

# 2023 Together Ensemble at UBC Report

Compiled and edited by Cait Murphy and Kshamta Hunter



# Agenda

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<b>JUNE 7, 2023</b>	<b>8.00am</b>	<b>Refreshments</b>
	<b>8.30am</b>	<b>Welcome &amp; Introductory Remarks</b>  Welcome by Alec Dan of the Musqueam Nation and performance by Tsatsu Stalqayu/Coastal Wolf Pack. Introductory remarks by BC Attorney General Minister, Niki Sharma and Sustainability Hub Senior Director, Linda Nowlan.
	<b>9.30am</b>	<b>Decolonizing Education: Complexities, Challenges and Approaches</b>  Presented by the Sustainability Hub, featuring Dr. Cash Ahenakew, Dr. Sharon Stein, Dr. Bernard C. Perley, and Zoe Kompst. Moderated by Kshamta Hunter.
	<b>11.00am</b>	<b>Just Transition: Creating an Inclusive and Green Economy Together</b>  Presented by Vancouver Economic Commission (VEC), featuring Nathan Grandjambe, Tessa Jordan, Janet Andrew and Max Cohen. Moderated by George Patrick Richard Benson.
	<b>12.30pm</b>	<b>Lunch with weaving workshop and networking</b>  Led by Rita and Zoe Kompst.
	<b>1.40pm</b>	<b>The Pulse of Climate Activism: Indigenous Feminist Movements Leading Climate Responses and Solutions</b>  Presented by British Columbia Council for International Cooperation (BCCIC), featuring Natalie Illanes Nogueira, Evelyn Arriagada Oyarzún, and Neftali Hernandez. Moderated by Jessica Wood.
	<b>3.00pm</b>	<b>Break</b>
	<b>3.15pm</b>	<b>Sharing by Student Rapporteurs</b>  Featuring Niki Afsharpour, Vicky Kim, Olivia Lang, Naomi Leung, Clarice Tuai, Fernanda Villasenor, Jack Suchodolski.
	<b>3.30pm</b>	<b>Roundtable discussions on the key themes featuring topic experts</b>  Featuring Pablo Beimler, Max Cohen, Dr. Kathryn Harrison, Dr. Tara Ivanochko, Temitope Onifade, Dr. Bernard C. Perley, Dr. Sandra Scott, Dr. Sara Nelson.
	<b>4.50pm</b>	<b>Conference wrap-up</b>

# Background and Context

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Together|Ensemble is Canada's national conference devoted to tracking progress on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The conference represents an all-of-society approach to addressing Canada's toughest sustainable development challenges, bringing together the private sector, academia, government, and civil society. Together|Ensemble incorporates the foundational principles of the SDGs by being an event that is accessible, inclusive, multi-generational, equity-based, and bilingual.

This year, with a distributed model, five institutions were invited to host an in-person province focused gathering of Together|Ensemble 2023. These regional gatherings work to bring together the SDGs community from that province/region to reconnect in-person after Covid disruptions reduced these types of opportunities. The University of British Columbia was invited to host to the BC regional gathering.

# Introduction

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## TOGETHER ENSEMBLE AT UBC


With an overarching theme of Just Transformation, the UBC BC day on June 7<sup>th</sup> focused on key cross-cutting themes of *Decolonization, Education, Climate Justice and Just Transition*. The events and panel conversations throughout the day advanced our understanding and appreciation of the key themes as they relate to the Sustainable Development Goals.

The conference gathered local and regional partners and stakeholders to attend and share their perspectives as well as to learn, engage in and contribute to Canada's approach to the global goals. With over 150 registrations, 95 attended the conference in-person. The 2<sup>nd</sup> session led by the Vancouver Economic Commission was also live streamed nationally through the Sustainable Development Solutions Network. All sessions were recorded and recordings are available online on the conference webpage.

The notes generated from the conversations at each session and specifically at the Roundtable session, informed the final conference report which will be

shared with Canadian decision-makers in advance of planned high-level global SDG gatherings at the UN Headquarters. The High Level Political Forum (HLPF) will be in July, at which the Government of Canada will be presenting a Voluntary National Review, an official review of progress to date on the SDGs in Canada. As well, the Summit on the SDGs will be in September.

In this final report, we present a summary of the conference and the outcomes through the notes generated by the student observers. Each student observer focused on one of the key conference themes. The report is organized under these themes and the focal categories that emerged from the conversations and discussions. The student observers also present key recommendations.

The conference was held at the UBC Vancouver campus from 8:30am to 5:00pm on June 7<sup>th</sup>. More details and the full program is available on the [conference website](#) .

# what are the paths towards decolonial futures?

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BY SAGORIKA HAQUE

We speak to you in languages that were never meant to be ours. How do you map paths towards futures when we have so few maps of our pasts? How do we center those of us forced onto the margins when the center created the margins? What does it mean to mourn the future, what does it mean to desire different ones? Who decides the definitions of development, of progress, of justice? Just for whom? Developed how? Progressing where? How do we move towards more equitable and livable worlds when the frameworks we are using are rooted in the deaths of our current worlds? The world we were born for never had a chance to exist. What are the borders of a life? We speak to you in languages that were never meant to be ours. Ancestral knowledges live in us, yearning, grieving, raging, dancing. Our mouths are tired. Our backs ache. Our feet and forests bleed. Our rivers swell and drown our dreams of having children. *কই যাবো? কই যাবো?* Where do we go? This apocalypse is unjust by design. *কই শুরু, কই শেষ?* Where do we end, where do we begin? Where can we? Where can we?



# Acknowledgments

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We acknowledge the land we occupy and where we had the privilege to have this gathering and conversations are the unceded, ancestral and traditional lands of the Musqueam peoples. We are grateful to the Coastal Wolf Pack for singing and dancing and Alec Dan for their generosity in welcoming us to their territory.

We are thankful to the student observers: Clarice Tuai, Fernanda Villasenor, Naomi Leung, Niki Afsharpour, Olivia Lang, Sagorika Haque and Vicky Kim for their thoughtful and insightful observations and reflections, and for helping develop the conference report.

We would not have been able to host this conference without our partners the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions, the BC Council for International Cooperation, the Vancouver Economic Commission, as well as all panelists and roundtable experts. Our sincere gratitude to all of you.

# Hope

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**BY NAOMI LEUNG**

*When I think about a just transition I think about my grandma  
About how she and other lower income migrants like her haven't had  
access to language about climate justice  
And about how she and other racialized seniors aren't prioritized in  
environmental spaces or in most rooms that they walk in*

*When I think about climate justice I think about my uncle who worked  
for a oil pipeline company in Alberta  
And who defended this pipeline out of fear of not being able to access a  
good job elsewhere*

*When I think of a just transition I think about my soon to be 7 year old  
baby cousin  
About my future children  
And about my future*

*My hope for this conference is that a commitment to creating a just  
transition is made by everyone here  
My hope is that a just transition won't be an empty promise because we  
will hold our leaders accountable  
My hope is that i see a just transition happening in the present, right  
now.*

*Where i see  
Translated resources about climate justice in different languages and  
cultural contexts  
I see positioned funded for women of colour and gender diverse peoples  
in green spaces  
I see intergenerational learning centred in anti-oppression and  
decolonization*

*My hope is that lower-income seniors, migrants, students and people  
are prioritized in a just transition  
And that their visions for the future and present are brought to fruition  
My hope is that no one is left behind- and we put our money behind  
making this happen*

*When I think about a just transition  
I think about the hope I have  
And the hope myself and my ancestors have fought to keep  
When you think about a just transition, what do you imagine?*

# Conference Themes: Major Takeaways

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The following sections are compiled and written by student observers. With a focus on the conference themes, student observers present their interpretations and reflections on the emerging conversations and discussions.

## EDUCATION

Written by Clarice Tuai and Olivia Lang

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“The plain fact is that the planet does not need more successful people. But it does desperately need more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers, and lovers of every kind. It needs people who live well in their places. It needs people of moral courage willing to join the fight to make the world habitable and humane. And these qualities have little to do with success as we have defined it.” — David W. Orr, *Ecological Literacy*

“Having fear about what you don’t know in the future is normal, but we have the agency to make change now.” Through education, “you are giving your children oars to navigate the uncertain waters.” — Nathan Grandjambe

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### Decolonizing Language Use in Education

Language choice must be intentional as we move towards Indigenizing our education systems, and use the foundational traditional knowledge that will help to achieve language vitality. In his cartoon, Dr. Perley is critiquing the concept of ‘wilderness’; a colonial concept that encourages a dichotomy between humans and nature. Indigenous peoples view themselves as part of nature, rather than separate from it, thus the concept of wilderness does not exist in Indigenous language or histories. Viewing ourselves as outside of nature restricts environmental action and harmonious relationships the nature in and around us. Another example is that ‘decolonization’ cannot be achieved under this term, as the word itself is colonial. We should ask instead what words and worlds do Indigenous peoples use and create? Even the idea of “sustain”



“Having Reservations” by Dr. Bernard Perley



# Conference Themes: Major Takeaways

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in sustainability implies going back to normal, or maintaining what already exists. But what exists is not working.

## Centering Indigenous Knowledge and Lived Experiences in Education

Including diverse forms of learning in Canada's education system is critical to moving towards decolonial and sustainable futures. Both Indigenous knowledge and lived experiences are not currently valued by the education system or the capitalist metrics defining success or worth. For example, Speaker Zoe Kompst asked why can't Indigenous peoples receive honorary degrees in Indigenous studies as a way to include lived experience in our education system and our ways of valuing knowledge? Zoe Kompst also highlighted that knowledge is not just found in education systems but also from the land. Land-based pedagogies display how the land has so much to teach us about how to live in harmony with each other and with nature.

## Trauma Informed Education

Education systems require compassion towards the traumas experienced by marginalized groups as a result of colonial structures. As a response to the experienced traumas of Indigenous peoples particularly, Dr. Cash Ahenakew, drawing on an idea from Michael Yellow Bird, presented the practice of neurodecolonization; "combining mindfulness approaches with traditional and contemporary secular and sacred contemplative practices to replace negative patterns of thought, emotion and behavior with healthy, productive ones" (Yellow Bird, n.d.). As a practice of healing from these lived traumas, Dr. Ahenakew discussed using land-based pedagogies as a method of reclaiming, resonating, and releasing trauma through different cultural practices and integrating mindfulness and meditation to promote healing and mental well-being. Through different Indigenous practices, Dr. Ahenakew states

how "social and institutional, discriminatory, anti-Indigenous, racist patterns and behaviours" caused by settlers must be interrupted to ensure the traumas imposed on Indigenous peoples are not reproduced. Trauma informed education is rooted in supportive and healing practices to help create spaces for generative knowledge production that places Indigenous knowledge and teachings at the centre.

Overall, the conference highlighted the need for education to be more holistic, inclusive, and reflective of diverse perspectives and lived experiences.

## JUST TRANSITION

Written by Naomi Leung and Niki Afsharpour

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"A just transition would look like centering a culture of care, love and reciprocity for workers and the worlds they are trying to build and rebuild, treating no one and no community as disposable, and prioritizing the well-being of future generations and people most impacted by climate injustice." — Naomi and Niki

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**A just transition is a workers-centred approach in every way (materially, socially, economically, etc.).**

It is important to credit how the just transition first came from the labour movement to be cautious of watering its meaning down when including a wider scope. Job losses are not a direct result of climate policy, rather they are a fault of social policy. Since technology is advancing regardless of energy type (coal, oil, renewables), workers will need to be reskilled for new jobs or skilled-up within their current jobs. This demonstrates how education is essential for a just transition. Furthermore, people deserve access to work they find meaningful.

# Conference Themes: Major Takeaways

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**To leave no one behind, equitable, trauma-informed, interdisciplinary approaches must be embedded into policy.**

A just transition shows up differently for people based on their positionality. People's lived experiences should be honored and validated and there must be equity in place for racialized workers, workers with accessibility challenges, lower-income workers and more. Lessons about accessibility and care in the workplace can be learned from the disability rights movements. In addition, language and cultural translation of climate justice and just transition knowledge is needed to increase accessibility for racialized migrants. When considering both global and local inequities, policy and decision makers should also ask "Just for who?" to ensure new solutions reduce harm to most impacted groups. Meaningful consultation from the most affected groups, meaningful listening and

integration of their needs can help achieve a just transition. For example, the carceral justice system is flawed, can be unjust and needs to be critiqued. Lessons from people who have voiced systemic and institutional flaws in policy should be listened to.

**Two-eyed seeing can be utilized in a just transition to consider the strengths of Indigenous perspectives and Western perspectives.**

A vision for a just transition should be more widespread and include the needs of those most impacted. To do this, we need to treat nature and future generations as stakeholders, utilize intergenerational collaboration and listening, and redefine 'value' into what we actually value, i.e. people over profit. We need to humanize every aspect of business and the economy for the just transition to succeed.

# Conference Themes: Major Takeaways

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## CLIMATE JUSTICE

Written by Fernanda Villasenor

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“What would it mean if we sustained this way of life for seven generations? ... If we were to sustain [what we have now] for the next generations, I think we would be in trouble ... How do we directly repair and revitalize what has been lost? Perhaps then we can have seven more generations.” — Zoe Kompst

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The climate crisis is a set of twin crises - inequality and climate collapse. This is the quote that stood out the most to me when listening to the Vancouver Economic Commission speak about the injustices we are facing today because of climate change. You can't fix one without fixing the other - and that is the essence of true climate justice. Throughout the conference, I was able to listen to different perspectives on what was needed to achieve the SDGs. One key takeaway is that both inequality and climate collapse are rooted in the way our economic system is currently set up.

### We need to find new ways forward, using ancestral knowledge

Our current way of life, our economic system, and the resources we use to live are killing the planet - and killing us. But it hasn't always been this way. As echoed in the Decolonizing Education and Mental Health and The Pulse of Climate Activism: Indigenous Feminist Movement Leading Climate Responses and Solutions, Indigenous peoples have always known how to live with and care for the Earth. The processes of colonialism and unregulated capitalism have created a divide between people and nature, making us forget our connection to the land. We are at a crossroads where we can decide what to keep from our modern ways of thinking, and what to leave behind in favour for older forms of knowledge that have sustained life for thousands of years.



Reflective painting by Sagorika Haque

### We need to redefine our values and design our education, economic, and social systems around that

Do our systems reflect our current values? Do our current values even reflect our true needs? Who has decided what our values are? We live in an economic system that prioritizes development, endless growth and short-term results. But are these the best ways to measure wellbeing? What would happen if, as Nathan Grandjambe said, we incorporated the planet as a stakeholder both in our abstract values as well as in our economic measures? While focusing on

# Conference Themes: Major Takeaways

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economics is not enough, the idea that these values have to put economic wellbeing and climate justice at odds is a false dichotomy. A new economic system that values people over profit and good jobs over “any jobs,” and that holds people accountable for their impact on the planet, is key to achieving equality, and therefore Climate Justice.

**Climate Injustices do not happen just within countries, they happen across countries, affecting the Global South more**

As we progress towards a “net-zero” economy and achieve important milestones in our journey towards independence from fossil fuels, it is important to keep in mind that, while crucial, this is only one dimension of climate justice, and that the things that can be solutions for the Global North can become a new iteration of injustice for the Global South as long as we maintain an extraction-focused economic model.

An example of this is the move away from gas-powered vehicles to electric vehicles. There is an urgent need to reduce emissions from transportation, most of it coming from the Global North. However, the materials needed to power this transition are often located in the Global South. Extraction is characterized by companies from the Global North coming in to get the resources in the most convenient and profitable way for them, while continuing to exploit and traumatize Indigenous communities. As Natalie Illanes Nogueira mentioned, we need to be willing to sacrifice our comfort in the Global North to prioritize the right to exist for communities in the Global South.

## DECOLONIZATION

Written by Sagorika Haque and Vicky Kim

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“Knowledge sharing should come from a place of respect and reciprocity; perhaps researchers need to do more work in the relationship.” — Winnie Tam, roundtable discussion participant

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### Key Invitations for More Just and Caring Futures Through Prioritizing Decolonization Across the SDGs

The trauma, pain, and violences faced by Indigenous and Other(ed)<sup>1</sup> peoples are not just of the past, but are *ongoing, deeply intergenerational, internal, interpersonal, communal, local, global, and ecological*. **All spaces in colonized societies are inherently based on uneven hierarchies** determined by “metrics of worth,” which includes race, class, geography, and gender. Colonized spaces were not designed to foster rest and well-being for Indigenous and Other(ed) peoples; **no wonder they are exhausted and traumatized in these spaces**. As Dr. Sharon Stein said, “SDGs are an example of a single story premised on ethnocentric notions of continued growth and development.” It has no room for the costs of historical and ongoing violences, and comes from capitalist and “development” imaginaries. It fails to account for “centuries of dispossession, genocide, ecocide, and epistemicide” (Dr. Stein) – especially in relation to the inequalities between colonizers and the colonized, and the “global north” and the “global south”. Understanding this, rebuilding trust-based relations grounded in institutional, individual, and collective intergenerational healing must be prioritized more moving forward.

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1 We intentionally chose to use the term “Other(ed)” throughout the text to center that communities living with the past, present, and impending impacts of capitalism and colonialism are not inherently “marginalized” or “Other” inherently but rather, made the Other by these dominative systems that require racialized, gendered, and classed hierarchies to sustain themselves. We wish to use and honour terms that do not place the blame and shame on those that have been and continue to be oppressed through recognizing that terms like “historically marginalized” still centre an imposition of the reductive epistemic frameworks that rely on those “within the margins” to validate the “centre” while continuing patterns of othering that erase agency and dignity.

# Conference Themes: Major Takeaways

Systemic trauma-informed engagement and education must be foundational.

Trauma runs and cuts deep, and healing cannot happen without the acknowledgement and understanding of trauma at all the levels in which it exists. Indigenous intergenerational healing practices must be foundational. And discomfort, especially for the most privileged, must be leaned into. **When initiatives aren't trauma-informed, they are unsustainable.**

Ethical forms of reparations, compensations, and restoration for this labor need to be in place, understanding that disproportional emotional, physical, and spiritual labor is shouldered by Indigenous and Other(ed) people.

For those not Indigenous and Other(ed), it is important to understand that mistakes are inevitable and we cannot move away from taking action in the fear of making mistakes. Dr. Cash Ahenakew and Dr. Sharon Stein speak to how we need to approach and move with "relational maturity, sobriety, and accountability" (Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures, n.d.). **We need stamina and humility to do this work.** As Dr. Sharon Stein has emphasized, we must start with honesty about our current understandings, capacities, and thoughts. Furthermore, she says that "we can only move at the speed of trust."

**Prioritizing spaces for Indigenous and marginalized communities to gather, heal together, and care for one another is vital, essential, and urgent.** Oppression pulls oneself away from themselves and people apart from one another. Community care and solidarity are acts of resistance in colonized societies.

**Lived experiences must be valued as knowledges.**

Panelists asserted that our lives and our emotions are embodied microcosms of systems, and thus, valuable sources of knowledges and reflection that can help



By Niki Afsharpour, inspired by a conversation with Pablo Akira Beimler

us reimagine what future systems should look like. Interdisciplinary and intersectional lenses and collaborations are needed to assess problems first, not only solutions. Intentional spaces for knowledge sharing are needed that are not extractive but (re) generative. *How do we center voices and experiences that need to be centered without reproducing patterns of extraction and exploitation of time, energy, and emotional, physical, and intellectual labor?*

Evelyn Arriagada Oyarzún asserted that there are situated knowledges, practices, and praxes, rooted in Indigenous, Afro, and Mestizo communities that exist within frontline grassroots organizing. Intersecting violences are happening in the land and also in our bodies; specifically, feminized bodies and Indigenous and Global South territories. Evelyn also offered that ecofeminist ideas offered vitalizing pathways towards more livable futures, through "acknowledging the mutual relationship with nature

# Conference Themes: Major Takeaways

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and gender – also gender and intersectional identities and intersectional systems of domination; climate is reinforcing existing issues... as well as windows of opportunities to change.” Racialized women are at the forefront of most environmental movements around the world, so challenging traditional gendered roles and power systems both locally and globally through cultivating more transnational feminist solidarities to bridge grounded community organizing and academia is vital in navigating our present and impending global and local crises.

## Imagination of futures must be grounded in Indigenous ancestral knowledges.

Transformative alternatives that do not rely on or reproduce frameworks based on exclusionary, reductive, and Eurocentric ideologies are needed to understand a decolonial world. With this comes the critical reflection of what it means to “sustain” development, and what “development” means and who it is for. Natalie Illanes Nogueira asserted that Indigenous communities are “holding the solutions for the problems we have now.” We must reframe our understandings of systems change – instead of working *for* Other(ed) communities, what does it mean to work with them without the onus of mitigating crises we are not responsible for, understanding that action has been historically disproportionate?

## The coloniality of power dynamics around language and action must be centered.

You have the power to “build worlds through words,” as Dr. Bernard C. Perley said. Words hold meaning and value, and language is a tool to visualize and reimagine just and caring societies. With this power comes responsibility. *What do the words you choose mean to you? What impact does your language have on yourself and others? What are the power dynamics that exist in your language and in the language that you see and hear around you?*



By Sagorika Haque

Tuck & Yang (2012) reminds us that “decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools.” (p. 1). Land back goes hand in hand with all decolonization efforts. Intersectional, culturally competent, and trauma informed systems and community care must center meaningfully mitigating and repairing injustices among disproportionately impacted communities globally and locally to avoid furthering systemic harms. These vital efforts in moving towards more livable futures only grow in their urgency.

# Concluding Summary

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The conference was an opportunity for a regional gathering to learn, engage, and reflect on our path toward decolonization, climate justice and just transition through education and community building. These overarching themes presented many actions by which Canada can accelerate work on the SDGs, particularly in the areas of good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, and climate action.


Overall, the conference highlighted the need for education to be more holistic, inclusive, and reflective of diverse perspectives and lived experiences. Just transition is understood as a social construct that should include the needs of those most impacted. To do this, we need to treat nature and future generations as stakeholders, and humanize every aspect of business and the economy for the just transition to succeed. Climate crisis is inherently a

justice issue and should be treated as such. Hence, we need to redefine our values and design our education, economy, and social systems that reflect justice-centered values. Prioritizing decolonization across the SDGs was a major theme that challenged us to confront our biases and preconceived notions of development and that requires us to reimagine education grounded in Indigenous ancestral knowledges. Centering trauma-informed approaches and honouring lived experiences to cultivate caring communities in both workplaces and beyond is considered key to many of the emerging issues.

# References

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