

Testing Life-Coherent Peace Under Tragic Choice

A COMPANION CASEBOOK FOR THE
LIFE-COHERENCE ARBITRATION PROTOCOL



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Companion to
*Life-Coherent Peace: An Autopoietic, Life-Value,
Anti-Violence Framework for Human and Planetary Flourishing*

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Abstract

This paper develops a methodological companion to *Life-Coherent Peace*, a theoretical framework that integrates John McMurtry’s life-value onto-axiology, Humberto Maturana’s biology of autopoiesis and love, and Johan Galtung’s theory of direct, structural, and cultural violence. The companion asks whether the Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol can guide judgment under tragic conditions in which two or more legitimate life-needs collide. The central case concerns a displaced population requiring immediate shelter, water, sanitation, food, safety, and medical continuity, while the only apparently available land is an ancient forest that sustains biodiversity, watershed integrity, carbon storage, and the cultural-spiritual continuity of an Indigenous community. This case is methodologically stronger than water privatization as a stress test because it does not present a simple opposition between life-value and money-sequence disvalue. In this case, both sides invoke life. Human survival, Indigenous self-determination, ecological continuity, cultural inheritance, species viability, and future generations are all at stake.

The paper argues that life-coherent arbitration should not be understood as a technocratic formula, moral trump card, or state-administered definition of flourishing. Rather, it is a disciplined, participatory, anti-reductionist, ecologically constrained, and recursively repairable method for handling competing life-needs under conditions of urgency, scarcity, asymmetrical power, and historical injury. The paper applies the eight steps of the Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol to the tragic-choice case: identifying affected living unities, mapping life-capacities, distinguishing needs from wants and means from substitutes, identifying thresholds of

irreversibility, seeking compossible options before sacrificial trade-offs, applying minimum sufficient force, requiring participatory languaging, and establishing monitoring, repair, and revision. It concludes that the protocol does not abolish tragedy or guarantee harmony. Its purpose is more modest and more necessary: to prevent premature sacrifice, hidden domination, money-sequence calculation, epistemic colonization, and the conversion of non-substitutable life-ground into priced preference.

Keywords: Life-Coherent Peace, tragic choice, life-value, autopoiesis, structural coupling, structural violence, cultural violence, civil commons, Indigenous life-ground, ecological justice, participatory languaging, minimum sufficient force, compossibility, anti-coercive governance

Executive Summary

The original *Life-Coherent Peace* paper argues that peace should not be defined merely as the absence of war, direct injury, or disorder. A society may be free of open armed conflict while still reproducing hunger, ecological destruction, preventable disease, loneliness, humiliation, dispossession, and despair. Peace becomes life-coherent only when social, ecological, economic, cultural, and political arrangements conserve and expand the capacities of living beings to think, feel, act, relate, and flourish without destroying the life-ground of others (Sahely, 2026).

The present paper accepts that conceptual foundation but moves to the next developmental task: methodological stress testing. The question is not whether the framework can diagnose obvious life-disablement. The water privatization case already does that. The harder question is whether the Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol can guide judgment when life-claims collide: when one community's urgent survival appears to threaten another community's ecological and cultural life-ground.

The paper therefore develops a tragic-choice case involving a displaced population and an ancient forest that is also Indigenous territory, watershed regulator, habitat, carbon sink, and sacred cultural ground. The case is deliberately difficult. The displaced population needs immediate shelter, water, sanitation, food, medical care, safety, and social stabilization. The Indigenous community needs the forest intact for cultural continuity, ceremonial practice, ecological livelihood, language, memory, and self-determination. The forest itself sustains species, soil, watershed function, and future habitability. No side can be dismissed as merely greedy, irrational, or life-blind.

The paper's central claim is that life-coherent arbitration does not eliminate tragedy. It prevents premature, hidden, one-sided, or money-sequence sacrifice. Where loss remains unavoidable, it requires that the loss be named, minimized, justified, monitored, repaired where possible, and never converted into a silent externality.

1. Introduction: From Conceptual Framework to Methodological Stress Test

The concept of Life-Coherent Peace begins from a dissatisfaction with negative definitions of peace. Peace cannot be adequately defined as non-war if the conditions of daily life continue to disable human and planetary flourishing. Galtung's distinction between negative peace and positive peace already makes this clear: the absence of direct violence does not by itself remove structural arrangements that prevent people from realizing their potential (Galtung, 1969, 1996). His later concept of cultural violence deepens the diagnosis by showing how language, ideology, religion, science, art, and everyday meaning-making can legitimate direct and structural violence (Galtung, 1990).

Life-Coherent Peace extends this tradition by integrating Galtung with McMurtry and Maturana. McMurtry supplies the life-value criterion: value is that which enables a more coherently inclusive range of thought, felt being, and action; disvalue is that which reduces, disables, or destroys these capacities (McMurtry, 2011, 2013). Maturana and Varela supply the biological and epistemological ground: living beings are autopoietic unities, self-producing systems whose continued existence depends on viable structural coupling with a medium (Maturana & Varela, 1980, 1992). Maturana's later work on love, languaging, and emotioning adds the relational insight that human coexistence depends on domains in which the other is accepted as legitimate in coexistence (Maturana Romesín & Verden-Zöllner, 2008).

The main paper's contribution is therefore conceptual, diagnostic, and methodological. Conceptually, it integrates life-value, autopoiesis, structural coupling, civil commons, and violence diagnosis into a shared grammar of life-coherence. Diagnostically, it identifies forms of life-disablement concealed by conventional measures of peace, growth, and order. Methodologically, it proposes a Life-Coherence Test and a Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol for evaluating institutions, policies, technologies, and cultural arrangements (Sahely, 2026).

The present paper takes up the methodological task. It does not ask whether the framework is philosophically suggestive. It asks whether the framework can guide practical judgment when the answer is not obvious.

The hardest test is not a case in which life-value clearly opposes money-sequence disvalue. The hardest test is tragic choice: a situation in which two or more legitimate life-needs collide. Such cases are common in governance. Emergency shelter may threaten ecological integrity. Public health action may threaten community autonomy. Conservation may impose immediate hardship on vulnerable people. Infrastructure may secure one life-need while destroying another. Future generations may make claims against present desperation. Indigenous self-determination may be overridden by humanitarian urgency, while humanitarian urgency may be neglected in the name of procedural delay.

If the Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol is to become more than a theoretical gesture, it must be able to handle these conflicts without collapsing into money-sequence calculation, moral absolutism, bureaucratic reduction, or coercive life-value.

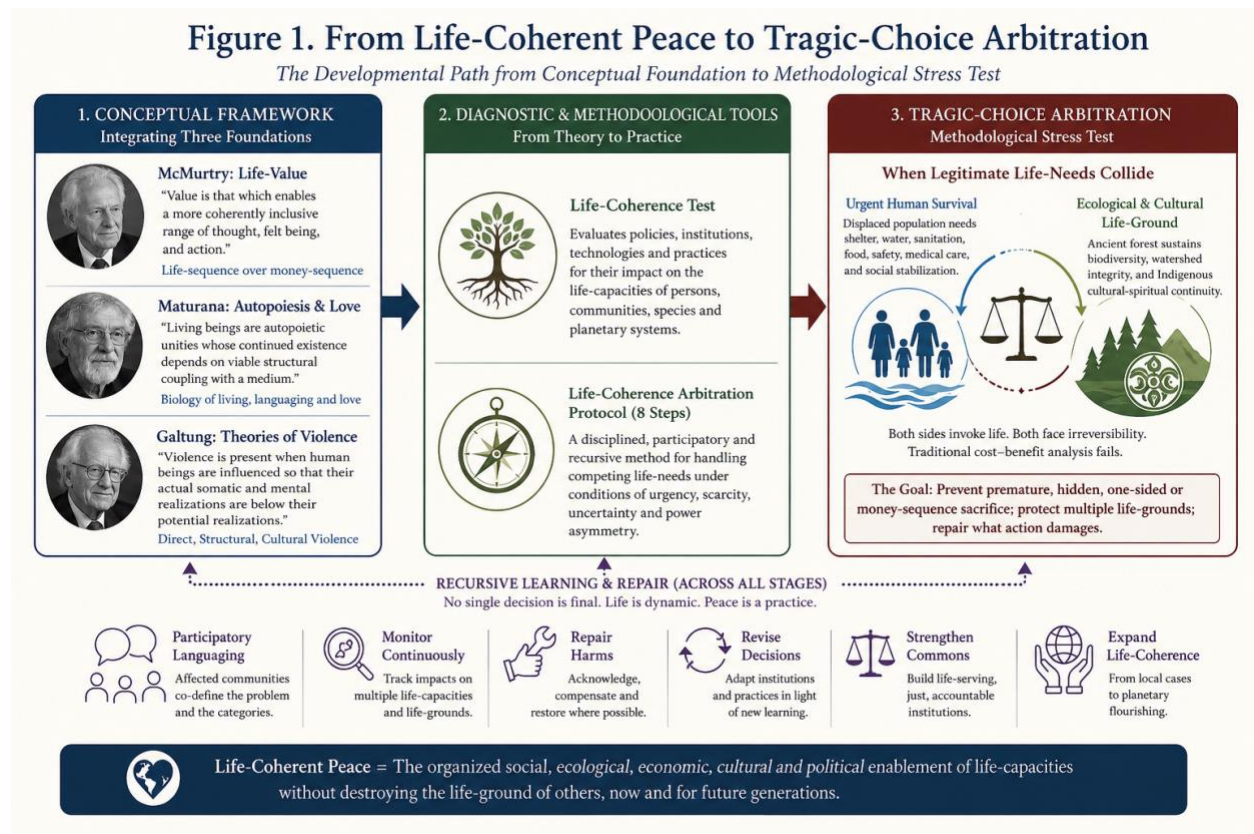


Figure 1. From Life-Coherent Peace to Tragic-Choice Arbitration.

2. Why Water Privatization Is Necessary but Not Sufficient

The water privatization case remains indispensable. Water is a universal means of life. It is not merely a commodity, preference, or municipal service. It is a non-substitutable condition of biological viability. To deny water to a household because of inability to pay is not simply to enforce a contract; it is to subordinate a condition of structural coupling to the money-sequence.

Through McMurtry's lens, the problem is life-value inversion. In the life-sequence, life is the ground and end: life uses means of life to enable more or better life (McMurtry, 2011, 2013). In the money-sequence, money becomes both beginning and end: life, labour, illness, land, attention, debt, and even suffering become instruments for money multiplication. Privatized water systems can become life-blind when they register revenue, payment compliance, and

return on investment while failing to register the biological and social consequences of water exclusion.

Through Maturana's lens, water is part of the medium through which autopoietic life remains viable. A living being is not an isolated machine that can be maintained regardless of its surroundings. It exists through ongoing structural coupling with air, water, food, shelter, temperature, care, language, and social relations (Maturana & Varela, 1980, 1992). To shut off water is therefore to damage the organism-medium relation required for living.

Through Galtung's lens, water shutoff is structural violence when it avoidably disables life-capacity through institutional arrangement rather than direct attack (Galtung, 1969). It may also be culturally legitimated when the language of "customer responsibility," "market discipline," or "non-payment enforcement" hides the fact that a biological necessity has been rendered conditional on purchasing power (Galtung, 1990).

The water case is therefore pedagogically powerful. It teaches the difference between a life-necessity and a commodity, between civil commons and revenue stream, between structural violence and neutral administration, and between public ownership and genuinely life-coherent institutional design.

But it is not sufficient as the culminating test of the Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol.

The reason is straightforward: the conflict is morally asymmetrical. On one side is access to a universal means of life. On the other is a money-sequence arrangement that can deny that means of life to those without payment capacity. The case tests diagnosis more than arbitration. It asks whether the framework can identify life-blind organization. It does not fully ask whether the framework can deliberate when both sides make legitimate life-claims.

A more demanding case is needed.

3. Tragic Choice as the Proper Test of Life-Coherent Arbitration

A tragic choice is not merely a difficult choice. It is a situation in which unavoidable limits, urgency, uncertainty, and asymmetrical vulnerability bring genuine life-needs into collision. The tragedy lies not only in scarcity, but in the possibility that protecting one life-domain may disable another.

Tragic choices expose the insufficiency of four common decision models.

The first is money-sequence calculation. This model prices the competing goods and chooses the option with the highest net benefit. It can count timber value, construction cost, compensation

packages, carbon credits, and land prices. But it cannot adequately register a dead child, extinct species, destroyed sacred site, severed cultural lineage, poisoned watershed, or irreversible trauma as non-substitutable losses.

The second is administrative expediency. This model asks what can be done quickly, legally, cheaply, and visibly. It tends to privilege options that are legible to agencies, contractors, and emergency authorities. Its danger is that urgency becomes a shield for domination.

The third is moral absolutism. This model protects one principle without regard for its disabling effects on other life-claims. It may absolutize human emergency, ecological sanctity, property rights, Indigenous refusal, or state authority. In doing so, it can convert a genuine life-claim into a weapon against other life-claims.

The fourth is procedural consultation without shared power. This model invites affected communities to speak after the problem has already been defined, the categories established, the options narrowed, and the decision logic fixed. It may create the appearance of participation while preserving epistemic control.

Life-coherent arbitration must avoid all four. It must discipline judgment without pretending to eliminate judgment. It must recognize life-needs without allowing “life” to become a coercive trump card. It must accept ecological limits without abandoning urgent human suffering. It must respect Indigenous self-determination without romanticizing Indigenous communities as symbols rather than political actors. It must use evidence without reducing life to what agencies can measure.

The central case developed below is designed to test precisely this capacity.

4. The Central Case: Displaced Population, Ancient Forest, and Indigenous Life-Ground

A severe climate-related flood destroys several coastal settlements. Thousands of people are displaced. Families arrive inland with little more than what they can carry. Children are dehydrated, frightened, and separated from school. Elderly persons have lost medications. Persons with disabilities require accessibility and personal support. Pregnant women and infants face heightened health risks. Temporary shelters are overcrowded. Sanitation is failing. Disease risk is rising. People need shelter, food, clean water, sanitation, safety, medical care, schooling, trauma stabilization, and a pathway toward durable resettlement.

The government identifies a nearby ancient forest as the only apparently available land large enough to support an emergency settlement. The site appears administratively attractive. It is contiguous, accessible, near transport routes, and capable of rapid clearing. Private contractors propose immediate development. Some officials argue that delay will cost lives.

But the forest is not empty land.

It is an old-growth ecosystem. It sustains endangered species, regulates water cycles, stores carbon, protects soil, reduces flood risk, and supports downstream communities. The IPBES Global Assessment emphasizes that biodiversity, ecosystem integrity, and nature's contributions to people are foundational to human well-being and are under severe global pressure (IPBES, 2019). In this case, the forest is also the cultural and spiritual life-ground of an Indigenous community. The community's language, ceremonies, medicines, ecological knowledge, origin stories, kinship obligations, and intergenerational identity are inseparable from the forest. The forest is not merely "land," "timber," or "undeveloped space." It is relation, memory, law, ancestor, and living continuity.

The Indigenous community rejects unilateral state action. Conservation groups demand total protection. Displaced families fear abandonment. Contractors pressure the government to proceed. Humanitarian agencies ask for rapid shelter delivery. Media outlets simplify the issue as "people versus trees." The state considers emergency powers.

This case cannot be solved by asking which side has the stronger preference. It cannot be solved by asking which option produces more economic value. It cannot be solved by declaring either immediate human survival or ecological-cultural continuity absolute. Both sides invoke life. Both sides face possible irreversibility. Both sides may be subjected to structural violence if the process is mishandled.

The life-coherent question is therefore:

What decision process can protect urgent human survival, Indigenous legitimacy, ecological continuity, and future life-conditions without prematurely sacrificing one life-ground to another?

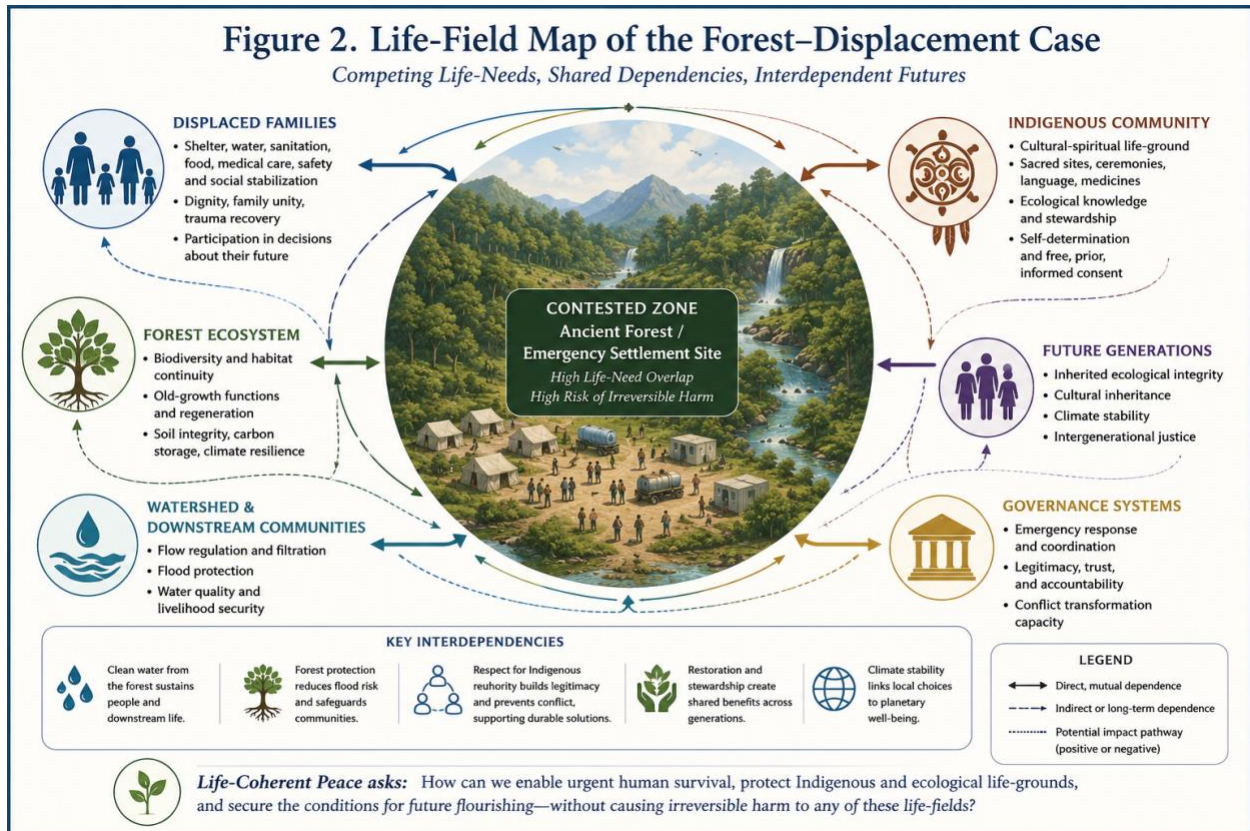


Figure 2. Life-Field Map of the Forest-Displacement Case.

5. Applying the Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol

The Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol is not a mechanical decision rule. It is a disciplined sequence of inquiry designed to prevent premature sacrifice. Its function is to slow the rush from urgency to domination, from complexity to price, from life-claim to administrative category, and from conflict to imposed settlement.

The eight steps are applied below.

5.1 Identify the living unities affected

The first danger is premature narrowing. The state may define the issue as land allocation. Contractors may define it as site preparation. Humanitarian agencies may define it as shelter delivery. Conservation organizations may define it as forest protection. Indigenous leaders may

define it as defense of ancestral law and territory. Displaced persons may define it as survival, dignity, and future.

Each framing discloses part of the situation. Each can also conceal other living unities.

A life-coherent process begins by identifying the full field of affected life.

Living unity	What may be enabled or disabled
Displaced families	Survival, shelter, safety, hydration, sanitation, sleep, dignity, family unity
Children	Development, attachment security, schooling, protection from trauma
Elderly persons	Medication continuity, mobility, hydration, thermal protection, care
Persons with disabilities	Accessibility, personal assistance, protection from abandonment
Pregnant women and infants	Nutrition, infection prevention, safe delivery, continuity of care
Indigenous community	Cultural continuity, self-determination, sacred relation, language ecology, ancestral law
Forest ecosystem	Biodiversity, habitat continuity, old-growth functions, soil integrity, regeneration
Endangered species	Habitat, reproduction, migration, survival
Watershed	Flow regulation, filtration, flood protection, downstream water security
Downstream communities	Water quality, flood protection, livelihood security
Future generations	Ecological inheritance, cultural inheritance, climate resilience
Governance system	Legitimacy, trust, accountability, conflict transformation capacity

This step prevents invisible victims. Many forms of structural violence begin when only the most visible, powerful, administratively legible, or monetizable claims are counted (Galtung, 1969). A life-field map is therefore not a stakeholder list. A stakeholder list often names parties in relation to a project. A life-field map asks what living unities may be enabled, disabled, erased, or made impossible by the decision.

5.2 Map affected life-capacities

The second step asks how each proposed action affects capacities for thought, felt being, action, relation, cultural continuity, and ecological viability.

For displaced families, life-capacity includes bodily survival, safe shelter, access to water, sanitation, food, rest, family unity, trauma stabilization, medical continuity, and participation in decisions about their future. These concerns overlap with the humanitarian language of durable solutions, which emphasizes that displacement-related assistance and protection needs do not

disappear merely because people have initially found safety (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2010).

For children, the issue is not merely survival. It includes developmental continuity: sleep, safety, schooling, nutrition, attachment, play, and protection from chronic fear.

For the Indigenous community, life-capacity includes cultural transmission, ceremonial continuity, language rooted in place, ecological livelihood, collective memory, self-governance, and freedom from renewed dispossession. UNDRIP recognizes the rights of Indigenous peoples to self-determination, cultural integrity, lands, territories, resources, and free, prior, and informed consent in matters affecting them (United Nations General Assembly, 2007).

For the forest, one must avoid anthropomorphic confusion while still recognizing ecological viability. The forest's "capacity" is not thought or felt being in the human sense, but regenerative continuity: habitat integrity, biodiversity, species reproduction, soil structure, hydrological regulation, carbon storage, and resilience.

For future generations, life-capacity appears as inheritance: the possibility of receiving a world in which water, culture, biodiversity, and social trust have not been irreversibly damaged.

This step links McMurtry's life-value criterion to the concrete case. Value is not what satisfies preference or maximizes exchange-value; value is what enables capacities for living (McMurtry, 2011). In tragic choice, the question becomes: which capacities are at risk, whose capacities have been ignored, and which capacities cannot be sacrificed without destroying life-ground?

5.3 Distinguish needs from wants and means from substitutes

The protocol does not treat all claims as equal. A life-need is not the same as a preference. A universal means of life is not the same as convenience. A contractor's profit opportunity is not equivalent to a displaced child's shelter, an Indigenous community's sacred site, or a watershed's integrity.

The displaced population needs immediate shelter, water, sanitation, food, safety, medical care, and social stabilization. But this does not necessarily mean permanent concrete housing, private plots, paved roads, commercial infrastructure, or settlement inside the old-growth forest.

The Indigenous community needs the forest as cultural and ecological life-ground. That need must not be translated downward into compensation, ceremonial access days, museum preservation, or symbolic consultation.

The forest needs habitat continuity, watershed protection, soil integrity, and regeneration. It must not be reduced to timber, carbon credit, tourism asset, or "vacant" public land.

The state needs emergency response capacity, lawful coordination, legitimacy, and public accountability. It does not need unchecked emergency power.

Private contractors may want contracts, road access, timber revenue, and long-term development opportunities. These are not life-needs.

Claim	Life-need?	Substitute possible?	Notes
Emergency shelter	Yes	Partly	Shelter is non-optional; exact site and design may vary
Clean water	Yes	No	Must be secured immediately
Sanitation	Yes	Partly	Mobile and ecological options may exist
Medical continuity	Yes	Partly	Requires immediate continuity, but delivery models may vary
Old-growth forest continuity	Yes	Rarely	Some ecological functions are non-substitutable
Sacred sites	Yes	No	Cannot be replaced by money
Indigenous self-determination	Yes	No	Not reducible to consultation after decisions are made
Contractor profit	No	Yes	Discretionary money-sequence claim
Administrative convenience	No	Yes	Cannot override life-ground
Rapid action	Yes	Partly	Urgency is real, but speed must not become domination

This step is crucial because money-sequence systems often smuggle wants into the rank of necessities. Development contracts, administrative speed, investor certainty, property values, and revenue streams may be treated as non-negotiable while water, culture, shelter, ecological integrity, and dignity are treated as variables.

5.4 Identify thresholds of irreversibility and non-substitutability

This is the most important step in tragic choice. Some harms can be repaired. Others cannot. The life-coherent process must distinguish inconvenience, hardship, reversible loss, serious damage, and irreversible violation.

Affected unity	Possible irreversible or non-substitutable threshold
Displaced population	Death from exposure; disease outbreak; severe trauma; family separation; developmental injury in children
Indigenous community	Destruction of sacred sites; forced displacement; cultural lineage rupture; loss of ceremonial continuity

Forest ecosystem	Extinction of endemic or keystone species; old-growth fragmentation; soil collapse; hydrological destabilization
Watershed	Loss of flood regulation; contamination; downstream water insecurity
Future generations	Permanent loss of ecological and cultural inheritance
Governance system	Loss of legitimacy through coercion, deception, or silencing

This step changes the moral atmosphere of the negotiation. The issue is no longer “housing versus forest,” “people versus trees,” or “culture versus development.” The issue becomes: what damage could not be undone? What loss could not be compensated? What threshold must not be crossed without grave justification?

A cash payment cannot restore a dead child, extinct species, destroyed sacred site, collapsed watershed, or severed cultural lineage. The Pinheiro Principles similarly recognize that housing, land, and property deprivation in displacement contexts requires restitution or compensation through independent and impartial processes, not arbitrary dispossession disguised as administrative necessity (Pinheiro, 2005).

In life-coherent terms, irreversibility disciplines urgency. Urgency remains real. People may die without shelter. But urgency does not authorize blindness to other thresholds. The correct question is not “Which side matters more?” It is “What must not be allowed to become irreversible, and what options protect the greatest range of non-substitutable life-conditions?”

5.5 Seek compossible options before sacrificial trade-offs

The protocol now refuses two premature solutions.

The first false solution is money-sequence calculation: price the timber, price the housing, estimate construction costs, assign compensation, and choose the option with the highest net benefit.

The second false solution is moral absolutism: protect the forest regardless of displaced people’s suffering, or shelter displaced people regardless of ecological and cultural destruction.

Life-coherent arbitration requires a search for compossible options before sacrifice is accepted. Compossibility does not mean everyone receives everything. It means that decision-makers must search for arrangements that protect multiple life-necessities together before imposing irreversible loss on any life-domain.

Option	Life-coherent rationale
Use already degraded land first	Protects forest thresholds while meeting urgent shelter needs

Temporary high-density modular settlement	Reduces land footprint and avoids permanent seizure
Mobile water and sanitation systems	Secures immediate survival without major permanent infrastructure
Indigenous-led ecological planning	Prevents epistemic domination and protects cultural legitimacy
Strict no-go zones	Protects sacred sites, old-growth areas, habitats, and watershed functions
Regenerative building materials	Reduces ecological damage and permits later removal
Emergency civil commons fund	Prevents financial cost from forcing ecological sacrifice
Distributed shelter network	Avoids concentrating all burden on one site
Use vacant buildings or underused public land	Reveals options hidden by narrow land-framing
Shared restoration work	Allows displaced persons to participate in ecological repair
Time-bound settlement agreement	Prevents emergency action from becoming permanent occupation
Independent monitoring council	Prevents the implementing authority from evaluating itself
Community benefit and repair agreements	Ensures burdens are acknowledged and repaired where possible

The point is not to guarantee a perfect solution. The point is to delay sacrifice long enough for hidden possibilities to appear. Under money-sequence logic, the cheapest available land may appear to be the “rational” choice. Under life-coherent logic, the cost of using degraded land, modular settlement, or distributed accommodation may be justified if it prevents irreversible ecological and cultural loss.

This is where Ostrom’s work on commons governance becomes relevant. Durable commons are not created by declaring common goods in the abstract. They require rules, monitoring, conflict-resolution mechanisms, graduated sanctions, local participation, and nested governance arrangements appropriate to the resource and community (Ostrom, 1990). Life-coherent arbitration similarly requires institutional design capable of holding multiple life-claims in relation.

Figure 3. Thresholds and Compossibility in Tragic Choice
 From Irreversibility Awareness to Life-Coherent Options Before Sacrificial Trade-offs

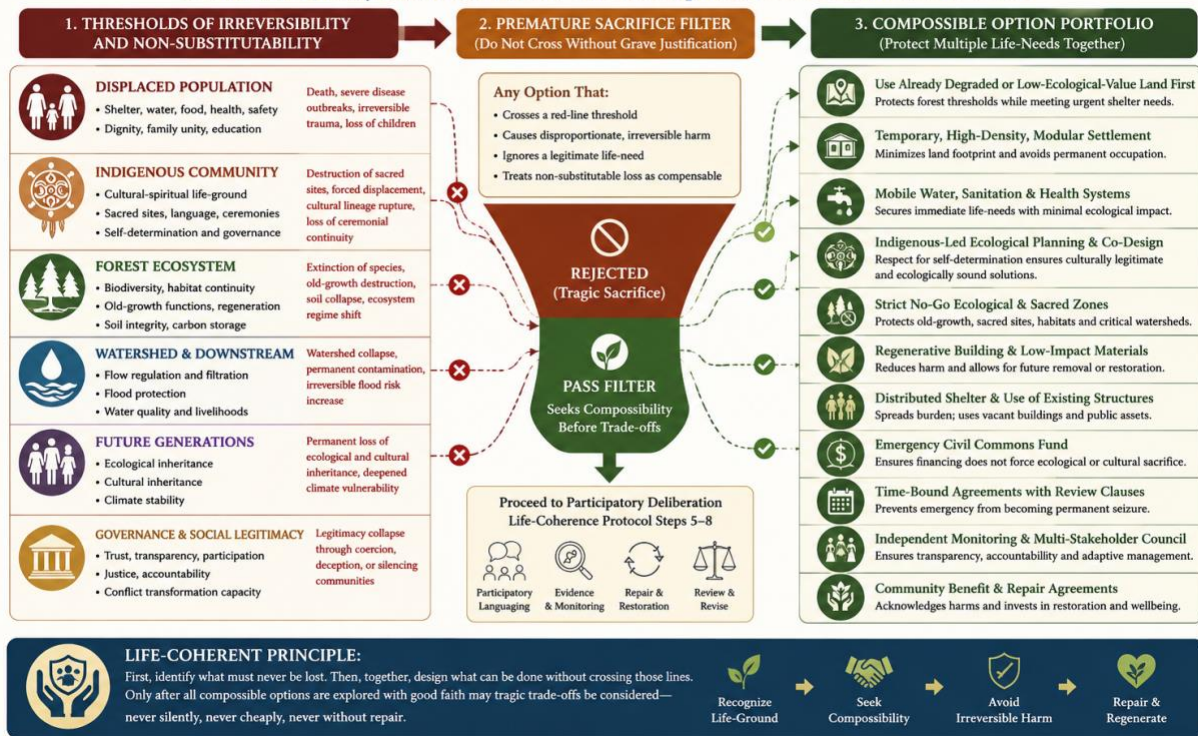


Figure 3. Thresholds and Compossibility in Tragic Choice.

5.6 Use minimum sufficient force

Minimum sufficient force prevents life-coherence from becoming coercive. If constraint is unavoidable, the intervention must be the least dominating and least life-disabling option capable of preventing serious harm.

In this case, minimum sufficient force may justify emergency action to prevent death, disease, exposure, or violence in temporary camps. But it does not justify unilateral seizure of Indigenous land, militarized exclusion of Indigenous protectors, suppression of protest, permanent settlement disguised as temporary emergency shelter, destruction of sacred sites, forced relocation of displaced families without participation, administrative erasure of dissent, or contractor-led development under humanitarian language.

Any coercive action must satisfy five conditions:

Condition	Question
Necessity	Is the intervention required to prevent imminent serious life-disablement?
Proportionality	Is the level of force proportionate to the harm prevented?

Least-harm alternative	Have less dominating options been exhausted?
Time limitation	Does the intervention expire unless renewed through participatory review?
Repair obligation	Are harms monitored, acknowledged, funded, and repaired where possible?

Minimum sufficient force also requires humility. The state may need to act quickly, but urgency does not erase legitimacy. Emergency does not suspend life-coherence; it increases the burden of justification.

A process that claims to secure bodily survival while humiliating, silencing, or dispossessing affected communities fails life-coherence internally. It may achieve a positive outcome in one domain while reproducing structural or cultural violence in another. Galtung’s work is essential here because it prevents the framework from treating “good outcomes” as separable from violent means (Galtung, 1969, 1990).

5.7 Require participatory languaging

Participatory languaging is the decisive anti-technocratic step.

Maturana and Varela argue that human beings do not simply mirror an independent world from nowhere; they bring forth worlds through embodied histories of distinction, action, language, and coexistence (Maturana & Varela, 1992). In practical terms, the categories used in arbitration are not neutral containers. They shape what can be seen, counted, valued, defended, repaired, or ignored.

Participatory languaging therefore means that affected communities must participate in the distinctions by which the situation is defined. They are not passive data points. They are living observers who bring forth worlds through memory, care, suffering, responsibility, and history.

For displaced families, the problem may not be “shelter units required.” It may be fear, grief, lost home, family separation, dignity, safety, continuity, and the need not to be treated as a burden.

For the Indigenous community, the problem may not be “land use conflict.” It may be renewed colonization, violation of ancestors, erasure of law, severing of ceremony, and the state’s refusal to recognize forest as relation.

For the forest, no human community can speak as the forest in a literal sense. But ecological science, Indigenous ecological knowledge, downstream communities, and future-generation representation can help disclose what forest viability requires.

This step requires a language compact:

Technical term	Community-facing question
Life-capacity	What would this decision make possible or impossible for your life, family, community, or future?
Structural coupling	What conditions must remain intact for you to stay alive, healthy, safe, and whole?
Means of life	What cannot be withheld without serious harm?
Cultural continuity	What must be protected so your people can continue as yourselves?
Ecological viability	What must remain intact for the forest, water, species, and soil to regenerate?
Threshold of irreversibility	What damage could not be undone?
Compossible option	What solution protects both urgent survival and long-term life-ground?
Minimum sufficient force	What is the least harmful intervention that prevents the worst harm?
Repair	If harm occurs, who must repair it, how, and with what resources?

The purpose is not to abandon theoretical precision. It is to prevent theoretical language from becoming epistemic domination. If a community must translate its sacred relation to land into a state-approved vocabulary of “ecosystem service value” or “autopoietic structural coupling” in order to be heard, the process has already reproduced cultural violence.

5.8 Monitor, repair, and revise

No decision becomes life-coherent simply because it passed through a protocol once. Living systems change. Emergency settlements evolve. Trust can erode. Ecological impacts may emerge slowly. State agencies may protect themselves. Contractors may exceed their mandate. Communities may experience harms not predicted at the start.

Monitoring must therefore be multidimensional.

Domain	Monitoring question
Survival	Are displaced families safe, sheltered, hydrated, nourished, and medically protected?
Trauma	Are fear, family separation, violence, and despair decreasing?
Agency	Do displaced families have meaningful voice in their future?
Indigenous authority	Does the Indigenous community retain real decision power?
Cultural continuity	Are sacred sites, ceremonies, language, and intergenerational practices protected?
Ecology	Are biodiversity, soil, water, habitat, and species indicators stable or recovering?
Watershed	Are downstream flow, filtration, and flood regulation protected?

Governance	Are decisions transparent, appealable, and revisable?
Power asymmetry	Are weaker parties gaining voice or losing it over time?
Repair	Are harms acknowledged, funded, and corrected?

Repair must be designed before damage proceeds. A policy that knowingly risks harm but lacks a repair pathway is not life-coherent. It is merely hopeful administration.

Figure 4. The Eight-Step Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol Under Tragic Choice

A Recursive Cycle for Life-Grounded, Participatory and Anti-Coercive Decision-Making

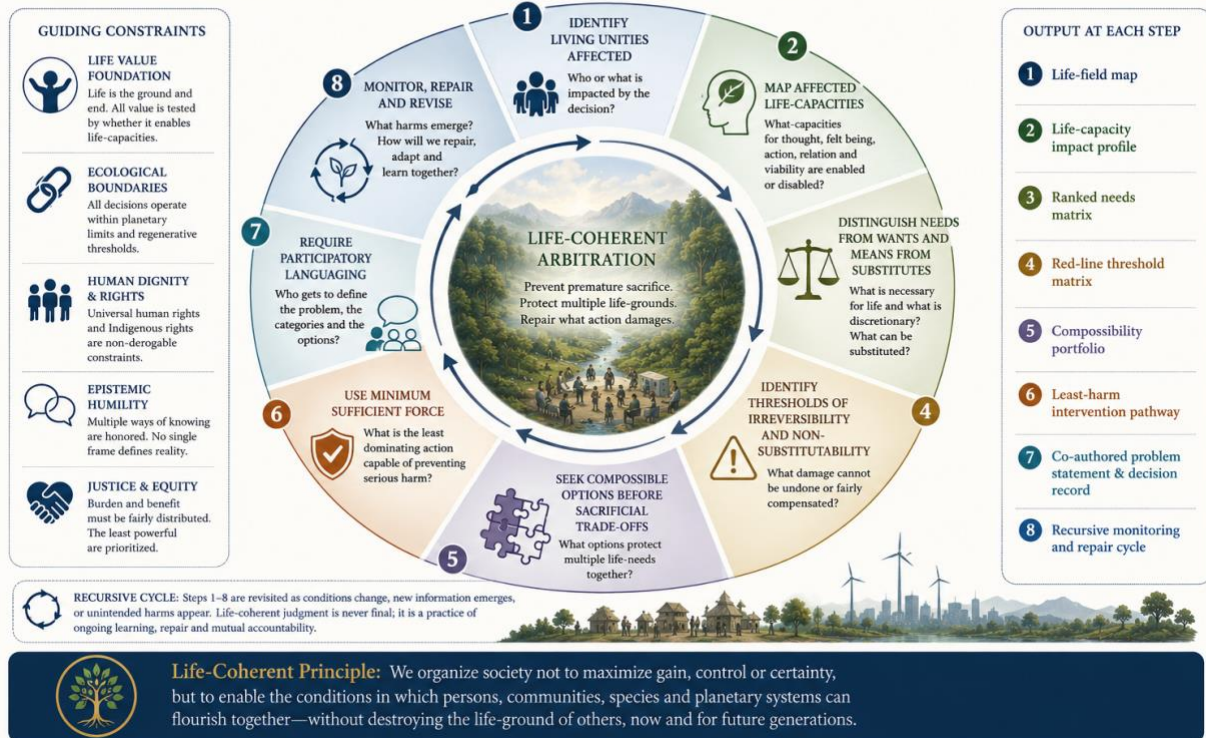


Figure 4. The Eight-Step Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol Under Tragic Choice.

6. Anti-Coercion Safeguards

The deepest danger in life-coherent governance is that “life” may become a new language of domination. States, agencies, experts, philanthropic bodies, or technocratic panels may claim authority to define what counts as life-capacity, structural coupling, compossibility, and minimum sufficient force. A benevolent vocabulary can conceal coercive power.

This danger must be taken seriously. Life-coherence cannot be defended by intention alone. It must be constrained by anti-coercion safeguards.

6.1 No single life-coherence score

Life-capacity must not be reduced to a single score, target, or ranking. A single score would invite bureaucratic reduction and false objectivity. A life-coherent assessment must include quantitative indicators, qualitative testimony, ecological thresholds, cultural red lines, narrative accounts, dissenting reports, uncertainty statements, and repair obligations.

A single composite index may be useful for communication in some contexts, but it must never become the decision itself. The dashboard must preserve the non-commensurability of key harms.

6.2 Communities co-define the categories

Affected communities must help define the categories of harm, evidence, viability, and repair. The state may bring planning categories. Public health officers may bring morbidity and mortality data. Ecologists may bring habitat models. Indigenous communities may bring sacred law, memory, place-based knowledge, and relational obligations. Displaced families may bring grief, urgency, practical knowledge, and survival priorities.

No single knowledge system should monopolize reality.

6.3 Emergency power must expire

Emergency action may sometimes be necessary. But emergency must not become the doorway through which permanent dispossession enters.

Every emergency measure should include a defined duration, review dates, public justification, appeal mechanisms, independent monitoring, restoration obligations, and participatory renewal requirements. Without sunset clauses, temporary life-protection can become permanent structural violence.

6.4 Cultural and ecological loss cannot be priced away

Compensation may be necessary, but it is not always sufficient. Money cannot restore an extinct species, destroyed sacred site, severed cultural lineage, dead child, or collapsed watershed. A life-coherent process must distinguish repairable harm from non-substitutable loss.

6.5 Minority reports must be preserved

Consensus is not always possible. When consensus fails, dissent must not be erased. Minority reports protect the process from premature closure. They also preserve memory for future repair. A silenced objection may later prove to have identified the very harm the system failed to see.

6.6 The burden of proof falls on coercion

Any coercive intervention must justify itself. The greater the force, the heavier the burden. The question is not whether the state can claim life-protection. The question is whether the state has demonstrated necessity, proportionality, reversibility where possible, participatory legitimacy, and repair capacity.

6.7 The implementing authority cannot be the sole evaluator

A government agency, contractor, or emergency authority should not judge its own life-coherence alone. Independent review should include affected communities, Indigenous representatives chosen through their own governance processes, public health experts, ecological scientists, legal observers, child and disability advocates, downstream communities, and future-generation representation.

6.8 Repair must be funded before harm proceeds

Repair cannot be rhetorical. It must have resources, timelines, responsibilities, and enforceability. If ecological damage is foreseeable, restoration funds must be secured beforehand. If cultural harm is possible, cultural protection and repair mechanisms must be agreed before intervention. If displaced families will be moved again, relocation support must be guaranteed before temporary settlement begins.

Figure 5. Anti-Coercion Architecture of Life-Coherent Arbitration

Safeguarding Participation, Dignity, and Life-Grounds Against Technocratic and Coercive Capture



Figure 5. Anti-Coercion Architecture of Life-Coherent Arbitration.

7. Evidence Dashboard Without Reductionism

The framework needs evidence, but not reductionism. It must avoid both vague moralism and technocratic scoring.

A life-coherence dashboard should show multiple dimensions side by side. It should not collapse them into one final number.

Dimension	Evidence to gather	Red-line question
Basic survival	Mortality risk, shelter access, water, food, sanitation, medical care	Is anyone at risk of death or severe bodily harm?
Health and trauma	Disease risk, mental health, sleep, family separation, violence	Is the intervention reducing or deepening trauma?
Agency	Participation records, appeal access, community-led proposals	Are affected people shaping decisions or merely receiving them?

Indigenous legitimacy	Consent processes, governance recognition, sacred-site protection	Is Indigenous self-determination being respected?
Cultural continuity	Language, ceremony, place-based practices, intergenerational knowledge	Is cultural lineage being severed?
Ecological viability	Biodiversity, habitat fragmentation, soil, water, species indicators	Is ecological damage irreversible?
Watershed function	Flow, filtration, contamination, flood risk	Is downstream life-security being compromised?
Distribution of burden	Who sacrifices, who benefits, who profits	Are the least powerful carrying the greatest burden?
Reversibility	Temporary vs. permanent infrastructure, restoration feasibility	Can the action be undone or repaired?
Governance legitimacy	Transparency, public reasons, conflicts of interest	Is the process trusted and accountable?
Repair capacity	Funds, legal obligations, timelines, enforcement	Is repair real or merely promised?

This dashboard is not a substitute for judgment. It is a way to make judgment accountable. It shows what is known, what is uncertain, what is contested, what is irreversible, and who bears the burden.

The dashboard also prevents life-coherent arbitration from becoming merely rhetorical. Without evidence, any side can claim life. Without narrative and participatory testimony, evidence can become narrow and violent. The dashboard therefore holds quantitative data, qualitative experience, ecological thresholds, rights claims, and dissent in the same field of judgment.

Figure 6. Non-Reductionist Evidence Dashboard for Life-Coherent Arbitration

Multiple Dimensions of Life-Capacity, Life-Grounds and Justice—No Single Life-Coherence Score



Figure 6. Non-Reductionist Evidence Dashboard for Life-Coherent Arbitration.

8. What the Protocol Can and Cannot Promise

The Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol cannot promise perfect harmony. It cannot promise that every conflict has a painless solution. It cannot guarantee that all life-needs will be fully satisfied. It cannot eliminate scarcity, ecological limits, historical injustice, or human fallibility.

It can do something more modest and more important.

It can prevent premature sacrifice.

It can prevent a forest from being called “timber” before its cultural and ecological life-ground is recognized.

It can prevent displaced families from being treated as logistical units rather than grieving, frightened, capable persons.

It can prevent Indigenous refusal from being dismissed as obstruction.

It can prevent contractor convenience from masquerading as humanitarian necessity.

It can prevent emergency from becoming permanent dispossession.

It can prevent cost-benefit analysis from pricing the priceless.

It can prevent life-value from becoming coercive moralism by requiring participation, humility, minimum sufficient force, independent review, and recursive repair.

This is the paper's central methodological claim:

The Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol does not abolish tragedy. It prevents premature, hidden, one-sided, or money-sequence sacrifice. Where loss remains unavoidable, it requires that the loss be named, minimized, justified, monitored, repaired where possible, and never converted into a silent externality.

This claim is deliberately restrained. It does not promise utopia. It promises discipline under constraint.

9. Discussion: From Civil Commons to Anti-Domination Governance

The civil commons is central to Life-Coherent Peace because no complex society can secure life-needs through private virtue alone. Water systems, public health, education, ecological protection, labour rights, libraries, parks, sanitation, and emergency shelter all require institutional forms. McMurtry's civil commons concept names the shared social inheritance through which societies secure access to life-goods (McMurtry, 2011, 2013).

Yet institutions can also dominate. A public agency may humiliate those it serves. A humanitarian intervention may override local authority. A conservation regime may dispossess Indigenous peoples in the name of nature. A health system may preserve bodily survival while destroying dignity, agency, and trust. A state may invoke safety to justify surveillance, confinement, or forced relocation.

Life-Coherent Peace must therefore distinguish civil commons from mere public administration. The civil commons is not simply state ownership. It is life-serving, participatory, accountable, and repair-capable institutional design. Ostrom's work is useful here because it shows that successful commons depend on governance rules shaped by users, local monitoring, conflict-resolution mechanisms, and nested accountability rather than simple centralized command (Ostrom, 1990).

In the tragic-choice case, a life-coherent civil commons would not mean the state unilaterally decides what arrangement best maximizes life. It would mean that the state helps secure the conditions for affected communities, ecological knowledge holders, public health actors, Indigenous governance institutions, and displaced persons to deliberate under conditions of real support, transparent evidence, and enforceable safeguards.

This is why participatory languaging is not a decorative addition. It is a condition of legitimacy. Without it, life-coherence becomes external control. With it, life-coherence becomes a disciplined practice of shared world-disclosure under constraint.

10. Conclusion: Life-Coherent Judgment Under Constraint

The original *Life-Coherent Peace* paper establishes a needed conceptual synthesis. It joins McMurtry's life-value criterion, Maturana's biology of living and loving, and Galtung's diagnosis of violence into a framework that redefines peace as organized life-enablement. That synthesis remains the foundation.

But the framework must now prove itself under pressure.

Water privatization remains a powerful diagnostic case. It shows how a universal means of life can be subordinated to the money-sequence. But the displaced population / ancient forest / Indigenous life-ground case is the more demanding methodological test. It forces the protocol to operate where life-claims collide, where urgency and irreversibility coexist, and where the danger of coercive life-value is real.

The Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol should therefore be understood not as a machine for producing certainty, but as a life-grounded discipline of judgment. It asks decision-makers, communities, institutions, and affected persons to slow down premature sacrifice, disclose hidden harms, distinguish needs from wants, identify irreversible thresholds, search for compossible arrangements, constrain force, share the power of naming, and repair what action damages.

This is the next step for Life-Coherent Peace: not more theoretical expansion, but methodological proof under tragic choice.

Appendix A. Compact Facilitation Tool

The Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol in Practice

Step	Core question	Evidence	Main danger	Output
1. Identify living unities	Who or what is affected?	Community mapping, ecological mapping, future-generation implications	Invisible victims	Life-field map
2. Map life-capacities	What capacities are enabled or disabled?	Health data, testimony, cultural impacts, ecological indicators	Reducing harm to money loss	Life-capacity profile
3. Distinguish needs from wants	What is necessary, and what is substitutable?	Shelter, water, safety, culture, ecology, profit claims	Treating profit as life-need	Ranked needs matrix
4. Identify thresholds	What damage cannot be undone?	Extinction risk, trauma risk, sacred sites, watershed collapse	Pricing the priceless	Red-line matrix
5. Seek compossibility	What protects multiple life-needs together?	Alternative sites, regenerative design, public investment	Premature sacrifice	Compossibility portfolio
6. Use minimum sufficient force	What is the least dominating intervention?	Legal options, emergency supports, rights protections	Coercive life-value	Least-harm pathway
7. Require participatory languaging	Who gets to define the problem?	Community forums, Indigenous governance, public reasoning	Epistemic violence	Co-authored problem statement
8. Monitor, repair, revise	What harms emerge, and how are they corrected?	Audits, grievance systems, ecological and social monitoring	Institutional self-protection	Repair cycle

Appendix B. Plain-Language Translation Guide

Academic term	Plain-language meaning	Question to ask
Life-capacity	What life can do, feel, sustain, and become	What would this decision make possible or impossible?

Structural coupling	Conditions that allow life to remain viable	What must stay intact for people, communities, or ecosystems to remain whole?
Means of life	Non-optional conditions of living	What cannot be withheld without serious harm?
Structural violence	Avoidable harm built into systems	Who is being harmed even though no one appears to be attacking them?
Cultural violence	Language or belief that hides harm	What words make injury seem normal or necessary?
Civil commons	Shared arrangements that secure life-goods	What must be protected from exclusion or commodification?
Threshold of irreversibility	A point beyond which repair is impossible or inadequate	What damage could not be undone?
Compossibility	Protecting multiple life-needs together	What option avoids sacrificing one living community to another?
Minimum sufficient force	The least dominating action needed to prevent serious harm	What is the least harmful way to prevent the worst harm?
Participatory languaging	Affected people help define the problem	Who gets to name what is happening?
Recursive repair	Ongoing correction after action	How will we detect harm and repair it?

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