

From the judges

What does the future hold for a child growing up today? When you ask those with the most at stake in the answer – young people themselves – you learn a lot.

We've learned about the hopes and preoccupations of children and teenagers from across the world. We've felt their frustration with those in power, heard their ideas for how to transform their towns and cities, and understood the things they treasure and want to protect: a local coral reef, electricity that lets them study after school, the trees and animals that surround their homes.

We observed themes: strong awareness of inequality and injustice, the importance of memory and intergenerational connection, hope for peace. Some imagined complex futuristic societies, but many others highlighted the power of humans – not technology – to make a real difference.

Earth4All's work is based on <u>scientific modelling</u> of possible future scenarios, but we know that science without a story can only go so far.

In this second edition of the Stories of the Future Creative Challenge, we received almost 200 entries from 33 countries, each one a window into the imagination of a young person concerned about their future – and all of ours. At Earth4All, we believe strongly in the power of culture and storytelling to influence the world around us, and we are delighted to share the voices and visions of eight young people whose creativity inspires us to keep working towards our vision of wellbeing and prosperity for all on a stable planet.

The Sky Beneath Our Roof

Christa Ashok. 16. USA

October 9, 2050

Dear Diary,

Today I heard rain on the roof.

Not panic rain, not the kind that makes you grab a plastic sheet and run to unplug the outlets. No one shouted. No one cursed the sky. It was just... rain. A soft, rhythmic tapping on the solar tiles we installed last summer. Amma says it used to sound like war drums on our old tin roof, which made it really hard to sleep.

My name is Revathi. I'm 16 years old. I live in Nochikuppam, at the edge of Marina Beach in Chennai. Just a few steps from the Bay of Bengal.

When I was small, Amma used to tell me bedtime stories. But not the fairy-tale kind. She told me about the wave that swallowed the shore, the 2004 tsunami that took entire families. She said the sea rose like a hand and slapped everything down. People ran, but the water was faster.

She told me about the 2015 floods too, how Nochikuppam was submerged, how they slept on roof tiles and prayed the current wouldn't take them. The way she described it, I imagined the whole city sinking like a broken கட்டுமரம் (kattumaram - fishing raft), swallowed by the sea.

Back then, Nochikuppam wasn't even on the map. Just a bundle of tin and tarps behind concrete walls. A place forgotten.

But we stayed. Because this is home. The கடல் (kadal - sea) is my home. Because we have salt in our blood.

Now, Nochikuppam isn't what it used to be.



Built on raised foundations with stormwater gardens in between. Solar roofs that hum in the morning. Amma calls the new mangrove belt our village's புடவை விலை (pudavai vilai – saree border) protective, green, and beautiful.

Inside our home, she grows பாகற்காய் (pavakkai - bitter gourd) and செம்பருத்தி (sembaruthi - hibiscus) in coconut shells strung along the front wall.

You can still smell the sea, but now it mixes with curry leaves, marigold, and hope.

Appa, who once went out before dawn with just nets and prayer and his little Hanuman statue, now works part-time in the ocean resilience team. He also teaches younger boys how to fish without hurting the coral beds. I like to think the sea listens more now.

I remember the hard days. Long lines for tanker water. Stomachs empty by sunset. Amma crying over my soaked schoolbook. I never asked for much, only to stay dry long enough to finish homework.

Change came slowly. But it came eventually.

My அக்கா (akka - older sister) joined a youth climate fellowship. Then the women of our kuppam (village) formed the வெப்ப எதிர்ப்பு குழு (Veppa Edhirppu Kuzhu - Heat Resisters Collective). They marched to the Secretariat with maps of our hottest streets and flooded lanes. The papers finally paid attention. This time, someone listened.

We got solar grids. Elevated walkways. Smart drainage. And the library boat.

Oh, the library! It's my favorite place in the entire world. Last week, I climbed onto the boat and read a verse from the தருக்குறள் (Thirukkural - a 2000-year-old Tamil text on ethics, governance, and love by the poet Thiruvalluvar). It was written long before any of us, but it felt like it was written for us:

தள்ளா விளையுளும் தக்காரும் தாழ்விலாச்

செல்வரும் சேர்வது நாடு

Translation: The union of unfailing yields, untarnished wealth, and people of wisdom - that is a country.



It reminded me of us.

We used to be invisible. But now our streets have names.

Last week, I walked through 争ற可ர் (Chitroor Theru - Chitroor street) and saw children building boats from scrap wood and old bottles, racing them through the rainwater gutters. Even the fish market got a makeover. Appa loves the fish market, which is now renovated with wind fans and shaded stalls. A mural of a fisherwoman now watches over the shore, oiled, braided hair shiny under the morning sun.

Still, not everything is perfect.

Some houses still flood. Some girls still drop out. And yes, the big storms still come. Just last month, Cyclone Vayu skimmed past us. But we didn't leave. We didn't run. We stayed dry.

The fridge kept humming.

For the first time in Amma's life, rain didn't mean fear.

I want to be a coastal architect. Not someone who draws towers in glass. Someone who designs homes like ours, built with dignity. Homes that don't apologize for being by the sea. Homes that face the wind and stay standing.

Last week, I presented a model of a self-sustaining மீன் சந்தை (meen sandhai - fish market) made from recycled ocean plastic and powered by tides for our school-wide innovators contest. I called it:

"நாம் கடலை வெல்லவில்லை. அதோடு வாழ கற்றுக்கொண்டோம்." (We didn't conquer the sea. We learned to live with it.)

The judges clapped.

Appa said, "You'll rebuild this coast, ma."

And I believe him.



The rain has stopped now. Waves are curling gently against the shore. The puddles shine like silver. A little girl just skipped past our window, dragging a paper boat made from yesterday's newspaper, the one with my name in it.

Funny, how for most of Amma's life, rain meant disaster. Floods. Loss. Darkness. But for me?

It means the tanks will fill. The plants will bloom. The sky will watch over our home.

And right now, I'm happy.

Love,

ரேவதி (Revathi)

Future city builder, daughter of the slum that rose

About the author



I'm Christa, a 16-year-old Tamil girl from the Bay Area in California. I grew up speaking Tamil at home and staying connected to my culture through food, films, and traditions. Though I've never lived in Chennai, watching Tamil movies about life in its slums made me more aware of the challenges some communities face, especially with climate change. I believe storytelling and technology can shine a light on these issues and help create a future that's more fair, sustainable, and inclusive.



My Grandmother's Henna

Hiba Azzouz. 17. Morocco

"One day, the sea will eat us if we don't feed it differently."

My aunt whispered this to me in 2030, when I was five. I didn't understand, not yet. Back then, the ocean was just a thing that gnawed at Mogadishu's edges, stealing a few more meters of sand each year. Back then, mothers tucked fears into our braids like charms, because bedtime stories were too fragile to hold what was coming.

My name is Amina. I was born in 2025, in a city learning to measure time in retreating coastlines.

It's 2050. I'm 25, and the wind smells different now. Not cleaner, not exactly. Just... fuller. Like it carries less fear and more memory.

We don't have flying cars, or robot teachers, or dome cities like the old cartoons used to promise. What we have is soil that remembers how to grow again. We have silence, good silence, on nights when the grid doesn't need to hum because energy comes from the wind off the coast and the heat under our feet.

My generation was raised on loss, species disappearing, rivers shrinking, heatwaves with names like people. As the shifts began, cheering was absent. Action took its place.

People think transformation is loud. But in Somalia, it came like a breath held too long finally exhaled. It started with water.

A decade ago, a coalition of women farmers and nomadic engineers (yes, that's a thing now) developed decentralized fog nets, woven from recycled fabric and lined with silica threads, cheap, repairable, beautiful. My mother installed the first one on our rooftop. It looked like a spiderweb blessed by the gods. It caught 22 liters a day.

With water came gardens. With gardens came nutrition. With nutrition came kids who could stay awake in class.

Rather than a green revolution, we chose to call it relearning.



In a twist of fate, the future was less a breakthrough than a rediscovery of what came before.

And in that remembering, something strange and sacred happened: we began to own time. No longer running to catch up with development models or northern benchmarks.

We paused. We listened. We asked: What does a good life mean for us? Sometimes I write letters to the girl I used to be. I tell her, "Don't chase the stars. Tend to the ground beneath your feet. Everything you need is already waiting to be remembered."

The wind smells different now. And that's how I know:

We made it through, whole and true.

About the author



I'm from Casablanca, Morocco, a country currently facing significant water scarcity and hydraulic stress.

Environmental issues have always been central in my life. I grew up accompanying my father to his job at a Moroccan company focused on modern irrigation systems designed to reduce water waste and improve efficiency in agriculture. Being exposed to this work early on gave me a strong sense of how vital sustainable practices are.

Because of this, I do everything I can, at my scale, to help. Whether that's in my daily habits, staying informed, or leading ecological initiatives at school, I believe it's crucial to act. I hope our future moves away from the race toward bigger, taller, faster, and instead focuses on preservation: learning from our ancestors and how they cared for the Earth before us.



Bright Rose

Aidana Seitova, 15, Kazakhstan

Translated from Russian

I was born in the era we call "After".

After the War, after the crisis, after all the troubles and disasters that came before us.

My name is Nurgul. Translated from Kazakh, it means "Bright Rose". My grandmother said that my name was chosen with the hope that the world would one day become soft as petals and strong as light.

I am sixteen. I have never seen poverty, wars or fear. I never thought that I would be expelled, humiliated, ignored because of my accent, skin color, special needs or gender. We watch movies about this, like people in ancient times read myths.

Today I woke up from the soft rays of the sun that entered my room through the windows. The city - green, reasonable, calm - breathed with me, in no hurry. Nowadays, all people have stopped chasing time, afraid of being late for something, because poverty has disappeared all over the world, everyone has a job, a home, and a happy family, and they have completely forgotten about competition and starting everything. Thanks to this, no one on our Earth wants to be a criminal and steal something from others.

But this is exactly what is scary. We have become so quickly accustomed to the good. We have become a generation that does not know what fear smells like. What a siren sounds like. How a city is destroyed. We are children of silence. What if we start to forget? That is why I decided to tell.

When I was nine, I first visited the House of Our Ancestors Museum. They were showing an old video from the 2020s. People with posters: "We don't want to die because of the climate!", "No to war!", "Food is a right!" I did not understand: why are they shouting? Why are the police coming at them with shields? Why are their faces filled with fear?

Then I saw footage of the war. Fear in all people. Destroyed houses. People walking barefoot in the mud. Children without school. Women who are not allowed to go to university. Men who cannot walk from hunger.

Lasked my grandmother how it stopped. She looked at me for a long time and then said:

Because we reached the edge. And then - finally began to listen to each other. This moment did not come in one day.



It was a series of fears - natural, social, political. First the water disappeared. Then - food. Cities were burning. Refugees were growing. And then billions of people began to die. No one could pretend that this was "not their problem" anymore.

People began to act.

Farmers united with climate scientists, children - with scientists, women - became leaders of countries. For the first time in history, Global People's Hearings were held - where every person, regardless of wealth, could speak. This became a starting point. A bunch of rules were drawn up, where everyone suffered, but went to victory.

Armies were disbanded. Money from military budgets went to schools, science and land restoration. Water is redistributed globally. Electricity became a right.

Inclusion became not just a word, but a rule. Every city is now built taking into account all bodies, all languages, all cultures, and not one race, a person was deprived.

"Now you learn sign language the same way as mathematics, and before it was known to less than a million people around the world": said Grandmother.

Now our silence is not accidental. It is the result of the choice and work of each person. Because I am Nurgul - "bright rose" - and I want my children to live in silence not out of habit, but with awareness.

Because we are the children of the Earth, and now we are not its masters. We are its guardians!

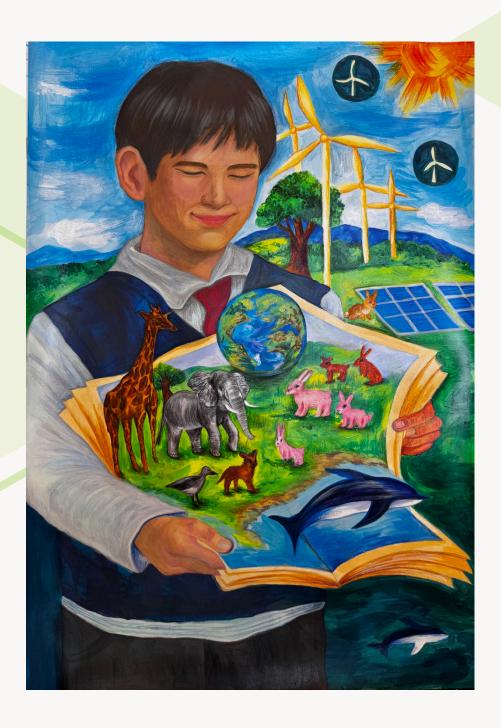
About the author



My name is Aidana, and I'm from Kazakhstan. I was inspired to write my story because I believe storytelling can help us reflect, dream, and act for a better world. I imagine a future where we live in harmony with nature, support one another, and use innovation to solve global challenges together.



Janghwan Kim. 15. South Korea



About the artist

I am a passionate artist who believes that art can inspire real change to the world through a variety of ways. Growing up close to nature, I have seen both its beauty and its brittleness. I am entering the Earth4All contest to use my creativity to speak up for the planet, raise awareness on helping others to see the urgency of protecting our shared home.

Wild Seeds

Florize Agante, 14, England

The sunrise in New Ayoka spilled golden light across the treetops of rooftop orchards and glinted off the glass-paneled wind towers. From her perch on the garden deck, Zari squinted at the horizon, redder than usual. Another dust storm was coming. For the fourth time this month.

Below her, the city pulsed gently, solar trains humming, aquaponic pumps gurgling, childrens laughter echoing from the communal learning dome. Her community had worked hard for this life. An improved life. Every seed in the soil, every panel on a roof.

But the storms were getting stronger.

She descended the spiral stair from the garden tower and made her way to the community commons. Her job today was simple, tell the children a story. Not one from books, but from the Before. Stories of the Collapse weren't in textbooks—they were told aloud, as warnings and reminders. They called them "Roots"

The kids sat in a semicircle on cushions under the storytelling tree. Its trunk was carved with spirals, each marking a story told beneath it.

"Today," Zari began, her voice soft but steady, "we remember a girl named Laila, who lived in New Ayoka the Drying. Her family had to leave after the last river turned to dust. They walked for months, planting what seeds they carried. Not for food..but for hope..."

As she spoke, she saw young eyes widen, some in fear but most in wonder. They didn't know that world. Their world was green, solar, slow. It had been earned, inch by inch, over decades. But the sky was changing again. The wind wasn't right. And Zari couldn't ignore it.

After the session, she climbed to the old library. Half of it had collapsed years ago during a quake, but her grandfather, once a historian, had restored part of the archives. She knew what she was looking for: a map.



"Seed Vaults," she whispered, running her fingers across crumbling paper. In the early 2030s, before the worst of the chaos, scientists and activists had buried native seeds in vaults around the world. New Ayoka had been built over one of themor so the legends said.

She found the coordinates scribbled on a margin, faint but legible: SECTOR 2112—the oldest part of the city. Now unused, overgrown, and rumored to be unstable.

Perfect.

The next morning, she set out at dawn, her pack filled with light tools, filtered water, and a data tablet for recording. Solar buses didn't go to that Sector anymore, so she biked through quiet streets where vines curled up abandoned streetlamps and birds nested in shattered skyways.

When she reached the gate to the old tunnel systems, the sky had turned sepia. Dust. She'd have to be quick.

The tunnels were dark, but still solid. Zari flicked on her headlamp and descended. The air was thick with silence and soil. After an hour of navigating crumbling halls and sealed corridors, she found it a reinforced door half-buried in moss and earth. The emergency keypad blinked faintly.

Her breath caught. She typed in the code etched on the map's corner. SEED-2050

The door creaked open with a gust of stale, dry air. Inside, rows of sealed drawers glinted under her lamp. Labels: Baobab. . Wild Yam. African Basil. Tears welled in her eyes. "They're real..."

She recorded everything—location, seed types, viability status. These weren't engineered crops like the ones in city gardens. These were ancestral. Untouched. Wild.

Suddenly, her tablet buzzed—RED WEATHER Alert: Category 4 Dust Storm Incoming. Shelter immediately.

She looked up. The tunnel was sturdy enough to ride it out, but the entrance could collapse. She took one case of seeds—just one—and ran.



By the time she returned to New Ayoka, the storm had begun. Skies were orangeblack, winds howling like beasts. Dust skated across solar panels, choking the sun. She reached the commons just as city workers were sealing the storm barriers.

"Zari!" her friend Kenji called. "Where were you?"

She held up the seed case, breathless. "I found the vault."

Eyes widened. Not just his. The others gathered. One of the elders, Amara, stepped forward, astonished. "You mean the real one?"

She nodded.

That night, under emergency lighting, the community gathered in the storytelling dome. Zari stood before them, the seed case open beside her.

"These are wild seeds," she said, her voice firm, proud. "Pre-collapse species. We can diversify the ecosystem again. Strengthen our food webs. Revive the native plants. These are our ancestors' gifts."

Amara smiled. "Then it's time we start a new story."

The following months were difficult. The storms damaged panels, cut off water supplies, and blanketed crops in dust. But slowly, the community adapted. They used the wild seeds to create hardy buffer zones of vegetation—plants that held the soil, cleaned the air, and attracted pollinators.

Zari became a local historian, officially

But she still told stories under the spiral-carved tree. Only now, she told them not just out of fear, but of courage. Of roots rediscovered. Of the girl who walked into the past to save the future.

And each time, she ended the same way:

"The future isn't something we inherit. It's something we plant."

About the author

I've always loved storytelling and developing plots. This story is set in 2030, in this sustainable, futuristic city that's kind of like a greener, reimagined New York. When I saw the chance to share something for the magazine, I jumped at it! A lot of my inspiration comes from imagining what our future could look like and how the characters navigate dilemmas.

The Screen Went Dark

Mathew Katz, 16. Canada

Julian's mom was working late, as she did often. She was a city councillor, but before being elected seven years ago, she had led the grassroots climate organization that helped change the city's future.

For dinner, Julian's dad made stir fry using vegetables they had bought directly from a farmers' market. Superstores didn't exist anymore in Edmonton, thanks in part to a farmers' market program championed by Julian's mom. After dinner, Julian worked on his homework and helped with chores before going to bed.

The next day wasn't a regular school day; it was the eighth anniversary of the Great Edmonton Fire.

Eight years earlier, in 2032, a scorching wildfire had nearly decimated Edmonton. Nearly the entire population had to evacuate. A few thousand Edmontonians lost their lives.

To commemorate the anniversary, the school held an assembly. Firefighters spoke about the heroes who had died trying to fight the fire. Politicians like Julian's mom renewed their commitment to fighting climate change. Teachers talked about how they rebuilt the city.

Julian didn't remember much about the Great Edmonton Fire. He was only four years old when it happened. All he remembered was his parents frantically ushering him into the car. He remembers looking up at the sky and feeling scared. It was black with smoke.

What he didn't remember was how the fire woke the nation up to the climate crisis it had helped to create. After the fire, Canada dramatically cut oil and gas production, invested in green energy and supported oil and gas workers in transitioning to new jobs. Julian's dad had once been one of them.

Around the world, similarly devastating climate disasters made other countries act on the climate crisis.

Even today, Julian can't go on a bike ride with his friends some days in the summer because it's too smoky, but the government has invested heavily in wildfire prevention. Two years ago, Julian's mom had helped pass a law to plant two million new trees in Edmonton, not only to absorb C02, but to provide shade during heat waves.

As the assembly ended, Julian felt sad for those who had died in the Great Edmonton Fire. But he also felt optimism. He didn't understand everything, but he saw how his community managed to rebuild from near complete destruction. And if that was possible, Julian knew his future, and the world's future was bright.

About the author



I am a 16-year-old Grade 10 high school student from Edmonton, Alberta. I was inspired to write this story to highlight the need for meaningful action on the climate crisis, but also to show how action to combat the climate crisis can improve our lives. If we all work together, I hope and believe we can create a future like the one laid out in the story: one of sustainability and equity across the world.



Photographs In Time

Hasini Manda, 16. USA

Small fingers hovered over the creased edges of an old photo album, hesitating slightly before touching the faded cover. A young girl sat alone, flipping open the hefty book brimming with memories.

September 6th, 2001. A young woman sat near the entrance of a lush, thick jungle. Sunlight spilled like liquid gold through a dense canopy of towering green trees still slightly damp from a downpour. A big smile graced the woman's face as she gazed at the Philippine Eagles gliding with their massive outstretched wings and brown feathers catching the light.

The girl ran her small fingers over the magnificent birds in the photo, mesmerized by their graceful arcs and freedom. She could almost smell the earthy scent of the air, heavy with the warmth that rose through the jungle floor after rainfall. She could almost hear the sharp, musical cries of the birds that swirled above the woman in the picture. Everything felt unshaken. Frozen in time.

April 19th, 2010. A young child stood barefoot in a field, laughter evident on his face as he reached for the fireflies which danced against a velvet indigo sky. A mesmerizing vivid yellow glow was cast across the picture, enveloping it in radiance. Below, the river shimmered, so clear that every pebble on the riverbed glinted like glass.

The young girl was confused. They looked like stars, small unreachable dots that shimmered brilliantly. The girl flipped over the photo glancing over the carefully written words. "It was my child's first time seeing fireflies."

She was confused, what were fireflies? She felt a pang in her chest, an urge to see the glowing lights which were now gone.

February 13th, 2021. An older man with a glum expression stood in front of a factory next to a forest. He wore a jumpsuit like all the other workers in the picture. Heavy machines dissected trees, their parts caked with mud and bark. There were no signs of animals in this picture, only their homes being torn apart.

The young girl wrinkled her nose, smelling the sawdust and oil on the picture. Was this where it all started? Birds' nests still clung to the tall trees in view, but there was no sign of the birds themselves.

June 11th, 2029. The picture was quiet. A young man stood under a hazy red sky, his face sunken in and tired. Only a few trees were in a massive clearing standing like soldiers who had survived war. The land around him was filled with towering buildings and yellowed grass. The sun was unlike the sparkling gold in the previous photos, instead a muted white disk in the far off distance.



February 2nd, 2037. The river in the picture was devoid of water. A dry, cracked bed snaked across the earth. Where the forest once stood, factories towered with their grey silhouettes. The sky was thick with smog, swallowing every trace of color. The air in the photo smelled metallic and acrid, stinging the lungs.

The world had gotten worse. The girl vaguely remembered this cityscape, when she was very young. It was then, after no longer being able to see the sun or stars, that the world collectively decided it was time to change.

May 12th, 2050. A lady in a white lab coat grinned excitedly, crouching in a field of bright green shoots pushing stubbornly through the soil. Behind her, a group of children were planting saplings in neat rows. In the background, a river shimmered once more, its gentle current alive with darting fish and lily pads swaying softly. The smog had lifted slightly. For the first time in years, the stars shone in the night sky, still dull but visible.

The girl's fingers trembled as she brushed over the image, tracing the outline of a small bird perched on the scientist's shoulder. It was a Philippine Eagle chick, healthy and alive.

April 9th, 2068. The final picture was the brightest of them all. Farmers and engineers were gathered together releasing rescued animals back into their habitats.

The girl saw animals that were previously endangered and a vibrant green environment stretching across the photo. Bright banners stretched above their heads with the words, "We brought life back."

The girl smiled softly, closing the photo album. She rose to her feet and walked to the window glancing at the birds darted between the trees, their calls echoing through the streets. She saw bees flying over flowers, and the flourishing wildlife. Sleek wind turbines spun in the distance and solar panels glittered upon every house in the neighborhood. The fight hadn't been easy. Generations fought across the world for change. But they had done it. The earth was finally healing.

The girl then decided she would add her own photograph of a thriving world to the album someday.

About the author



My name is Hasini and this story is my vision of the future we could have, if we act urgently and together. There is no Planet B, no second shot at the miracle that is Earth. I want to live in a world where children don't learn about polar bears or coral reefs through faded photos in textbooks, but see them alive and prosperous. I believe we still have time to make our planet healthy again, but only if we choose to act now.



About the artist:



My name is Wilma. I'm 12 years old and I was born in Berlin. Since I was two, I've been travelling around the world. Art is a big part of my life—I draw whenever I have time or inspiration. I like making up stories, like this short comic. I wanted it to be humorous, a bit goofy and fun to read, while keeping the message clear. If it makes people smile and at the same time also think about working together for a better future, that would make me happy. Right now I'm on a multi-year bike trip around Europe with my mum. I'm very grateful I can travel—not every 12-year-old gets to do that. We call our environmental bike trip Giant Leap Life, because taking a giant leap sounds a lot better than business as usual;)







About Earth4All

Earth4All is an international initiative driving one of the most ambitious transitions of our time: transforming our economic system into one that puts people and planet first.

Backed by world-leading scientists and economic thinkers, Earth4All champions five extraordinary turnarounds that together create a pathway towards our vision: wellbeing and prosperity for all on a stable planet.

The Earth4All initiative is guided by clear principles:

- 1. We can achieve wellbeing for all within the limits of our planet.
- 2. The crises we face are interwoven and need to be approached with a systems thinking perspective. For example, we cannot solve the climate crisis without also tackling the poverty and inequality crises, and vice versa.
- 3. Solutions must work for the majority, and they must be seen as fair and just or they risk rejection. Transforming our economic system requires widespread support.

To achieve this, we encourage citizens from all walks of life to engage in discussions about transformative ideas. Together, we can jumpstart the transformation of our economic system to one that puts wellbeing above growth. *Earth for All: A Survival Guide for Humanity* presents two science-based scenarios for the future: Too Little Too Late and the Giant Leap

Visit our website: earth4all.life

Feeling inspired? Why not use our <u>Stories of the Future</u> <u>Facilitation Guide</u> to inspire your own, or to use in classes or workshops to get people thinking, talking and writing their visions of a future where we take a Giant Leap.

