



Changing our ways?

Behaviour change and the climate crisis

Background

The key objectives of this report are:

- I. Using existing literature, to clarify parameters of “sustainable behaviour” in relation to climate change** and the contribution behaviour change could potentially make towards mitigation. Reference is made to possible targets as well as timeframes for transition that emerge from existing research. We use a variety of methodologies to seek to explore the parameters of sustainable behaviour change.
- II. To apply a cross-disciplinary approach** by drawing on insights from the social sciences, the natural sciences, technology and engineering and the humanities, to identify psychological/cultural/infrastructural and especially systemic factors that perpetuate unsustainable behaviour patterns and levels, and constraints to behaviour change. The composition of the Commission means that a range of relevant disciplines are represented from psychology to natural sciences, politics and international relations, science and technology studies, economics, geography, development and sociology.
- III. To evaluate the state of knowledge about critical leverage points and tipping points for social transformations towards sustainable behaviour.** We review existing research on these issues and draw on interviews with commission members to solicit historical and contemporary examples of sustainable behaviour change and the factors and conditions that enabled it to occur.
- IV. To work with practitioners to identify high-impact scalable interventions for truly sustainable behaviour.** We worked with colleagues at Forum for the Future, and a network of sustainable behaviour researchers and practitioners in the Boundless Roots Community, which is committed to promoting sustainable behaviour commensurate with the goals of the Paris Agreement, to help bring together insights from both theory and practice. This helps to ensure that the report will be used as a dynamic platform for developing concrete, evidence-based proposals for new, scalable interventions.

Research Questions

The research questions which guided the work of the Commission included the following:

- A. What does “sustainable behaviour” mean in terms of the transition needed in our way of life?
- B. What contribution could a shift to sustainable behaviour make to global climate change mitigation?
- C. What are the key (systemic) obstacles to sustainable behaviour that need to be addressed?
- D. What do different bodies of social science research suggest about critical leverage points and tipping points for social transformation towards sustainable behaviour?

- E. What are the most promising, high-impact and scalable interventions for rapid changes towards sustainable human development? Who can implement them? This includes interventions to promote transformational policy making and/or business models, as well as working with civil society. What is currently blocking these interventions? What is the relationship between rapid and deep changes in sustainable behaviour?
- F. Where are the differences or tensions between what the academic literature says and what the practitioner experience is? What does this tell us about the current field of sustainable behaviour?
- G. What shifts in organizational culture and mindset, and what new capacities or skills and implementation approaches, might be needed to support action that drives systemic behaviour change? How can these be achieved?
- H. How can KR Foundation and the philanthropic community work with civil society to support implementation of these shifts? What is needed, in addition to funding?
- I. What are the live questions that require further exploration (or that future proposals may seek to respond to)?

The Process

Members of the Commission were selected based on a mix of their (i) disciplinary expertise (ii) practitioner experience (iii) sectoral expertise (iv) regional expertise and representation and (v) the need for gender balance. Online interviews of around an hour and a half in most cases were conducted with each Commission member. Questions were tailored to the individual Commission member's expertise and experience, but broadly spoke to the overarching questions the Commission was set up to address (listed above). Interviews were recorded with the consent of Commission members and permission sought for the direct quotation in the report of anything said in the interviews. All Commission members then provided feedback on the first draft of this report. In recognition of the time commitment involved, participants were offered a small honorarium.

Though there was some discussion about the merits of trying to physically convene the Commission to allow for a fuller exchange of views and deliberation on the questions the Commission seeks to address, we decided to try and minimise the carbon footprint and economic cost of our work

by doing everything online to avoid unnecessary travel. This decision was made before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, which would have made such an arrangement inevitable in any case, in the spirit of modelling alternative practice. It had the added advantage of permitting us to gain in-depth insights from each member and avoiding the dynamics that sometimes prevail in workshop settings where certain voices tend to predominate.

Commission members were asked to:

- **Identify key research and literatures** in their areas of expertise that they think should be included in the report regarding key levers and potential tipping points for more transformational action.
- **Propose case studies and examples** of where behaviours have been successfully changed and what enabled this to happen.
- **Propose key tools, approaches, and interventions** for addressing sustainable behaviour change more effectively, including recommendations for where funders can make the most difference.
- **Identify key gaps in knowledge and practice** where further work is needed.