How to change a system inspired by the ideas of Donella Meadows

A CHECKLIST of systemic interventions, arranged from weak to strong, influenced by the work of Donella Meadows.

‘Higher’ interventions have the potential for stronger, broader and more durable improvements, increasing the resilience and sustainability of systems.

- Have you thought about the full range of interventions?
- What level are you working at now?
- Could you intervene at a higher level?

1. Communicate facts  Communicate a behaviour-changing fact (if you have one).
2. Build skills  Use modelling, experiential learning or training to pass on important skills.
3. Provide resources  Provide funding and expertise to increase people’s leverage or productivity.
4. Provide services  If it’s too demanding for people to do it themselves, do it for them.
5. Provide buffers  Provide unstructured time or funds to increase the “cognitive bandwidth” of individuals.
6. Build Infrastructure  Build, infrastructure, products and processes that lower the costs of acting.
7. Add feedback loops  Collect data on the consequences of actions and feed it back to the actors.
8. Include less powerful voices  Enable less powerful actors to influence decisions.
9. Create diverse partnerships  Convene a community of practice or partnership.
10. Accountability  Collect data on the decisions of dominant actors and make it public.
11. Level playing field  Equalise access to important information, income or resources.
12. Full cost pricing  Impose ‘externalities’ on the account books of actors.
13. Organising  Start an action group or alliance to lobby for change.
14. Change the rules  Work for laws to be passed or existing laws to be enforced.
15. Build/defend institutions  that embed fairness and enable the weak.
16. Innovation  Create novel alternatives to everything below.
17. Pivot the purpose  Align your organisation with human values.
18. Change the paradigm  Transform your thinking and language.