



**SUSTAINABILITY LEADERS NETWORK**

Deepening Learning & Practice for People & Planet

## **Donella Meadows Leadership Fellows Seminar**

Ralston White Retreat, Mill Valley, California

7-12 November 2010



**We can do it!**

**Building capacity for greater impact  
addressing climate change and other sustainability issues**

**Wokshop participants:** *back row, left to right:* Michelle Erickson, Newey Kraiwatnutsorn, Mike Dupee, Dominic Stucker, Virginia Farley, Lynn Stoddard, Anna Jones-Crabtree, Angela Park, Mary Roscoe, Lorie Loeb, Nancy Gabriel, Huma Beg, Any Sulistyowati, Maria Latumahina, Sudha Soni, Christine Negra, Edie Farwell. *Not pictured:* Rachel Bagby, Kristi Kimball, Jen Mayer, Susi Moser, Chris Page, Elizabeth Soderstrom, Natalie Starr, Jodie Tonita, Ellen Wolfe, Tse-Sung Wu and guests Hunter Lovins, Kevin W. Kelley, and Constance Washburn.

Photos by Huma Beg and Dominic Stucker.

## Purpose

The purpose of our Donella Meadows Leadership Fellows Seminar was to engage all four classes of Fellows to nurture relationships across Cohorts, sectors, and countries; learn from one another's personal and professional efforts to bring about sustainability; reground in nature, reflect, and articulate short- and long-term visions; and engage in thematic discussion and action projects, for example through Affinity Groups.

Our vision is to support Fellows and key Living Planet Network partners to be strategic thought leaders, actors, and instigators of significant sustainability measures here in the United States, and in other countries where Fellows live and work. With a special focus on building capacity for greater impact, the workshop sought to support Fellows in accelerating the sustainability revolution from a place of spirit, compassion, truth telling, love, and integrity.

## Background

Based on the positive responses of participants in our September 2009 Donella Meadows Leadership Fellows seminar in Connecticut and previous annual seminars, there is a high demand for continuing in-depth, action-oriented visioning, systems thinking, and capacity building workshops. To meet this request, we organized a similar workshop in November 2010 at the

Ralston White Retreat in Mill Valley, California, our first on the west coast.

Since 2003, 74 people have completed the Fellows Program. Fellows come from all around the world, representing a diversity of geographies, sectors, and issue areas. Participants are selected for their ability to employ an approach to sustainability that displays analytic clarity, systemic change, and attention to spirit, values, and meaning.

### Planning Team Members

Name	Cohort	Country
Any Sulistyowati	3	Indonesia
Christine Negra	4	NY, USA
Dominic Stucker	staff	CA, USA
Edie Farwell	staff	VT, USA
Mary Roscoe	4	CA, USA
Michelle Erickson	4	NY, USA
Mike Dupee	2	VT, USA
Newey Kraiwatnutsorn	4	Thailand
Virginia Farley	1	VT, USA

#### With contributions from...

Danielle Hirsch	3	Netherlands
Jen Mayer	4	CA, USA
Lorie Loeb	4	VT, USA
Rachel Bagby	4	VA, USA

## Planning Team

This year we tried something new: we convened a volunteer Planning Team, made up of Fellows and staff. The Team played a key role in collaboratively designing the workshop goals and agenda, engaging in four conference calls and numerous e-mail discussions from April-November. It grew from 7 to 13

contributors (see boxed text), divided into 4 Working Groups. Planning Team members were involved in developing all sessions, voicing their priorities, collaborating closely with staff and helping create an agenda that balanced mind, heart, and body. A full workshop packet was produced with both a printed version and one posted online to the Fellows Network Wikispace.

Participants represented 6 countries and the non-profit, philanthropy, business, and government sectors. A third of the Fellows Network attended plus two guest speakers, Hunter Lovins of the Natural Capitalism Solutions, Donella Meadows' friend, and Kevin W. Kelley,

author of the best-selling book, *The Home Planet* (1988).

### Sessions

Our first morning together, Hunter Lovins presented on '**The Sustainability Insurgency**,' emphasizing the current trends of environmental degradation and offering systems thinking and biomimicry as tools to help us address these challenges. She made the business case for sustainability, drawing on studies from around the world focused on the green economy and energy efficiency. Finally, Hunter made a call for bold and visionary leadership by ordinary people as essential for bringing about change. Huma Beg of Serendip Media created a video of her talk: (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxCZA2rWjNI>)

Edie Farwell led sessions on visioning that framed the week, starting with

*I am honored to have people hold my vision and allow me to fulfill it in its own time. - Huma Beg, Pakistan*

'**Envisioning a Sustainable World**,' and embarking with '**Envisioning Next Steps**.' Following the first visioning session, we went out individually into nature to listen, observe, notice patterns, and systems, and to find a place or metaphor that inspired us, a vessel for our vision, a place to return to in our mind's eye over the course of the week and beyond: '**Nature as a Vessel to Hold Vision**.' In a session designed by Edie, Mary Roscoe, and Any Sulistyowati, Fellows created pieces of art in collaboration with nature and used these as a way to introduce themselves to their Coaching Group.



These **Coaching Groups** of 4-5 people engaged in deep listening, clarifying, and inquiry together, offering each person an hour of their undivided focus. A 'case study' approach, adapted from Otto Scharmer, was used by some coachees to engage in active problem-solving. Fellows who wished to have a peer coaching partner were paired up to exchange coaching bi-monthly for 4 months, or longer.

Fellows shared their work or a learning edge through creative pieces in '**Learning in Systems: a Gallery Walk**.' Some included causal loop maps, others were three-dimensional works of art that invited the viewer to respond to key questions. During the evening Gallery Walk, half of the group stayed by their piece and spoke about it with those who were mingling; then the groups switched. The pieces remained up all week for extended discussions. Fellows also offered **1-Minute Vision Presentations** to the group, describing an aspiration they have for their work and/or personal lives. A video is being created of these presentations, overlaying the audio with photos and footage from the workshop.



Another evening, we heard from Fellows Lorie Loeb and Rachel Bagby, in addition to partner Kevin W. Kelley, author of the best-selling book, *The Home Planet* (1988). They shared with us an exciting work in progress: drawing on new technologies in a planetarium setting to **visualize our place in the universe**, showing the 'breathing' of the Earth as Arctic ice expands and retreats; the revolution of the Moon around the Earth, the Earth around the Sun, the Sun through the Galaxy. It was an intimate presentation and discussion, inspiring us to be stewards of the Earth.

We also heard from **Fellow Huma Beg, who showed excerpts from her moving documentaries about the floods in her home country of Pakistan**. She offered her analysis of the situation and pointed to the long-term development needs in education, health, and youth empowerment and employment that were already present before catastrophe hit in July. Taking a systems perspective, the phenomena of upstream deforestation, climate change, flooding, and development were discussed afterwards. Many expressed interest in strategic disaster prevention and preparedness, with others wanting to help Huma directly with her on-the-

ground media and foundation work. A video of her talk was created: (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4en0jYmqyCs> start at minute 9:55).

**Affinity Groups are one of the key action-oriented outcomes of the workshop.** Through an emergent process, facilitated by Michelle Erickson, Christine Negra, and Dominic Stucker, Fellows identified over a dozen potential thematic, regional, and sectoral groups and formally convened five of them. These groups are intended to serve and enrich each Fellow's ongoing work and to help members achieve actions that would be impossible in isolation. Convened by Fellows, Affinity Groups formed on:

- Systems Thinking
- Organizational Learning and Behavior
- Personal Mastery, Alignment, and Inspiration
- Personal Branding

Additional groups emerged on Pakistan and the Corporate Sector.

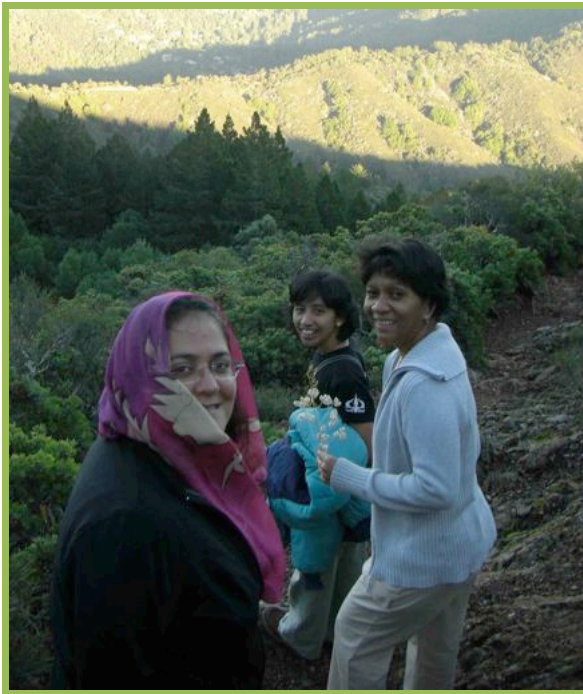
A new Affinity Groups page has been

*Affinity Groups have lots of potential to be THE way our network gets things done. Off to a good start. – Mike Dupee, Vermont*

created on the Fellows Wikispace with and common calendar and links to a page for each group with a list of members, description, and updates on activities and opportunities. Fellows who were not at the workshop have been invited to join and/or start their own. At the time of this report, **Affinity Groups are engaging in collaborative projects** including monthly conference call discussions, sharing relevant materials, providing feedback on writing, setting personal daily goals and weekly check-ins, organizing a year-long systems thinking course for Fellows, etc.

We dedicated half an afternoon to **deepening our sense of place and groundedness in nature** by enjoying the beautiful setting of Ralston White Retreat and the slopes of Mt. Tam. Complete with redwood groves and tumbling mountain streams, one group explored the Blithedale Ridge, a shoulder of the peak with panoramic views, while another ascended to the top via the direct Tamalpa Trail.

Our final evening together consisted of a **celebration** with fun improv theater, original music, and dancing organized by Virginia Farley, Mike Dupee, and Newey Kraiwatnutsorn.



Close to the end of the workshop, Fellows participated in a future-oriented discussion focused on their own network: **'Fellows Network 2011: Leadership Beyond the Limits.'** We discussed both what Fellows value about this 80-person network and their visions for the coming year. Specific strategies were discussed – including the convening of an annual Fellows

Network Seminar - and these directly inform current work planning.

## Evaluation

*Fellows gatherings are so nourishing and provide a much-needed chance to regroup personally and professionally. What I love most is the connection with other Fellows - learning from them, being supported and inspired by them. This is the true food of sustainability. – Lynn Stoddard, Connecticut*

In addition to boxed quotes throughout, here's **what Fellows reported taking away from the workshop:**

- Shared desire to improve sustainability work, understanding of challenges of sustainability work in other countries. - *Natalie Starr, Vermont*
- Insights for my professional life, time for reflection, feeling supported by my coaching group. - *Any Sulistyowati, Indonesia*
- I felt impacted by the reality of climate change and our growing disconnection with nature... This was balanced by feeling inspired by the visions of many of the Fellows becoming manifest in the world. - *Mary Roscoe, California*
- A powerful experience... looking for a place in the landscape to somehow mark our commitment to whatever vision we have for ourselves. - *Susi Moser, California*
- Hearing about other Fellows' work and experiences helps me reground in my own sense of purpose and vision. I now have an expanded global context into which my own work fits. - *Anna Jones-Crabtree, Montana*
- Feeling encouraged and illuminated. – *Fellow from Asia*

On a 1-10 scale, with 10 indicating that the **learning goal** was 'fully' realized,

Fellows ranked the following the highest, with a average of 8.3:

- Feel safe and supported in sharing about your personal and professional lives and exploring and engaging your learning edges.
- Nurture relationships across international borders.
- Develop a greater sense of and appreciation for the Fellows community and what we each bring to it.

With 7.9, the next highest were:

- Reground in nature, have time for reflection and learning.

*This retreat came at a challenging time for me, personally and professionally. ...it was an excellent opportunity for self-reflection, candid conversation, and thinking ahead to new beginnings. – Mike Dupee, Vermont*

- Learn from Fellows' work and life experiences.

When asked **how useful/meaningful each session was** to them, Fellows rated the Hike on Mt. Tam, 1-Minute Vision Presentations, Affinity Groups, and Coaching highest.



### **Appreciation**

Beyond its intimate and inspiring location, the Ralston White Retreat staff was very flexible and supportive. The kitchen team prepared delicious, organic

meals - sourced locally - which were appreciated by all.

We are grateful to our donors, including the Morgan Family Foundation, Flora Family Foundation, and several individuals. We are also appreciative of our fiscal sponsor and partner, the Buckminster Fuller Institute, based in New York City.

### **2011**

There was strong feedback from Fellows that we should continue to gather annually. When adequate funding is in place, we anticipate holding the next workshop in the fall of 2011, possibly at the Cobb Hill eco-village, Vermont. Given the success of this year's Planning Team, we will seek the engagement of volunteer Fellows again. We will continue to support Affinity Groups' activities, with some potentially facilitating a session on their area of focus at the 2011 workshop.