future: From seconds to centuries
- * Redefine value: From economic wealth to planetary health.

Leverage: How to make change happen

To create truly deep change, the Theory of Deep Change recognizes two types of levers that can be used to affect change: inner and outer levers. While it is possible to start with one lever, both are needed to create lasting change.

Inner levers: Inner levers are the ways we can change the current assumptions of our systems. They include paradigm or mindset shifts that allow people to redefine the boundaries of what is possible.

Outer levers: Outer levers translate the new goals of a system into practical structures to produce more positive outcomes. They involve changes to policy, institutions or education, for instance.

In respect to the previously mentioned example of solar geoengineering, an inner lever would shift assumptions from prioritizing self-interest to viewing ourselves as responsible people caring about the global community. Outer levers can also be pulled to create structures for international governance and commitments to work together to solve global problems. Both are needed to create deep, lasting change and a better future.

The full news release and report, an executive summary of the report, five technical background reports, news release translations, images, videos, and other resources are available post-embargo at: <https://conta.cc/43H1Cq0>

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