**Headline:** Our World Is in a Multifront Crisis—It’s Time to Cultivate a Local Peace Economy

**Teaser:** When the way things are isn’t working, we can build something better if we draw from our collective power and focus on care and interconnection.

By April M. Short

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**[Article Body:]**

We are alive in a unique time of challenges that arrive not one by one, but all at once, and on a global scale. Each enormous risk we (and not just “we” humans but “we” collective life-forms of planet Earth) currently face is entwined with a set of several other enormous risks, creating a monstrous cluster that can seem impossible even to trace, much less untangle. In other words, we are on the verge of “polycrisis,” as the World Economic Forum’s [Global Risks Report 2023](https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-risks-report-2023/digest) puts it.

The report assessed a set of serious risks to humans now, as well as risks projected 10 years into the future, finding the most urgent current risk to be the cost-of-living crisis, and the most urgent in 10 years to be the climate crisis (and its myriad implications—from superstorms and forced migrations, to environmental degradation, and plummeting biodiversity). Together, the report predicts, the many risks converging on us now promise to “shape a unique, uncertain and turbulent decade to come.”

Without a culture rooted in care and support, existing in these times can mean an endless process of dodging feeling overwhelmed and panicked. Anxiety and depression are on the rise [globally](https://www.forbes.com/sites/cindygordon/2023/02/12/massive-health-wake-up-call-depression-and-anxiety-rates-have-increased-by-25-in-the-past-year/?sh=4c55108b1760)—which is an understandable response to the very real horrors that materialize each time we scroll through social media, open our inboxes, or dare to read the news. But panic tends to beget panic. The changing state of the world, with all of its risks, makes this a vital time for us each to remember our agency as part of a powerful cooperative of living beings. Now is the time to root into what actually matters, to reclaim ways of life that are interconnected with the planet and community, and to protect what is actually valuable about living.

**A Polycrisis of the War Economy**

Jodie Evans, co-founder of the feminist anti-war organization [CODEPINK: Women for Peace](https://www.codepink.org/), tells me that the polycrisis we collectively face is a result of the war economy—the “extractive, destructive, oppressive economy that is killing you, your community, and the planet.”

“Yes, we all want to be able to put our hand on a lever of change and address the atrocities we are watching,” she says. “Unfortunately, fewer and fewer of us have our hands on those levers. Power is becoming monopolized not by the people but by the rich.”

She notes that many of the places we think hold the power to pull these levers, such as Congress or the White House, are not accurate. It’s the billionaires—who are also the war economy.

“And those levers [the billionaires] are pulling globally are destroying the planet, taking down ecosystems, disrupting biodiversity,” she says.

The war economy, she says, is also “at the root” of the shrinking of social justice and “responsible for the decay of our commons—our capacity to be in relationship with each other.” And, of course, it’s responsible for war itself, which exponentially contributes to climate and social crises that cause enormous suffering.

“The bombs may be dropping in Ukraine and in Yemen, but the patterns are playing themselves out in our streets,” Evans says.

**Time to Cultivate Local Peace Economy**

How do we move away from the war economy? Cultivate what is known as the “local peace economy.”

Evans says the local peace economy is “the giving, thriving, sharing economy without which none of us would be alive.”

“Without the love and care of your parents, the love and care of your friends, without the nourishment of what it is to be in community, life is pretty dark,” she points out.

Participating in the local peace economy means that, rather than throw up our hands and do nothing out of exasperation over the long list of levers we can’t control, we start living into the better world we want to see. When we engage locally, even in small ways that might at first seem insignificant, there is a cumulative effect.

“We say ‘local’ peace economy because at CODEPINK we work globally, but what we can each affect is what is closest to us,” Evans says. “When you start local, the big is in the small. Some of the global patterns reveal themselves very quickly” by looking locally. She also recommends getting “your news from your community because it comes more readily—as a question, a concern, something you can engage with—rather than staggering, horrible facts that excite the brain and crush the heart.”

Evans has supported people who cultivate local peace economies since having an epiphany during Barack Obama’s presidency (a time when she says the peace movement was “shriveled to near-nothing,” as U.S. drone strikes raged on). “We are not going to end war until we end the war economy,” she realized.

Evans likens the polycrisis we currently face to the enormous floods featured in legends from many ancient civilizations around the world. She says that facing the polycrisis feels like watching an impending tsunami, which can create an overwhelming feeling of helplessness against the wave.

“We need an ark to get through the flood,” she tells me, and she sees the peace economy as that ark—a concept she detailed in a [video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vyxM3DguuU) shared on YouTube in November 2022.

She tells me there is no Armageddon. “There’s just the question of what we can do in the face of these patterns that are out there… And what we can do with ourselves is cultivate the peace economy.”

She says when we are feeling overwhelmed by bad news from around the world and are frustrated by our helplessness to change things on our own—when we experience “heartbreak” and “desperation” over the tsunami waves that have already hit elsewhere and those that we feel will inevitably break closer to home—rather than giving up and preparing to drown, we can instead use that moment to pivot into cultivating a more beautiful future, starting locally.

“We can look at what is happening in the world, and I call it the folly of fretting,” she says. “The fretting does nothing; what we need to move that fretting into is the creating. Yes, it’s overwhelming. Yes, it takes us into grief. Yes, it breaks our hearts daily. What I know from grieving, which I’ve had a lot of experience with, is that serving others is the best way to heal a heart and the best way to weave back the worn fabric of the commons.” And in that way, she says, we can better live together “in respect and with dignity for others and for ourselves.”

**Out of the Comfort Zone and Into Something New**

Evans says the process of moving from a war economy to a peace economy will not necessarily be comfortable.

“What we know is not working,” Evans says. “The things that capture us and lock us into these bad habits have failed. Our psyches and hearts know that.”

The culture we *know* is a culture of incessant productivity, greed, and violence that would gladly suck us dry of our visions for a better world, and swallow us down into the gaping void of a war economy whose priorities hinge on empty accumulation and consumerism to satiate endless war. Evans points out that this is actually where many of us feel comfortable—even safe—because it is what we are used to.

But if the current ways persist, given the risks we face, we will all actually die.

“Some examples [of the war economy’s influence] are that we’ve become transactional instead of relational, we think we live in scarcity instead of abundance, we relate as an ‘us versus them’ mentality instead of a ‘we’ mindset,” Evans says. “We have to exist as a ‘we’ on this planet. If we don’t move in that direction, we’ll destroy ourselves. And we’re pretty close to that with the war in Ukraine and the coming U.S. war in China, and a cavalier attitude toward playing with nuclear weapons.”

The reality is we’ve collectively pulled the tower card from the tarot deck; the structures that have upheld the extractive, oppressive, and violent ways of being in the world are crumbling all around us. We have the collective power to reshape everything. It comes down to a simple choice: Succumb to feeling overwhelmed—an option that promises more death and destruction—or resist it by creating the conditions of care we want and need to survive.

Evans says a local peace economy already exists, everywhere. To begin to find it, she recommends figuring out “where the war economy has had the most dire effects in your community, and go there.”

“Be part of the community that is trying to meet the needs that the state should be meeting but isn’t, and engage with it,” she says. She says that getting involved and offering “the love and care” that are needed but are not available will help to sow the seeds for the world we wish we lived in. And, she says, learn how to listen. “One of the things the war economy takes away from us is our capacity to really listen. When you listen, you can see the patterns of oppression, obstruction, and distraction right in front of your face… There are people in your community who are cultivating care. There always are. There is always a peace economy.”

**Lessons From Local Peace Economies During the Pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic proved that to move through challenging times, we must rely on our communities—rather than on top-down systems of aid—for essential care, support, and survival. When the economic realities of the COVID-19 crisis devastated livelihoods and interrupted food and other essential supply chains, it was localized networks of support and mutual aid across the U.S. and the world that got people through.

Free food fridges [popped up](https://socialistproject.ca/2020/10/community-fridges-mutual-aid-amid-pandemic/) en masse on city streets, neighbors organized grocery delivery [efforts](https://www.deseret.com/utah/2020/4/8/21213943/elderly-immunocompromised-free-grocery-medication-delivery-neighbors-helping-neighbors), support for local [CSAs](https://thecounter.org/csa-sales-struggling-before-coronavirus-covid-19/) and community-grown [food programs](https://www.laprogressive.com/economic-equality/well-fed-during-a-pandemic) increased, people [reallocated](https://www.counterpunch.org/2021/07/02/people-in-la-are-feeding-each-other-the-food-that-would-be-wasted/) food that would be wasted, localized food supply chains [expanded](https://www.alternet.org/2021/11/local-soclutions-global-challenges), people who still had jobs [shared](https://www.pressenza.com/2020/07/americans-with-jobs-are-sharing-their-stimulus-checks-with-people-out-of-work/) their government stimulus checks with those out of work, neighbors developed emergency action plans to check in on one another, and marginalized communities brought about breakthrough housing and property reallocation initiatives in many cities.

This was the local peace economy in action.

“COVID taught us a lot about what is really essential and valuable, and what nourishes life, us, and our communities,” Evans says. “Mutual aid organizations that had grown up around climate crises [like worsening wildfires] were very necessary and needed during… [the pandemic], and now we have communities across the country seeing the value of them.”

The better way of living that is our birthright begins right where we live, in our daily interactions. Despair thrives in narratives of separation, and it dissipates when we remember how interconnected we actually are, and empower ourselves from within our communities. At the crux of the impending “polycrisis,” the crumbling of toxic infrastructures and outmoded ideals, there is an opportunity to spark new ways of being in and living in this world. These are ways centered in localized systems of support, cooperation, and commons.