



Shifting the paradigm

Plastic pollution in oceans is an urgent and visible problem, but merely cleaning up won't solve it. So long as plastic keeps flowing into the oceans, removing it is important, and yet also an example of fighting the symptoms of a deeper issue. To truly address it, we must examine the root causes, the laws, structures, and norms that lead to plastic creation and disposal, and work towards structural change. Typically, that level of change is prevented by the investment in the status quo of decision-makers, or those who control the capital. To address this, some social innovators focus on the power distribution and dynamics and seek to transform those. At the deepest level, truly 'solving' this challenge requires a paradigm shift: away from a linear and extractive economy to a circular and regenerative one.

This is what social innovators focusing on systems change envision. They seek to alter the conditions that generate, and maintain the social or environmental challenges they are tackling. However, systems change work remains poorly understood and insufficiently supported. That's one of the reasons why I co-founded *collaboratio helvetica*, an initiative aimed at catalysing systems change towards the SDGs in Switzerland and beyond by leveraging the power of cross-sector collaboration and supporting so-called Catalysts to realise their systems change initiatives across SDGs and sectors.

Our partners and Catalysts from industry and start-ups are seeking to leverage the unique position and resources of their organisations to bring about change in three key ways.

The first, and the most obvious, is that businesses can create change through the services and products that they offer. Sometimes, these are so innovative that they disrupt a whole system (such as personal computers), or catalyse a wave of change, like mobile banking advancing financial inclusion in Kenya.

Secondly, businesses can lead by example in their

industry. They can transform their entire operations, supply chains, and internal culture to be representative of the



kind of business that will lead the way into a better future. One *collaboratio helvetica* Catalyst, Aurelia Figueroa, is Global Director of Sustainability at Breitling, a Swiss luxury watch company. Under her leadership, Breitling is making strides to become a pioneer of sustainability in the industry and transform it.

Thirdly, businesses can initiate or participate in collective systems change initiatives, which convene stakeholders in a collaborative process to address a specific challenge. Another one of our Catalysts, Silvano Lieger, Co-Director of Sentience and Public Affairs Manager at Planted, is currently convening stakeholders in Switzerland for a Protein Lab, co-creating the conditions for a transition to sustainable protein, including academia, start-ups, investors, retailers and social innovators.

Business has a tremendous potential to create positive change. But it's up to us, as entrepreneurs, leaders, and consumers, to harness that potential and use it for good. No matter our sphere of influence, guided by the principles of systems thinking, we can co-create the paradigm shifts our societies need.

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