



PART I

The Blue Marble Perspective

Four Overarching Blue Marble Principles

- CHAPTER 1. Global Thinking Principle
- CHAPTER 2. Anthropocene as Context Principle
- CHAPTER 3. Transformative Engagement Principle
- CHAPTER 4. Integration Principle

Blue Marble refers to the iconic image of Earth from space without borders or boundaries, a whole-Earth perspective. We humans are using our planet's resources, and polluting and warming it, in ways that are unsustainable. Many people, organizations, and networks are working to ensure that the future is more sustainable and equitable. Blue Marble evaluators enter the fray by helping design such efforts, providing ongoing feedback for adaptation and enhanced impact, and examining the long-term effectiveness of such interventions and initiatives. Incorporating the Blue Marble perspective means looking beyond nation-state boundaries and across sector and issue silos to connect the global and the local, connect the human and ecological, and connect evaluative thinking and methods with those trying to bring about global systems transformation.

Blue Marble evaluation integrates design, implementation, and evaluation. Evaluators bring their knowledge and expertise to bear in the design of resilient, sustainability-oriented interventions and initiatives. When an intervention and, correspondingly, an evaluation fail to incorporate an ecological sustainability perspective, both are engaging from a closed-system mindset, disconnected from larger patterns and realities—like turning a crank that isn't connected to anything. It is essential for

planners, implementers, and evaluators at the beginning of their work together to routinely analyze the sustainability and equity issues presented by the formulation of the intervention and analyze the implications for evaluation. Blue Marble evaluation premises and principles provide a framework for that initial review, ongoing development and adaptation, and long-term evaluation of systems transformation contributions and impacts.

Blue Marble evaluation looks backward (what has been) to inform the future (what might be) based on the present trajectory (what is happening now). Evaluators examine what has worked and not worked in the past, not just to capture history, but to inform the future. Forecasts for the future of humanity run the gamut from doom and gloom to utopia. Evaluation as a transdisciplinary, global profession has much to offer in navigating the risks and opportunities that arise as global change initiatives and interventions are designed and undertaken to ensure a more sustainable and equitable future.

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Global Thinking Principle

We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them.

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

CONTEXT: The Blue Marble

On December 7, 1972, the first photograph of the whole Earth from space was taken by the astronauts on *Apollo 17*. That photo became known as the **Blue Marble shot**. You can't see Earth as a globe unless you get at least 20,000 miles away from it. Seeing from



a *whole-Earth* perspective is what the designation “Blue Marble” connotes.

Taking a Blue Marble perspective means viewing the world **holistically**. It begins with watching for, making sense of, and interpreting the implications of things that are interconnected in the global system, thus thinking beyond nation-states, sector silos, and narrowly identified issues. Blue Marble thinkers see the interconnections between the global and the local, the macro and the micro, and the relationships between worldwide patterns and area-specific challenges. They become adept at zooming out for a big-picture perspective and zooming in to understand and incorporate contextual variations, problems, and solutions. Applying Blue Marble thinking to initiatives aimed at creating a more sustainable, equitable, and just world, at any level and in any arena of action, has implications for how such initiatives are designed, carried out, and evaluated. Thus, the first Blue Marble principle expresses the importance of thinking globally.

Global Thinking Principle Explicated

PREMISE: Global problems like climate change, worldwide pollution, and global disparities require global interventions and, correspondingly, globally oriented and world savvy evaluators.

Global Thinking Principle

Apply whole-Earth, big-picture thinking to all aspects of systems change.

IMPLICATIONS

- Whatever is done, or evaluated, at all levels and for all types of interventions and initiatives, consider its global context and implications both within and beyond nation-state boundaries.
- Think systemically. Conceptualize systems and evaluate systems changes, not just focusing on projects and programs.
- Connect the local to the global, and the global to the local.
- Think across silos by examining how issues, problems, and specific interventions may be interconnected.
- Unpack and bring fidelity to initiatives, organizations, and projects calling themselves “global.” Working on one issue in three countries is not global. What are the various ways in which the designation “global” has meaning?
- Select appropriate methods for the situation and nature of the targeted systems changes.
- Time being of the essence, be attentive to varying time horizons by integrating short-, medium-, and long-term sustainability considerations while acting with a sense of urgency, given climate change and related global trends.

This chapter provides an overview of the basis for the global thinking principle—its implications and applications. Subsequent chapters present and discuss the other Blue

Marble principles that, together, constitute the Blue Marble perspective.

Global Interconnectedness

The Blue Marble perspective flows from our global interconnectedness. Consider these news stories as examples of global interdependence:

- Slave labor in the Amazon has been linked to suppliers of Lowe’s and Walmart (U.S. retail stores). An investigation has revealed U.S.-based companies bought timber from Brazilian traders where loggers worked under slave labor conditions. (Campos, 2017).
- China’s ban on importing contaminated waste leaves Australia awash in rubbish (Smyth, 2018).
- Dramatic warming of the Gulf of Maine due to increased freshwater flow from the Arctic into the Labrador Current is dramatically changing the ecological and socioeconomic future of this once-abundant fishery (Poppick, 2018).
- Though the details vary from continent to continent, the global refugee crisis has roots in climate change, the differential effects of economic globalization, changing global power dynamics, and social media communications (Werz & Hoffman, 2016).
- Central banks in industrialized countries raised interest rates. Workers in Mexico and merchants in Malaysia suffered. Rising interest rates in the United States and Europe drove money out of many developing countries, straining governments and pinching consumers around the globe (“The Fed Acts,” 2017).

Now let’s zoom out to the future and the whole Earth. An international team of 23 multidisciplinary scientists reviewed more than 3,000 papers on various effects of climate change. They identified 467 ways in



Zoom in, zoom out by Simon Kneebone.

which expected changes in climate affect human physical and mental health, food security, water availability, infrastructure, and other facets of life on Earth. The effects include heat waves, wildfires, sea level rise, hurricanes, flooding, drought, and shortages of clean water. Loss of life, increasingly desperate living conditions, and forced migration are worst for the poorest people around the world. Mammoth economic burdens for climate mitigation will hit wealthier countries, demonstrably diminishing growth and prosperity (Mora et al., 2018).

We're all affected by more severe weather. But let's get even more personal. We all use

plastic. Everyone reading this uses plastic at some level in some way. In 2018, the Earth Day Network featured the effects of plastic pollution locally and globally. Their website (www.earthday.org/plastic-calculator) offers a personal evaluation tool to measure your level of plastic consumption. Why does this matter? Here's why.

Plastic pollution is permeating oceans and threatening marine wildlife. Microscopic plastic particles are absorbed by fish that humans eat. Land animals are trapped by plastic debris or eat it and become sick. The main source of marine plastic is improperly managed waste, especially from

badly managed landfills that overflow directly into waterways and oceans.

The negative impacts of improper or insufficient waste management are immense, and the growing scale of the problem is pushing this issue towards an environmental and humanitarian crisis. . . . It is estimated that of all the world's waste, 40 percent ends up in uncontrolled dump sites. Many of these dump sites are so poorly regulated that the waste overflows directly into the ocean. This phenomenon is the main source of the problem of plastic pollution in our oceans.

The growing scale of the problem of mismanaged waste means that by 2020 we will see a tenfold increase in the amount of plastic in the oceans and by 2050 marine plastic will outweigh the fish in the sea. Mismanaged waste also contributes to global warming. By 2025, dump sites and landfills will account for a staggering eight to 10 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. (Earth Day Network, 2018)

Plastic pollution is but one example of global interconnectedness. However manifest, global interdependence has implications for businesses, governments, nonprofits, philanthropic foundations, communities, and people in general. Globalization and the resulting global interconnectedness influence international development initiatives, including evaluation of those initiatives. Designing, carrying out, and evaluating change initiatives from a Blue Marble perspective requires a deepened capacity to understand global patterns and their implications.

The Blue Marble Worldview

The Blue Marble worldview constitutes a paradigm, so let's do a quick review of what paradigms do and why they matter. Paradigms tell us what is important to pay attention to, thereby guiding us in how to think and behave. Therein resides the power of

paradigms—they provide a belief system that facilitates action. The shadow side of paradigms is that the very reasons for our choices are hidden in the unquestioned assumptions of the paradigm. Paradigmatic behavior becomes thoughtless and routine. Operating within a paradigm provides the comfort of familiarity. Being conscious of one's paradigmatic premises supports evaluative thinking. Blue Marble evaluation, based on Blue Marble perceptions, thinking, and principles, constitutes a paradigm, a mindset, a way of making sense of things.

Paradigms are distinguished by both what they assert and what they contrast with. Humans' dominion over nature is a paradigm perspective. That humans and nature are fundamentally and deeply interconnected and interdependent is an alternative paradigm. Laissez-faire capitalism is a paradigm that self-interest, profit, and unfettered markets should be the mechanisms for distributing wealth, the basis of neoclassical economic theory that undergirded the development of modern global financial markets. Social democratic economics is an alternative paradigm that elected governments should regulate markets and redistribute wealth from those with much to those with little. Nationalism is a paradigm that makes national sovereignty and nation-state interests primary. Globalism is an alternative paradigm that places priority on the well-being of humanity as a whole. These paradigmatic contrasts draw stark comparisons. There is lots of room in the middle. But what constitutes the middle is defined by the contrasts. The Blue Marble paradigm sometimes constitutes a clear alternative to currently dominant mindsets and at other times harmonizes opposites to seek common ground. Either way, Blue Marble thinking is a mindset. It is a mindset defined by a set of principles. Let me explain the principles-focused nature of the Blue Marble perspective and then we can get into the substance of the worldview and its implications.

Why Principles?

Blue Marble evaluation is principles based because to deal with the complexities of global issues and problems we need principles to guide us, not a rule book to tie us down. Principles-focused thinking is for principles-driven people engaged in principles-based change. An effectiveness principle provides guidance about how to think or behave toward some desired result (either explicit or implicit) based on norms, values, beliefs, experience, and knowledge. A high-quality principle provides guidance about what to do, is useful for informing decisions and actions, provides inspiration as an expression of values, is relevant to diverse contexts and situations, and can be evaluated. Just as examining contrasting paradigms illuminates each, examining contrasting principles illuminates why adhering to one principle versus its alternative matters. I'll present those comparisons. Evaluating a principle involves examining its meaningfulness to those expected to follow it, whether it is being adhered to in practice and, if adhered to, whether it leads to desired results (Patton, 2018d).

Distinguishing Overarching from Operating Principles

Part I of this book presents and explains four overarching Blue Marble principles. Part II examines and elaborates the implications of the **overarching principles** with 12 operating principles. The distinction between overarching principles and operating principles is like the distinction between goals and objectives. Overarching principles provide big-picture, general guidance. **Operating principles** provide more specific guidance. For example, an overarching principle providing guidance for an initiative could be: *Build collaborations to increase impact*. Two operating principles that provide more detailed guidance would be

1. Ensure that all voices in the collaboration are heard.
2. Share leadership among collaboration members.

Principles provide guidance but do not specify structures or procedures for following that guidance because such details are context dependent.

The first overarching principle, introduced in this chapter, is the Global Thinking principle: *Apply whole-Earth, big-picture thinking to all aspects of systems change*.

Two operating principles that provide more specific guidance are the focus of Chapters 5 and 6, respectively:

1. Transboundary Engagement principle: *Act at a global scale*.
2. GLOCAL (global-local) principle: *Integrate interconnections across levels*.

While this book focuses on Blue Marble evaluation, the Blue Marble principles can guide situation analysis, design of interventions, and work to bring about systems changes as well as evaluation of those efforts. It's important to clarify right away that the Blue Marble perspective is both an approach to evaluation and a way of thinking about all aspects of systems change initiatives and interventions, at all levels at which they occur, from local to global.

Practicalities

Before continuing with the Blue Marble principles, let me address some practicalities that arise whenever I speak about this approach or conduct training. Here are quick answers to four common questions.

1. ***For what kinds of programs and interventions is the Blue Marble perspective appropriate?*** It's simplest to distinguish two levels of application. One is applying Blue Marble thinking to programs and initiatives that are not focused on global systems

change specifically but appreciate that global trends like climate change, environmental degradation, inequitable distribution of wealth, and unsustainable use of resources affect whatever is being done. Increasingly, there are calls for all nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and all programs at all levels to incorporate attention to and contribute toward global sustainability and equity. Blue Marble thinking and evaluation offers a doorway into greater global awareness and engagement for any program, community, organization, or initiative. For example, understanding and evaluating the collective response to a rapidly warming Gulf of Maine requires a systemic, cross-sector, cross-scale analytical framework embracing both indigenous and Western perspectives.

The second and more direct application of Blue Marble thinking and evaluation is with the thousands of initiatives that are oriented toward global systems change, like the Global Alliance for the Future of Food (GA), the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the Global Center for X, the Global Initiative on Y, or the Global whatever—you fill in the blank. We'll look at specific examples as we go along. Global efforts of any and all kinds are prime territory for Blue Marble evaluation.

2. *You talk about a Blue Marble perspective, Blue Marble thinking, Blue Marble principles, and Blue Marble evaluation. Is this primarily an evaluation approach or something else?* Let me begin my response with an observation from researchers who study how we make decisions.

We have a tendency to treat problems in isolation, rather than as part of a larger whole. Just as investors often mistakenly evaluate stocks individually, rather than as part of the portfolio, coaches and fans often evaluate sports decisions in terms of their immediate impact and give less consideration to how those decisions fit in the larger context of the game. (Walker, Risen, Gilovich, & Thaler, 2018, p. 4)

We tend to silo rather than integrate. We deal with things in parts and fail to see the whole. Indeed, the most common advice for dealing with complicated challenges is to break them down into small, manageable parts. That may get the small bits taken care of, but may miss how the parts interconnect as a whole. Complex systems are best understood by examining the quality of interactions among elements, not the quality of the elements in isolation. Working on isolated elements without understanding their relationship to other elements can interfere with the functioning of the whole. Dealing with problems piecemeal can, inadvertently, make the overall situation worse.

Design, implementation, and evaluation are typically treated as separate functions dealt with sequentially by different people with different roles who don't communicate with one another. At the heart of the Blue Marble perspective you'll find a pattern of breaking down silos, integrating separated functions, connecting people and places, and creating linkages across time. In that spirit, Blue Marble evaluation focuses on integrating design, engagement, implementation, and evaluation of programs and interventions of all kinds, especially initiatives working on making global systems more sustainable.

Blue Marble evaluation builds on what we've been learning from developmental evaluation of social innovations in which the evaluator is engaged on an ongoing basis as part of the innovation team supporting redesign, implementation adjustments, and responsive evaluation occurring together, mutually reinforcing, as the innovation unfolds. Likewise, with principles-focused evaluation, the evaluator is typically involved in helping to craft evaluable principles, support their application and adherence in practice, and provide feedback about the results of adherence, or lack thereof. Blue Marble evaluation has emerged from these innovative approaches to evaluation in which evaluation becomes part of the intervention because it is em-

bedded in and integral to the innovation and change efforts being developed. That degree of evaluation engagement is controversial, to be sure, and asks more of the evaluator, so I'll address those concerns along the way. For now, it's sufficient to understand the evolution of Blue Marble evaluation and its niche in the evaluation and global systems change landscapes.

3. Who is Blue Marble evaluation for? Is this something just for evaluators? This isn't a private party for evaluators only. The whole world is invited: development practitioners and specialists, social innovators, policymakers, program designers, leaders and directors in government, philanthropy, NGOs, the private sector, grassroots activists, researchers, think tank experts, sustainability scientists, equity advocates, sustainable development goal (SDG) implementers, commissioners of evaluations, and certainly funders and social impact investors. Have I left anyone out? If so, I apologize. Everyone is invited.

While evaluators are a prime audience for Blue Marble evaluation, evaluators can't effectively and usefully undertake Blue Marble evaluations unless others engage in Blue Marble thinking. Transformation for sustainability and equity connects all of us together. In putting forth Blue Marble evaluation, we are joining others in addressing the 2030 global systems change agenda adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 2015 and expressed in the overarching vision of *No One Left Behind*, operationalized in the 17 SDGs. Blue Marble evaluators join others in working toward that vision and, hopefully, increase its likelihood of being realized by supporting knowledge generation, learning, and adaptive actions along the way. To make such contributions, however, evaluation will have to be transformed to systematically and holistically evaluate transformation, the premise that undergirds Blue Marble evaluation and is the focus of Part III of this book.

4. Is any organization actually doing Blue

Marble evaluation? Many are, but not necessarily by that name. Thinking globally is not exclusive to Blue Marble evaluation, to be sure, but naming it helps make the perspective explicit. Social innovation is propelled by early adopters. In research, the first documented manifestation of a phenomenon is called an *index case* (Patton, 2015, p. 266). The world's first official Blue Marble evaluator was chosen to fulfill that responsibility by the GA, which adopted Blue Marble evaluation as well aligned with its mission and strategy. The 23 major philanthropic foundations that make up the GA adopted a three-pronged strategy informed by a global perspective:

- a. Forge new insights and strengthen evidence for global systems change.
- b. Convene key food-system actors, facilitate meaningful dialogue, and strengthen interconnections.
- c. Stimulate local and global action and interaction for transformational change in collaboration with other committed stakeholders to realize healthy, equitable, renewable, resilient, and culturally diverse food systems.

In support of this strategy, the GA created the world's first Blue Marble evaluation position and brought on board the world's first Blue Marble evaluator, Pablo Vidueira. The notion of Blue Marble evaluation conducted by Blue Marble evaluators is not some distant pipe dream. It is happening. The future is now. The index case (first ever) has emerged. You can meet Pablo in the sidebar accompanying this discussion.

The engagement of a Blue Marble evaluator with global team support helps embed global systems change thinking in the work of the GA. In every activity, the question of how that activity relates to global transformation is always asked, and the theory of transformation to which the GA is committed (see Chapter 13) stays front and center

Pablo Vidueira Reflects on Being the World's First Official Blue Marble Evaluator

Pablo Vidueira studied agronomy as an undergraduate at the University of Madrid. His master's focus was in international development in which he studied social development processes in rural areas of Spain as part of a European program called Erasmus Mundus involving universities in Copenhagen, Montpellier, Cork, Madrid, Wageningen, and Catania. Pablo's doctorate specialization in evaluation focused on systems methods for impact evaluation in the European Union. His work included working with small farmers in Puebla state in Mexico. In his engagement as Blue Marble evaluator, he is supported by a team of people who have adopted the Blue Marble perspective. Here, Pablo comments on how he has come to view Blue Marble evaluation.

Being the first-ever Blue Marble Evaluator and doing so with the Global Alliance for the Future of Food is an honor. I could tell you a million things about this, but for now I want to share two personal views that I hope may contribute to better understanding and framing Blue Marble evaluation.

In my PhD, I tried to understand how impact evaluation was being done in the European Commission (EC) programs, then considering the extent to which systems concepts and methods might overcome some of the limitations I found. My main concern was that, in order to assess the impacts of programs implemented all across the European Union (EU), a set of indicators was being quantified at each Member State level, and then those were being added up at the EU level. At the same time, discussions around how to evaluate the Sustainable Development Goals were following the same "monitoring-focused path." This narrow approach did not seem to me to take advantage of the wealth of evaluation approaches and resources that have been developed. I felt that the lenses being used to make sense of and evaluate these interventions were not allowing evaluators to contribute all we could. We were, as I wrote in one of my papers on the EC programs, enclosed in evaluation "as a legal requirement instead of as the opportunity to make policy development more transparent, to implement better programs and to use public money to make a difference to people's lives." I quickly came to see Blue Marble evaluation as a way to address these concerns and limitations. This is what appealed to me the most at my entry point to Blue Marble evaluation.

When first introduced to the idea of Blue Marble evaluation, I thought it probably meant developing fancy computer-based simulation models about global systems. It took me a while to understand that the point is not tools—and never was. The point is how we look at and make sense of global interventions, how we understand the role that evaluation should play, how we pose meaningful questions that help to critically assess potential improvements, how we understand the ways in which interventions are interrelated with each other and with broader contexts, how different stakeholders understand the same thing in many different ways, how boundaries matter, and how it all affects our profession and our contribution to improving the world we live in, from the smallest to the largest interventions and evaluations. It is all about the lenses we use, first to understand, then to evaluate. This was the biggest breakthrough of Blue Marble evaluation for me—it has changed how I look at interventions, evaluation, and our world, all together.

Note. Chapter 10 features the Blue Marble evaluation framework that Pablo Vidueira has developed for the Global Alliance for the Future of Food.

in strategy implementation and evaluation of the GA. That's what it means to have a Blue Marble perspective taken seriously and embedded in the ongoing work of an organization or initiative. The GA executive director explains:

We believe that transformational change requires that we craft new and better solutions at all scales through a systems-level approach and deep collaboration between philanthropy, researchers, grassroots movements, the private sector, farmers and food systems workers, Indigenous Peoples, government, and policymakers. Transformation means

realizing healthy, equitable, renewable, resilient, and culturally diverse food systems shared by people, communities, and their institutions. (Richardson, 2019)

Such an organizational commitment expresses a commitment to thinking and acting globally and constitutes fertile ground for Blue Marble evaluation. The call for global systems transformations is grounded in facing the realities of threats to humanity's future in what has come to be called the Epoch of the Anthropocene, the focus of the second overarching Blue Marble principle in the next chapter.

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