

Summary

Restorative revolution



A movement of the church to transform
wealth, power and communities for a
flourishing world

tearfund



📍 A church elder in Nepal facilitates a community mobilisation session.
Photo: Mr. Uttam B.K. – Project Coordinator/
Nepal Magar Society Service and Information Centre

What stories will be told of the 21st century?

This is a pivotal moment for the people of God to come together within his restoration story and realise our collective power to shape a fairer future. The church is the most powerful agent for change in the world. Together, we can act with courage to shape a flourishing world where each of us has the economic agency and power to meet our basic needs while protecting the whole of creation. This is the restorative economy.

The invitation

This report is an invitation into the story of what is possible when millions of Christians across hundreds of thousands of churches follow Jesus with our whole lives. A story about how small seeds can sow global restoration in the hands of God. To see Jesus' kingdom come.

On earth, as in heaven.



📖 Cover illustration: Freedom lies in recapturing our true stories, not accepting those the world imposes on us. Illustration: Wingfinger.



📍 Brazil, Recife, Coqueiral community.
Photo: Ruth Towell/Tearfund

Where are we and why are we here?

Before 2020, this century seemed full of ‘mingled promise or peril’¹ – depending on how we moved forward together. But insufficient action means we now experience and anticipate the dangers more starkly. Inequality and extreme poverty are on the rise again. Unprecedented biodiversity loss, pollution and climate catastrophe² threaten the air, land, water, plants and animals that the Creator loves and we all rely on. We face soaring costs around the world. And we are divided – by politics, conflict³ and the fortifying of borders on every continent.⁴ Many of us are fearful that we will stumble from crisis to crisis in this decade.⁵ Millions of us who are young face an uncertain future.

The current economic system is accelerating this inequality and breakdown of the natural world. It is marked by extreme wealth⁶ and exclusive power. Exploitation persists; many of us from formerly colonised countries – as well as vulnerable communities within wealthy economies – continue to have our labour exploited and ecosystems destroyed while being unable to meet our basic needs.

Wealth and power have been connected throughout human history. But we need to face how they are currently linked and guarded at the expense of the majority – and those living in poverty most of all.

The root of all this is humanity’s ancient problem: shalom⁷ was interrupted when sin entered the world. Our relationships were broken – with God, with ourselves, with each other and with the rest of creation. The fundamental problem is the condition of the human heart (Matthew 12:33–35). And the fruit of this brokenness includes broken systems, greed, corrupt governance, injustice, colonialism, dehumanisation and a failure to value the whole of creation.

But this brokenness is not God’s plan. This moment which looks full of difficulty is a critical window for millions of God’s people to enact stories of redemption, reconciliation and restoration.

Where should we go?

God’s restoration story

We can be part of God’s ongoing redemption story for the whole of creation. The story that began in a garden and will play out for eternity in a garden city.⁸ This is the bigger story into which the life, death and resurrection of Jesus invites us and provides a way. This is where we find our hope for tomorrow as well as for today. Let’s locate ourselves in this story again.

We are made of and for stories. For each of us, freedom lies in recapturing our stories, not accepting the inaccurate narratives the world would distract us with or impose on us.



Freedom lies in recapturing our true stories, not accepting those the world imposes on us. Illustration: Wingfinger.

Setting our hearts to loving God, not rival idols who would ensnare our hearts through the practices they shape. Recovering and voicing our stories in light of God's great redemption story is how we reclaim our power and agency.

The only way forward is together. As God gives each of us – different people, communities and organisations – a piece of the jigsaw puzzle, we bring them together for the larger picture to emerge. The stories of millions of prophets all over the world aligned in God's redemption story will repair broken dignity and connections, and enrich our understanding of flourishing. Our stories will drive a restorative revolution.

Communities and societies transformed

In a restorative economy, each of us has sufficient economic agency and power to meet our basic needs – but not at the expense of other people or wider creation. So none of us has too much or too little. And the natural world is protected, not plundered.

This scale of change needs a restorative revolution. We believe this will be marked by growing and connecting:



abundant churches,⁹ which embody Jesus locally, recognising there is enough for everyone and resisting greed and individualism by living lives of generosity, simplicity and justice together



abundant businesses, which can be part of the solution when their purpose goes beyond solely profit, disrupting the current broken system and modelling restorative alternatives



a globally connected and abundant movement to drive the rebalance of power, transform businesses and governments, and to hold each other and powerful decision-makers to account. The church can be the beating heart of such a movement

How do we get there?

The church embodies Jesus in the world. God calls us to align with his heart for justice in the face of inequality and destruction. We do this – with the Holy Spirit's leading – by being salt in society, acting locally to obey Jesus' commandment to love others as we love ourselves. And being light, a city on the hill and a powerful witness, caring for the whole of creation in a world wracked with division, extraction and self-interest.

This requires us to engage in the messy business of democratic politics, following Jesus' example as an agent for change, revealing injustice and challenging excessive power. The church is powerful when it speaks with a shared voice.

Abundant churches

Our call is for hundreds of thousands of churches that centre on the intrinsic human dignity and interconnectedness of each of us. These are communities that are marked by: relationship, not isolation; co-creation, not exploitation; simplicity, not overconsumption; flourishing, not destruction; and peace, not division. This is an invitation to align in God's story of restored relationships, embracing the model of community in Acts 2:42–47.

We know we can't wait for our hearts to change, or fix them on our own. Instead, by practising spiritual disciplines, we position ourselves to be transformed by God's grace through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is outworked in community: one of us demonstrates radical generosity in love, another reciprocates. Those of us with disproportionate power, resources, material goods and wealth will need to have less of those things. This may be hard – but it is as necessary for our souls as it is for our world.

A growing and connected movement

The level of change we need requires a movement. A movement that follows in the footsteps of the indigenous land rights movement in Latin America, the anti-slavery, anti-colonial and anti-apartheid campaigners, and the US civil rights movement.

Abundant communities and businesses can change our societies, governments and markets when they're connected in an abundant mass movement. As a movement connects and grows, we understand that we don't need to be thwarted by governments that fail to act or exclusive power that fails to stand aside. A strong movement creates bonds of cooperation and collaboration with others in civil society, especially those on the margins in lower-income countries and communities, women, youth, people with disabilities, indigenous peoples and communities of colour.

This is how we can be part of God's heart for justice and call to see a restorative economy made real on earth.

What does a restorative economy look like?

A restorative economy is one where each of us has the economic agency and power to meet our basic needs while protecting the whole of creation. No single person, community or organisation can deliver that, but hundreds of thousands of churches in a movement can influence governments, businesses and multilateral organisations for a fairer future.

Three key strategic shifts are needed:¹⁰

1. From exclusion and elite power to inclusion and agency for all.

We need to rebalance power between citizens, communities, governments and business through accountability, equity, transparency and inclusion. This means: including ordinary citizens and civil society in decision-making; protecting the rights of environmental and human rights defenders; strengthening laws to prevent excessive corporate power and protect the natural world.

2. From hoarded wealth and extreme poverty to dignified, purposeful livelihoods and lives.

We need an economy that works for us all. This means: investing in sustainable jobs and livelihoods; making trade work for everyone within environmental limits; redistributing wealth and rebalancing our tax system; tackling unsustainable debt.

3. From extraction and degradation to flourishing for the whole of creation.

We need to avert the worst of the climate catastrophe and restore the wholeness of people and the natural world. This means: delivering climate justice through ending fossil fuels, a fair clean energy transition and support for those on the frontlines of this crisis; a global treaty to end plastic pollution; reforming land use and restoring biodiversity.



Your invitation

This is your invitation to re-covenant with God, yourself, others and creation as part of the restorative revolution.

That means:

- **Going deeper:** How do you respond in your own heart and in your community? Explore the [*Restorative revolution Bible studies*](#) to reflect personally and with your group.
- **Being salt:** How can your church act locally to infuse society with virtues of selflessness, grace, generosity and simplicity – obeying Jesus' commandment to love others as we love ourselves?
- **Being light:** How can your church embody with integrity the change we want to see? This means living out good news – for example, being responsible consumers, reducing plastic use and carbon emissions, and caring well for biodiversity on church land. And it means calling for the large-scale change we need – see learn.tearfund.org/restorative-revolution for 15 policy ideas.

☑ Above: Members of the Zizu community in Rwanda harvest bananas from the plantation set up through their church-based training group.
Photo: Marcus Perkins/Tearfund

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Endnotes

- 1 Evans and Gower (2015) *The Restorative Economy: Completing our unfinished millennium jubilee*, Tearfund. learn.tearfund.org/en/resources/policy-reports/the-restorative-economy
- 2 The world is headed for a devastating increase of 2.5°C above pre-industrial levels, based on current government national climate plans. UNFCCC (2022) *2022 NDC Synthesis Report*. unfccc.int/ndc-synthesis-report-2022
- 3 One in four of us lives in a conflict-affected country. United Nations (2022) *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022*. 2022 was the deadliest year in nearly three decades. Davies et al (2023). 'Organised violence 1989–2022, and the return of conflict between states', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol 60 (4) pp 691–708.
- 4 At the end of the second world war, there were fewer than five border walls; there are now more than 70, most of them erected in the last two decades. www.migrationpolicy.org/article/rapid-proliferation-number-border-walls
- 5 theconversation.com/permacrisis-what-it-means-and-why-its-word-of-the-year-for-2022-194306
- 6 Since 2020, the richest one per cent have accumulated almost two-thirds of all new wealth. www.oxfam.org/en/research/survival-richest
- 7 Peace, wholeness and the ability for all to thrive.
- 8 A story told from Genesis 2 to Revelation 22.
- 9 Thacker (2022) *Abundant community theology: Working towards environmental and economic sustainability (EES)*, Tearfund. learn.tearfund.org/abundant-community
- 10 These transformational shifts – and examples of policy changes within them – have been identified from wide, international consultation as well as drawing on research and learning from the past decade.

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