

CONCEPT NOTE

COLLECTIVE EDGE: TRANSFORMING CHANGE



BY UNITED EDGE

RATIONALE

We are in the midst of an emergency. The planet is experiencing an unprecedented era of climate and ecological breakdown. We are part of the generation that will witness the biggest mass extinction since the dinosaurs. Thousands of species that have existed for million of years have already gone extinct. And despite living in the most productive era in human history, the gap between rich and poor has never been so great, and groups that have traditionally been oppressed by those in power are still bearing the brunt of this inequality.

For decades, NGOs, charities, social change movements and consumers have tried to change our course and prevent the immanent disaster that has been predicted for as long as we've been working against it. Some impressive gains have been made along the way - often led by women, people of colour and the working class - with massive sacrifices along the way. Civil society has been an essential part of the journey towards a more just society, but we are also part of the same mechanisms that extend and entrench the arms of white-supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism across the planet. We duplicate and replicate the very structures that are at the root of injustice and oppression. Our left hand is claiming to dismantle injustice while our right hand is building it up.

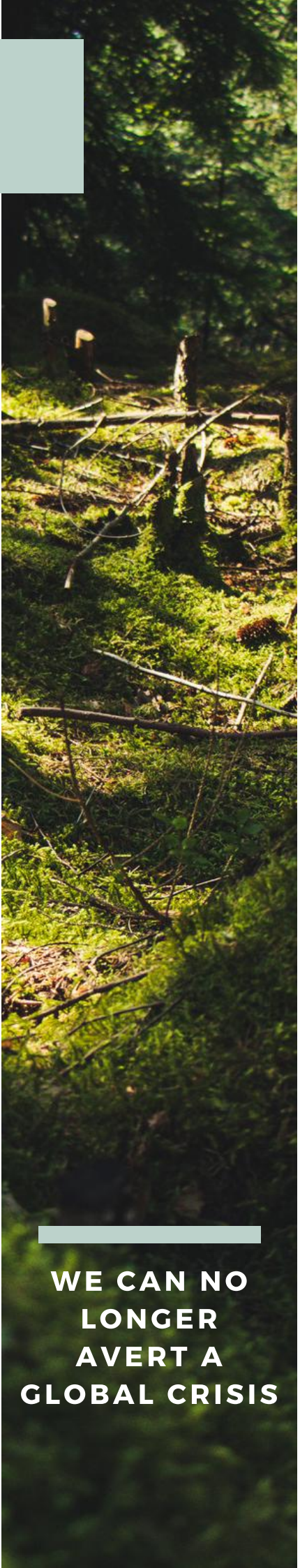
We can no longer avert a global crisis. It's simply too late for that. We only have to look around us to see climate breakdown in action: wildfires, massive storms, droughts, floods and other extreme climate events abound. Our vapid exploitation of the planet has already seen the destruction of countless ecosystems and indigenous homelands. Our obsession with incessant economic growth has destroyed the planet and communities alike. The reality where eight humans - all men - own the same wealth as half of our global population is proof that we are not waiting for shit to hit the fan. We are living through the proverbial pebble-dash, the effect of our failure as a species.

The question is not what we can do to prevent disaster, but what we can do with the disaster we should have prevented. What do we do from here. The sooner we realise this, the sooner we can respond, and as ever, we don't have time to waste. We have forests to protect. Women to empower. Young people to engage. Species to restore. Communities to rebuild. A climate to liberate.

We have to move forward with the greatest hope we've ever known - an unbreakable belief in the part our species has yet to play on this planet. A deep knowledge of our call to be guardians of each other, other species and the ecosystems that make up this unspeakably beautiful home.

To do this we need a new movement. One that functions like we mean to go on. That embodies the same qualities we are striving to create in the world. One that redefines what it means to be working for social and environmental justice while simultaneously redefining what it means to be human.

Collective Edge is part of the movement that is working not only for a new reality but a new destiny. We believe in radical unity, and we want to alter the course of the human story in the history books of time.



**WE CAN NO
LONGER
AVERT A
GLOBAL CRISIS**

COLLECTIVE EDGE

We are a group of humanitarians, community organisers, activists, and environmentalists from around the world who come together under one banner to change the way humans work towards justice and to develop alternative models that will help us to address the challenges we face as a species. We are the first Justice-based organisation. That means:

- We thrive because of our diversity. Together, we are more than the sum of our parts, and we strive towards models where everyone is a winner.
- We actively challenge the systems of oppression that most NGOs replicate in everything they do. We confront racism, sexism, classism, ablism, transphobia, homophobia, and all other forms of supremacy.
- We are self-regulated and completely participatory. We are led by a team who equally share all internal decision-making: power is not concentrated but shared.
- We run truly democratic projects, which means they are totally localised. We ensure that those most affected by a decision are the same people leading that decision.
- We go beyond ideas of restoration and sustainability to focus on the regeneration of both society and the planet.

Not only do we contribute to building justice around the world, but through both our projects and the way we work, we also showcase a different way of doing things.



THE TEAM

Since 2017, United Edge has shared the Justice Based Approach with more than 1,000 people from around the world who are already on the ground, working to make a positive impact. Now we're ready to take our work to the next level to become the world's first justice based organisation.

The Collective Edge team will be made up of these people, those who are already experts in social change and who represent the diversity of people we intend to serve. Others are welcome and encouraged to join as long as they are committed to reflect on their own positionality and give space to the voices that are often harder to hear.

We will spend a number of months deepening our shared understanding of the pillars of justice and what a justice based organisation should look like to truly embody those principles. Together we will build the foundations of an organisation and decide how it will be run. We will work as a cooperative or collective of individuals and explore ways to challenge injustice through our projects, using this the new model for a co-created NGO.

Reflection, learning and personal growth will be at the heart of our culture.



NEXT STEPS - JOIN US!!!

PHASE ONE: APPLICATION

We will share the concept of a cooperative and participatory NGO with our network, particularly our JBA alumni. Keeping in mind our diversity goals, we will set up an application journey for those interested in being a part of this organisation.

PHASE TWO: LEARNING

The team will join a new Justice Based Approach: Advanced Course, and a shared learning journey focused on deepening understanding and practice and setting the parameters and foundations for a justice based organisation.

PHASE THREE: PROJECTS

Based on the decisions collectively made by the team, we will officially set up the organisation and begin to generate income in order to pilot transformative projects that focus on showcasing alternative models for society.

ADVANCED COURSE



Everyone who joins Collective Edge will have been introduced to the Justice Based Approach through the introduction training led by United Edge. The first step in setting up Collective Edge is a group learning experience that makes up the Justice Based Approach: Advanced Course. This is how that might work:

CONTENT

The Justice Based Approach: Advanced Course will go deeper into systems of oppression and aim to challenge the group to reflect on their own identities and assumptions about the world. It will explore how to cultivate democratic, regenerative cultures and leadership skills. It will explore some of the essential topics related to all five pillars of justice, as well as how to run an international NGO -- from participatory project design to feminist human resources and everything in between

PRACTICE

Initially, the United Edge team will lead the development of the core sessions and will take care of all the necessary coordination of the course. We will deliver these early sessions, but as the course progresses, those participating will begin to take on more of a leadership role in the development of sessions and learning activities as well as developing individual and group projects that align to the goals of the experience. With support, everyone will be set up to become a Justice practitioner.

FORMAT

This advanced course will be conducted online with the possibility of face-to-face sessions depending on the situation of the global Covid-19 pandemic and the resources that are available. All remote learning will be highly interactive with a large range of methodologies and different levels of human-centred interaction between participants. A participation fee will cover the cost of organising the programme, but every effort will be made to ensure this doesn't exclude anyone due to lack of finances.

THE STRATEGY

All of our work is focused on tackling injustices and creating justice. This is why the foundation of all of our work is the Justice Based Approach, making us the world's first truly justice based organisation.

Developed by United Edge back in 2017, this approach to social and environmental justice has been shared with activists, movements, organisations and individuals all around the world. The approach is a lens to help to establish justice in all parts of society and life. It is made up of five essential pillars:



RADICAL SYSTEMS

We must understand that injustice is systemic. It is embedded into complex systems that make up society which oppresses some while benefiting others. This is the root of many of our problems. Rather than putting a band-aid on broken systems, we need to create radical new ones where power is balanced and benefits are shared.



LIVING DEMOCRACY

So often in life, decisions are made for us. We have little say in creating our own destiny. We need to create a new reality - one where those most affected by decisions are the same people making them. True, living democracy isn't just about governance. It's about all parts of life - our homes, schools, workplaces, and communities.



BRAVE ACCOUNTABILITY

We cannot have justice without accountability. Being accountable is essential for individuals and organisations and can help victims of injustices to heal and move on with their lives. Holding those in power to account helps to break the cycle of impunity and allows us to build trust, respect and unity in the world.



EVERYDAY ACTIVISM

Every individual and organisation on the planet has a responsibility to act to bring about justice. We have to explore the consequences of our actions, develop more compassionate habits and ensure that the positive steps we are taking are the most impactful and important ones - not just the simplest or easiest.



ALTERNATIVE MODELS

If we want to create a better reality, we have to create alternative models for the way we build our societies. Just because something has been done in the same way for generations, doesn't make it the best solution. More just, holistic alternatives already exist and some are yet to be created. We have to be innovative and revolutionary.

OUR GOALS

United Edge was set up to support people working for social and environmental justice. As a radical new project of United Edge, Collective Edge is taking that work to the next level by directly supporting power-shifting projects to create alternative models for our new reality.

Everything we do contributes to building the systems and models needed for a just world. Projects are both the means and the end: the goal is always justice, and the path to get there is through the creation of structures that embody justice.

We believe that every person has the right to be involved in decisions that affect them. In all of our projects, the people who will be most affected by a decision will take the lead in making that decision. This helps us to shift power away from Collective Edge and into the hands of those who are best placed to wield it.

Our role is always to inform, empower, connect and support those who are on their own journey towards a just future. We are facilitators, not leaders, in the process of change.

DUAL PURPOSE

There are two areas we have to focus on if we are going to create lasting change. They are the two positive forces that oppose destruction and oppression, which are the essential ingredients of all the biggest problems the world has ever faced. At Collective Edge our work falls under one or both of these purposes. This keeps us focused on the issues that matter most.

LIBERATION

Liberation is about the end of oppression. Whether it occurs through the patriarchy, capitalism or animal agriculture, we aim to tackle the domination and exploitation of one group for the benefit of another. We aim to smash the chains that attach to parts of our identities and replace them with ribbons of celebration and solidarity with those who are still enslaved. We intend to tackle power imbalances head-on and create an alternative reality that recognises the injustices of the past while uniting to build a more just future for all.

REGENERATION

Regeneration is about turning the tides of destruction and moving towards a new era in which we are creating more than we are taking away. We aim to fix the collective mistakes of our past and invest in protecting and rebuilding the earth, its ecosystems, its diverse species, its peoples, its cultures, its languages and its stories. We aim to celebrate the beauty of our celestial home by planting seeds for a civilisation that is more than simply sustainable, but actually nurturing and enriching for people and planet.

SHIFTING POWER

A NEW APPROACH FOR A CHANGING WORLD



We are not just another NGO. We are rebuilding what international civil society can look like without the oppressive chains of imperialism, white supremacy and patriarchy.

In order to embody the change that we want to see in the world, we are committed to shifting power away from a centralised team, away from donors and away from the powers-that-be.

Our board of directors will reflect an extremely diverse group of people from around the world - representing people from different backgrounds and identities. They ensure our strategy is aligned to our vision and mission and make sure we don't lose track of our goals.

Coordination happens from our core team, who are experts in what they do. There is no hierarchy. We work together in project teams and we hold each other to account for our work.

Management happens on a project level, and decisions are collectively led by those involved in the project - with the groups most affected by the project taking the lead.

All three levels are informed by the others and hold them to account for their decision-making practices.



The types of programmes, ways of working and structure of Collective Edge will be set up by the whole team as we embark together on this journey. What is clear from the beginning is that Collective Edge will be a demonstration of what being truly justice based can look like. With that in mind, here are some ideas of how the organisation could look -- and some of the key discussion points to come over the initial months of the project.

FLAT STRUCTURE

So many of the world's problems stem from arbitrary hierarchies that have been built between people. At Collective Edge we believe that everyone brings something unique and valuable to the organisation. One person's opinion is not worth more than another's. For this reason we could function as a flat structure, with no bosses and shared accountability. Each area of work would function as a separate project and those leading the projects would lead decision-making about their area of work, with the whole group feeding in when it affects the whole group.

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

Participation in community development, humanitarian aid and conservation has been a buzz word for too long. We should aim to make it a reality. Each of our projects should be truly led by those it is aiming to positively impact. From analysing the context and designing the intervention to evaluating the impact, we want communities to be leading the decision-making on every project. After all, they are the ones best placed to do so. It means investing in relationships, being brave enough to listen, brokering partnerships and shared accountability.

ALTERNATIVE MODELS

Our projects and our structure should not only be future-proof, they should be living, breathing examples of how to cultivate resilience, connect people, shift power, challenge oppression and protect the planet. We should focus primarily on radical, innovative, and regenerative models that act as blueprints that other organisations and communities can adapt, scale up and embrace as alternative ways of living. Each project should address the roots of the problems they set out to address, namely the oppression of certain groups and the destruction of the planet.

DECOLONISING DEVELOPMENT

For too long, NGOs have been an arm of imperialist control of the planet. We have created and perpetuated myths of the majority world that deny people's power and agency. We join the movement that calls out neocolonialism, white supremacy and corporate domination. We should actively call out the roots of inequality in the world as imperialist policies of the minority world imposed on the rest that place the minority world at a distinct advantage over everyone else. We return control to where it should be: in the hands of communities of colour.

FUNDING AS REPARATIONS

Like people, countries become rich when they are able to benefit from something that isn't theirs. Resources, labour, time, ideas that don't belong to them. Colonialism and neocolonialism benefited the rich and powerful by exploiting the vulnerable. Rather than asking for donations, NGOs should be demanding reparations for the injustices, destruction and oppression that led to the accumulation of wealth and power into the hands of a tiny minority of the global population. Perhaps we should set up a model based on reparations and not handouts, where people who have benefited from subjugation can finally repay the debt.

ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIES

The capitalist project has failed. We know that the planet cannot sustain growth any more than the poor can continue to be exploited for profit. Through developing cooperative businesses and projects that localise and democratise trade and commerce, we will build alternative, more circular economies that will shift the conversation and inspire global action.

CASH PROGRAMMING

Rather than deciding what we think individuals need, either in the form of humanitarian aid or through so-called development projects, we have an opportunity to return the power to decide to those who are best placed to make decisions. Through providing cash directly to those in need in the form of cash transfers or universal basic income, we empower people to take control of their own lives and decide for themselves what they need. This can work for individuals, families or entire communities. The fact that the cash could come in the form of reparations goes some way towards correcting historical injustices.

MOVEMENT BUILDING

With all our work focused on a Justice Based Approach to change, we hope to model how aligning to the five pillars of justice can create lasting change in the world. Alongside United Edge, we will continue to raise awareness of this essential lens for social change and include it in all our work. However, rather than focus on training predominantly NGO-based professionals, we will introduce JBA to communities, to marginalised peoples, to movements, to activists. We will share this tool with those who need it most in the hope that we can finally get on the same page when it comes to our ultimate goal of justice.

COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Any just solution to the broken economic system will have to include some sort of cooperation. We will support the set-up and development of cooperative businesses, schools, hospitals, governance mechanisms, finance models and social change movements. We will also support movements for common ownership from open source technology to community managed resources.

ECOLOGICAL REGENERATION

One of the main pressures on ecosystems and the global climate is the way we are using (or, more accurately, abusing) the land we share with all other life on the planet. Through conditional cash programmes, radical rewilding, and community-led conservation initiatives, we could have a significant impact on humanity's carbon footprint and the ability for ecosystems to regenerate and thrive. We can stand and act in solidarity with all those calling for climate justice and support humanity to step away from devastating animal exploitation and move towards more sustainable, less violent and abusive sources of nutrition.



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**GOT ANY
QUESTIONS?**

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