

Deep Adaptation and climate change:

An intro into the work of Jem Bendell

Over the last few months, several authoritative voices have started telling us that the outlook on climate change is a lot worse than most published forecasts suggest, and that we urgently need to understand the implications. The most useful of these voices in my view is Professor Jem Bendell. Whilst he strongly supports all efforts to reduce climate change, he cites extensive recent scientific evidence that it may well be too late: numerous adverse trends are already growing exponentially.

Jem uses the term Deep Adaptation as a focus for looking hard at the likely adversities of the coming years: I agree with this view that we need to find responses which go well beyond resilience in the way it is mostly understood. He highlights four aspects to Deep Adaptation:

- **Resilience:** recognising what we most want to keep, and the skills to do so, including how to handle deep emotions such as fear and grief.
- **Relinquishment:** This “involves people and communities letting go of certain assets behaviours and beliefs where retaining them could make matters worse. Examples include withdrawing from coastlines... or giving up expectations for certain types of consumption”.
- **Restoration:** This “involves people and communities rediscovering attitudes and approaches to life and organisation that our hydrocarbon-fuelled civilisation eroded.”
- **Reconciliation:** “With what and whom shall we make peace as we awaken to our mutual mortality?” This recognises that the pressures ahead may intensify polarities, extremism, scapegoating, and we need to get beyond them.

The quotes above are from a 30-page long paper by Jem Bendell, reviewing the climate change outlook and an outline of Deep Adaptation (pages 18 onwards). I highly recommend reading it: [PDF download link to the paper](#)

A distinctive part of Jem’s outlook is his belief that societal collapse is likely in developed countries like the UK within the next ten years. The most probable trigger for this is global food shortages. He shares the view of many experts that a Multi Bread Basket Failure is possible anytime from now: this means major crop failures in the same year for the few countries and staple foods that most of the world population depend on.

Jem’s expectation of societal collapse puts him at the pessimistic end of the climate experts I’m aware of. At the recent Findhorn climate change conference ([see my blog here](#)), I asked some other experts for their view, such as Jonathan Porritt and Charles Eisenstein: they don’t think societal collapse is likely. My view is that there will be turmoil in many countries, and huge stress on western Europe from refugees, as well as food and water shortages, I’d hope that the UK can organise food rationing and maintain societal stability: but this will need a lot of preparation.

When Jem is asked what can be done now, he advises getting active in strengthening your local community, for example, by joining Transition Network and Extinction Rebellion. Growing more food is an obvious step, but he highlights the need for more water storage as droughts become more likely.

Jem also refers to two ways we need to prepare for potential collapse, and find new skills and mindsets:

- **Collapse-readiness** includes the mental and material measures that will help reduce disruption to human life – enabling an equitable supply of the basics like food, water, energy, payment systems and health.
- **Collapse-transcendence** refers to the psychological, spiritual and cultural shifts that may enable more people to experience greater equanimity toward future disruptions and the likelihood that our situation is beyond our control.

One of the many things I value in Jem's approach is that he acknowledges the deep emotional and spiritual impacts of facing a bleak outlook, and points to ways to process these impacts, including faith, and "a vision of people sharing compassion, love and play." He also recognises that many who have worked hard for sustainability over many years may have to face a crisis over self-worth and identity. And he sees upsides and potential in what is likely to be a period of major, painful change.

If you go to <https://jembendell.com>, you'll find Jem's latest blogs, as well as a link to the [Deep Adaptation Forums](#) on a range of topics, resources for emotional support, and a signup for bulletins and a quarterly update. To give you a flavour, here are a couple of recent blogs, as of April 2019:

- *Fourteen recommendations on living beyond collapse-denial*: including self-care, spiritual resourcing, and positive visioning.
- *Notes on Hunger and Collapse*: a valuable overview of the limited info currently available on food impacts of climate change, plus references.
- *The Love in Deep Adaptation*: a really well-considered piece about the huge focus in Western culture on individual needs and control, and how deep adaptation and rising uncontrollability offers the potential for a return to compassion, curiosity, respect, and love.

You can see Jem's responses to some of the frequent questions about the implications of Deep Adaptation at his blog here:

- [Comments on initial responses to the Deep Adaptation paper - August 2018](#)

Jem believes that "we will see social collapse happening in the West in less than 10 years. That's not a prediction and I hope that's wrong. He goes on (in the comments linked above) to give indicative ideas on how Government, local communities and individuals should start to prepare for this outlook.

For a short, 14-minute video of Jem giving the essence of Deep Adaptation, [click here](#); for a fuller, 44-minute version [click here](#).

If you want to go deeper into deep adaptation, and get actively involved, use www.deepadaptation.info, and you'll find a set of forums you can join, including Food & Agriculture, Community Action, and seven more.

Jem is also a policy advisor to Extinction Rebellion, and was a keynote speaker in London in April 2019. Like him, I support their aims, I am concerned that people believe ER is enough, without recognising the urgent need for Deep Adaptation too.

You can see more at Jem's new website: www.deepadaptation.info, and can contribute to the growing exploration of DA by joining the [Deep Adaptation Forums](#) he has set up. You can also join the discussion on Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/deepadaptation

For me, all of the above adds value and urgency to the pilot programmes on community resilience and climate change now underway with the Future Conversations project I am directing: [see more here](#). My work on resilience since 2012 has shown me the need for a bigger response, and Deep Adaptation could be just that.