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The Flow of Capital and the Goal of Sustainability

Objective: Assess the impact of capital allocation and the international flows of funds on sustainability goals.

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Hypothesis: Unfettered, unregulated currency trading, lending and capital markets speculation has dominated global finance since the fall of communism paved the way for the dominance of capitalist institutions. Unrestrained by the mollifying effect of internal rules of nation states, transnational corporations and financial institutions can choose to employ effective, visionary practices in commerce or sink to the most permissive level of environmental and labor practice.

With performance pressures arising from very short-term investment horizons, investors face a natural tendency to ignore full sustainability goals in search of financial dominance or survival. The ability to destroy the habitat and livelihoods of indigenous peoples as well as natural resources in a very short time span is well documented. With the recent severe dislocations in entire economies around the globe, from Asia to Russia to Latin America, a debate has been reopened that previously had been ceded to the free-trade camp. It is imperative that we understand these short-term performance pressures as well as the potential disruptions caused by the unfettered flow of capital in order to devise ways to modulate their effects and allow long-term planning.

Panel Profile: Suggested panel would include representatives from such professions as accountancy (understanding capital allocation, ...Marc Epstein), journalism (understanding currency trading, etc., .Greg Millman...), Public Pension Fund Trustees (Carol O'Cleireacain, understanding the performance pressures), Robert Reich or Olena

Berg (formerly Dept. of Labor responsible for U.S. Employee Retirement Systems), or other international representatives, possibly from the WTO, World Bank, IMF to be named.

Discussion: Would include background on international funds and accounting of institutions, profile of current situation, examples of bad and good practices, discussion of what is required to prevent financial flows from being a barrier to sustainability.