

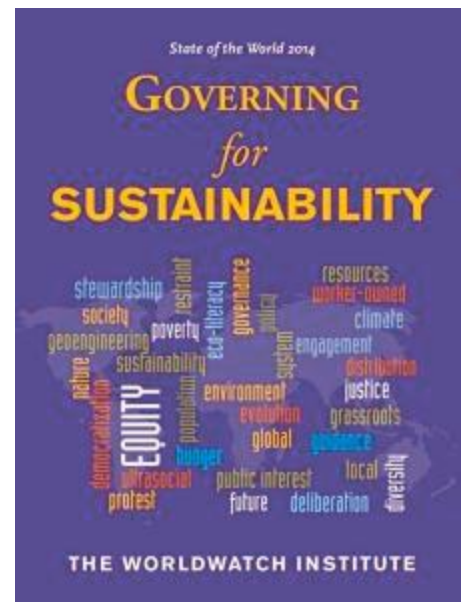
Successful Local Governance is the Route to Sustainability

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If the electoral and political decision-making processes of some countries, including the United States, are being captured by powerful interests opposed to decisive action on sustainability then increasingly it is up to city and local administrations to take the lead.

That is the central thrust of **State of the World 2014**, the Worldwatch Institute's 40th anniversary edition of this regular snapshot of global sustainability. Its theme is **Governing for Sustainability**, and contributing authors highlight the responsibility of political and economic actors to achieve sustainability, emphasizing the strength of citizens to make significant sustainability changes and showing why effective governance systems need to be inclusive and participatory, allowing members to have a voice in the collective decision making.



But it also identifies a growing threat to democratic governance in investor/state dispute-settlement clauses that are sometimes included in many bilateral investment treaties. They allow companies investing abroad to challenge a broad array of health, environmental, social protection and other laws, says State of the World 2014 co-director Tom Prugh.

Therefore, "Ultimately, all governance begins with individuals in communities. Humans are no more isolated actors in politics than they are the independent molecules of mainstream economic theory," he concludes.

"Pressure to improve governance, at every level, can come only from awakened individuals, acting together, dedicated to making their communities sustainable places," adds *State of the World 2014* co-director Michael Renner. "From there, it may be possible to build communities in a way that affords every person on Earth a safe and fulfilling place to live, and offers future generations the same prospect."

On the economic front, to counter growing **wealth inequalities** in which, it notes, both ultra high and ultra low wages are often undeserved by recipients, it examines community wealth-building strategies including: cooperatives, worker-owned firms, community development corporations, community

development financial institutions, social enterprises, community land trusts, and employee-owned enterprises. These can pool capital in ways that build wealth, create living wage jobs, and anchor those jobs in communities.

In the concluding chapter Tom Prugh and Michael Renner consider the nature of efficient and legitimate governance and the difficult question of what is needed to drive the governance process for sustainability forwards.

Monica Zimmermann describes how the current locus of activity on climate change and biodiversity preservation lies mainly within the organisations of local and regional, not national, governments.

Over the last 20 years or so, pioneering local governments have stepped forward on the global stage to assert their relevance to sustainability initiatives, and make commitments, provide and share resources, track progress towards goals and have helped influence national and international processes to do the same thing.

There's no doubt that in some cases they shame national governments, which need to do better both in negotiations with other governments and in their own countries.

The authors also point out that to many of the world's government systems are heavily male dominated, reflecting men's barriers, priorities and viewpoints much more than women's. Only one parliament in the whole world has a majority of women members: Rwanda's.

How amazing that one of the poorest countries on the planet with such a recent tragic history should serve as an object lesson to the rest of us.

The book contains other chapters on understanding governance, listening to the voices of young and future generations, climate governance and the political-economic foundations of a sustainable system, amongst many others.

Comprehensive graphics and tables include an analysis of Local Agenda 21's historic impact, local government involvement in the UN biodiversity convention, cities in the UN's post-2015 development agenda, and local climate actions paralleling global actions, 1990–2012.

The authors analyze a variety of trends and proposals, including regional and local climate initiatives, the rise of benefit corporations and worker-owned firms, the need for energy democracy, the Internet's impact on sustainability, and the importance of eco-literacy.

A consistent thread throughout the book is that informed and engaged citizens are key to better governance. Knowledge is power.

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