



## Power Circle Resources

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### Background

The Ubuntu Climate Initiative facilitates the integration of ancestral earth-affirming beliefs, values, and practices into governance, policies, investments, and collective organizing. The loss, destruction, and sidelining of traditional belief systems, values, and practices of Black, Brown, Indigenous, and rural communities, is at the root of today's climate crisis. The Ubuntu Policy Circle is building a movement and policy agenda centered on the cultural reparation of eco-centered, communal, land-based, and harmonious lifeways.



## Join Our Campaign to Protect and Invest in Historic Black Freedom Settlements

In honor of Juneteenth 2024, we have partnered with The Chisholm Legacy Project to protect and invest in Freedmen’s Settlement Communities across the U.S. These communities, founded by individuals freed from the shackles of slavery, stand as a beacon of courage, bravery, and faith in a better future. Yet too many have languished without the necessary resources for survival.

We are calling on the Biden-Harris Administration to recognize the historical significance of these communities by providing preservation protections and ensuring adequate funding streams to equip communities with basic amenities such as running water, electricity, and sanitation services.

Please [sign and share our petition](#) endorsing our call for [a federal resolution](#) to protect and fund Freedmen’s Settlement Communities.

## Ubuntu Policy Principles

Many principles inform our policy platform and development work. Below we summarize some of the main principles that inform our work. For more information, contact [ubuntuclimatecircle@gmail.com](mailto:ubuntuclimatecircle@gmail.com).

- **Bioregionalism:** a bioregion is a geographical area characterized by distinctive ecological features, such as climate, topography, vegetation, and wildlife. Governing and stewarding land and resources at a bioregional level connects and roots us to our surroundings and facilitates greater sustainability and resilience when compared to artificial political boundaries.
- **Co-governance / Co-cities:** *We support efforts to transition governance to communities themselves. The Co-City framework, developed by Sheila R. Foster and Christian Iaione, represents a framework within which communities are empowered to play key roles in “producing, delivering, and managing urban assets or local resources.” Open Access digital edition available [here](#).*
- **Consumption-based emissions:** climate accounting that takes into account the full scope of emissions of an individual or geographic area’s consumption. Climate emissions in the U.S. have not included scope 3 emissions, which are the bulk of



emissions from the production of resources consumed outside one's locality. While building and transportation emissions rise to the fore when only considering production emissions, food and building infrastructure, among other areas, rise in precedence when considering the full scope of consumption-based emissions.

- **Commons:** A general concept and paradigm describing durable, dynamic sets of self-organizing social relationships for stewarding and sustaining all kinds of resources—cultural, natural, digital, and beyond. Human beings have organized their existence on earth via commons' ontologies for thousands of years.

Commons are a unique sector of the economy—with minimal to no reliance on the market and the State. They are legal, political, and economic semi or fully autonomous spaces grounded in community.

The extractive economy has steadily enclosed the commons for private gain while dispossessing and disconnecting people from their communities and relationships to the natural world.

The Ubuntu Initiative embraces the commons as a paradigm that supports the embodiment of communal practices and lifeways. While the classic commons are small-scale and focused on natural resources. New forms and practices are emerging at all levels— from urban commons to trans-national commons.

- **Eco-cultural restoration:** the mutually reinforcing restoration of land and culture which entails repairing ecosystem services in ways that contribute to cultural revitalization and renewing culture that promotes restoration of ecological integrity. As Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer, a distinguished biology professor and enrolled member of the Potawatomi Nation, notes, “in many cases it is not only the land that has been broken, it’s our relationship to land that has been broken. So our work in restoration needs to heal [that] relationship, as well as the land.”
- **Just transition:** the Ubuntu playbook is grounded in the Just Transition Framework put forward by the Climate Justice Alliance and Movement Generation. Our policies are focused on building “the new,” a living, regenerative economy based on caring and sacredness. We also focus on shifting the rules— from local to global levels— to make that possible. See the full just transition framework [here](#).
- **Resourceful economy:** resourceful economies are those that value materials— and thus seek to minimize the embodied emissions and embodied harms found in the goods and



resources we use. This leads to managing material flows in ways that lead to increased investment in repair, material re-use, sharing, and deconstruction.

- **Solidarity economy:** a democratic, post-capitalist economic system, based on values of solidarity and decentralized equitable ownership of resources. The solidarity economy encompasses producer and consumer-owned cooperatives, worker-owned cooperatives, and community-based enterprises and its core principles include solidarity, participatory democracy, justice, sustainability, and pluralism.

## Ubuntu Policy Spheres

*We aim to catalyze communal well-being economies rooted in the Land and supported by collective energy, water, food, housing, and material goods stewardship.*

*We seek to grow mutually supportive commons-based efforts among five spheres of activity:*

- **Social Commons:** Align the drivers of our economy with collective well-being
- **Land Commons:** Cultivate healthy food systems and eco-cultural land restoration
- **Energy Commons:** Harmonize with natural energy flows to design resilient energy systems and built environments.
- **Water Commons:** Collectively protect and steward our watersheds
- **Material Goods Commons:** Shape resourceful, solidarity economies and supply chains

Interested in learning more? Contact us at [ubuntuclimatecircle@gmail.com](mailto:ubuntuclimatecircle@gmail.com)

- **Social Commons:** Align the drivers of our economy with collective well-being



Our well-being is supported by health, connection, and empowerment. It is supported by understanding and healing our Ancestral roots, as well as having ample time to care for ourselves, families, and communities, in addition to our labor duties. Orienting our economy, investments, and governance toward well-being and collective thriving can break the cycle of managing ever-growing harms from an extractive, profit-oriented economy.

#### **Policy Levers Include:**

- Health and well-being governing frameworks
- Bottom-up well-being economy platforms
- Budgeting for well-being
- De-emphasizing GDP
- Passing policies to free our time to nurture collective well-being: 4-day work weeks

#### **Examples:**

- [Seven Vital Conditions for Health and Well-being](#)
- [Āina Aloha Economic Futures](#)

### ➤ **Land Commons:** Cultivate healthy food systems and eco-cultural land restoration

Restoring our relationship to the land and bringing forward traditional land stewardship practices is critical for human and planetary health. We can begin by returning stolen lands to Indigenous and Black communities, and we continue by revitalizing vacant lands, stewarding public easements and land grants, and creating new governing entities to facilitate these transfers, such as community land trusts.

#### **Policy Levers:**

- Land-use and zoning policies
- Land grant university federal policies and funding streams
- Expansion of community-governed land banks and community land trusts
- Celebrate and establish harvest, solstice, and other nature-based festival days
- Invest in eco-cultural restoration, such as Indigenous fire management practices
- Invest in regenerative agriculture




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### Examples:

- Chicago's [Neighborspace](#), a non-profit land trust, created by three governmental entities in CHicago that oversees 129 land-based projects led by communities.
- [Dishgamu Humboldt community land trust](#), structured as a unit of the Wiyot Tribe.

➤ **Energy Commons:** Harmonize with natural energy flows to design resilient energy systems and built environments.

Reintegrating local wisdom and resources into our centralized and brittle energy system is essential for mitigating and adapting to the increased stresses of the climate crisis while reducing disproportionate air pollution harms that stem from fossil-fueled energy injustices. Energy planning and investment at local and regional scales can facilitate investing first in reducing excess energy uses, identifying resilience needs, and investing in optimal amounts of distributed energy technologies to minimize impacts on the land and our communities.

### Policy Levers:

- Embracing natural design materials and passive solar and heat technologies in the built environment
- Leveraging direct pay measures in the Inflation Reduction Act to create distributed renewables and storage investments at the local level
- Investing in energy planning at local substation levels
- Converting private utilities to public and cooperatively owned structures modeled on the commons
- Investing in microgrid, solar garden, and virtual power plant projects and revising state laws that prevent these investments

### Examples:

- [Blue Lake Rancheria microgrid](#)
- [Solar Commons Project](#)
- [Living Future Buildings](#)

➤ **Water Commons:** Collectively protect and steward our watersheds

Water is Life, as Indigenous communities across the U.S. remind us. Reconnecting and aligning our governance and investment mechanisms with the watersheds from which water originates



can support cleaner drinking water, greater ability to weather drought and flooding, and more abundant water life. Aligning governance at the watershed scale can support similar alignments with other bio-based resources, such as foodsheds. By deepening our relationship with our local watersheds, we can also shape our foodsheds to be in balance with the water available.

#### Policy levers:

- Invest in public water systems
- Reform public governance of water to align with the commons
- Create bioregional, watershed governance mechanisms
- Support distributed water infrastructure pilots, investment, and capacity-building

#### Examples:

- **Groundwork San Diego Chollas Creek**, a non-profit community-based organization was empowered by the City of San Diego to restore a watershed through citizen engagement. In partnership with Indigenous tribes and the UC San Diego School District, they have conducted master planning, raised millions of funds, and collectively restored the ecology and economic health of the local watershed.
- **The Agency for Water as a Commons in Naples, Italy** was established via national referendum. It not only created public governance of the water system, but incorporated citizen control over the operation of the company and created a living ecological and social purpose incorporated into the by-laws that supersede profit-making motives.

#### ➤ **Material Goods Commons:** Shape resourceful, solidarity economies and supply chains

We need to create regenerative economic models to meet our basic provisioning needs. Bottom-up approaches to provisioning can be enabled through land, community-organizing, capacity-building, and non-extractive finance. Numerous cooperative entities and ecosystems exist under the framework of the solidarity economy. More attention, investment, and policy is needed to enable beautifully frugal supply chains from soil to soil. We can focus policy on the entire lifecycle of our goods and resources to minimize embodied harms and emissions.

#### Policy levers:

- Mandatory scope 3 / consumption-based emissions reporting
- Right to repair laws
- Durability standards



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- Enabling cooperative economy laws and investments
  - Material end-of-life policies

#### Examples:

- [The Industrial Commons](#) in North Carolina
- [Portland's Building Deconstruction Policy](#)

## Ubuntu Power Circle Book Recommendations

Just Getting Started? Here are some book recommendations aligned with the Ubuntu Climate Initiative's perspective.

- [Co-Cities: Innovative Transitions toward Just and Self-Sustaining Communities](#) by Sheila R Foster and Christian Iaione
- [Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice](#) by Jessica Gordon Nembhard
- [Free, Fair, and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons](#) by David Bollier and Silke Helfrich
- [Jackson Rising Redux: Lessons on Building the Future in the Present](#) by Kali Akuno & Matt Meyer
- [Sacred Instructions](#) by Sherri Mitchell
- [The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for Planet in Crisis](#) by Amitav Ghosh
- [The Ecology of Law](#) by Fritjof Capra and Ugo Mattei