



# what next

volume 1 | setting the context

development dialogue  
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This issue of *Development Dialogue* is the first in a series of *What Next* project publications. It also marks a new phase in the journal's history. *Development Dialogue* is being given a fresh look - a new cover design and a new layout. At the same time we are introducing a new and simpler numbering system, consisting of a running number along with month and year of publication. This issue is No. 47 since there have been 46 previous issues of the journal.

Subscribers are kindly requested to inform the Dag Hammarskjöld Centre of any changes of address or subscription cancellations.

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The opinions expressed in the journal are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation.

The length of *Development Dialogue* may also vary more than before. One issue may be under a hundred pages because we wish to offer our readers something very topical without delay, whereas another issue may be over 200 pages and contain a range of thematically varied articles.

We hope the new plans for the journal will meet with readers' approval. *Development Dialogue* will continue to provide a space for pioneering ideas, and the essential character of the journal will remain unchanged.

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# what next

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## Introducing *What Next*

The world at the beginning of the 21st century is deeply contradictory. There is among many an increasing disaffection with the state of humanity and a growing concern about the unprecedented damage being done to Planet Earth. At the same time, there are numerous examples, at different levels of society, of actions for positive change. In order to analyse the present situation and what we may be facing in the future, and to propose bold and innovative alternatives to the predominant development trajectory, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation has, over the past few years, devoted considerable attention and energy to the *What Next* project. This issue of *Development Dialogue* introduces the project as the first in a series of publications.



*The world at the beginning of the 21st century is deeply contradictory.*

Drawing on the Foundation's four decades of work in the field of development, the *What Next* project aims to contribute to the much-needed discussion about crucial issues in the next few decades. Under this initiative a diverse group of concerned people – civil society activists, academics, media representatives, national and international policymakers and civil servants – has come together to engage in intense debate and dialogue. *What Next* is a sequel, roughly 30 years later, to the Foundation's *What Now* project, which culminated in the 1975 Dag Hammarskjöld Report *What Now: Another Development* and the monograph *Another Development: Approaches and Strategies* (1976). The Report was launched as an independent contribution to the Seventh Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Development and International Cooperation. With a print run of 100,000 copies in six languages, the Report came to play a significant role in the development debate during the following years.

*What Now* introduced the concept of 'Another Development', which advocated a different content and direction for development. It proposed a set of principles for alternatives to the established order and for the reformation of international relations and the United Nations system. Since the Report was published, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation has consistently explored and elaborated on alternative development perspectives in seminars and publications. The *What Now* Report was envisaged as a 'tribute to the man, who more than any other, gave the United Nations the authority which the world needs more than ever' – Dag Hammarskjöld, the UN Secretary-General 1953–1961 and one of the last century's most remarkable international leaders.

The year 2005 marked the centenary of the birth of Dag Hammarskjöld, during which much international attention was given to his life and work. New material about Hammarskjöld was presented and assessed adding to already existing knowledge. A more complete picture is beginning to emerge of a person with an exceptional background in the field of economics, international law and international negotiations, which he used to stretch the established limits for diplomatic action and create new ways and means of handling international crises. His famous speech in 1954 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York comes to mind: ‘In modern international politics – aiming toward that world of order which now more than ever seems to be the only alternative to disruption and disaster – we have to approach our task in the spirit which animates the modern artist. We have to tackle our problems without the armour of inherited convictions or set formulas, but only with our bare hands and all the honesty we can muster. And we have to do so with an unbreakable will to master the inert matter of patterns created by history and sociological conditions.’ It is our hope that the *What Next* project’s critical scrutiny of the predominant development path and the alternatives proposed bear the stamp of such a spirit.



*‘We have to tackle our problems without the armour of inherited convictions or set formulas, but only with our bare hands and all the honesty we can muster.’*

### *The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and the What Next project*

The Foundation that Dag Hammarskjöld gave name to was established in 1962. Hammarskjöld, who perished the previous year in a plane crash in Northern Zambia, died while negotiating peace in the troubled Congo. He was guided by the notion that small countries, especially those that had just emerged from wars of independence and decolonisation, should be able to assert their interests vis-à-vis the major powers and build their own future and destiny. As a way of commemorating Dag Hammarskjöld and his quest for a more just, humane and peaceful world, the Foundation has, since the time of *What Now*, explored workable development alternatives.

Believing in the power of ideas and in free and frank discussion among concerned individuals, the Foundation has, over the years, organised more than 200 seminars on a wide range of development issues. In areas spanning global health policy, indigenous publishing and cross-cultural communication as well as disarmament, UN reform, plant genetic resources and nanotechnology, the Foundation has sought to question established approaches where they have been deemed deficient and attempted to foster broad-based debates on new and viable perspectives. The results of these explorations of social, political, eco-

conomic and cultural development – particularly in the South but also globally – have been made available to the public in more than 150 publications, including the journal *Development Dialogue*.<sup>1</sup>

Thirty years after *What Now* – in a world that has changed in many ways – there is a need to take stock of the past and look ahead. What has gone wrong with the world in the last 30 years? What has gone right? What global possibilities and challenges may we be facing during the next 30 years if the present trends persist? What are the roles of the state, of civil society and of other social forces in countering damaging trends and forging a more just and equitable world?

With a view to probing such questions, the Foundation has tapped the network it has built up over the years and brought together a diverse and dedicated group of people to exchange ideas and experiences. Meetings and seminars have been held in the midst of the bustling World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, on the farm and training centre of the Indian scholar-activist Vandana Shiva in the foothills of the Himalayas, and at the Foundation's own, tranquil, wooden mansion, Geijersgården, in Uppsala, Sweden, to mention a few places.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the process, there has been a significant presence of civil society actors. Already in the discussions following the launching of *What Now*, the 'Third System' – or 'the Citizen' – was strongly emphasised as one of the three prime movers of development, the other two being the Prince (the state) and the Merchant (business). Since then civil society has emerged as a more powerful force, not just within nation states but globally as well. The 1990s saw the rise of transnational, global justice and pro-democracy social movements that provided compelling critiques of the prevailing development model. The *What Next* project has aimed to include these views by involving representatives from a broad range of civil society groups. It has sought to build on the knowledge generated through existing initiatives and to stimulate cross-fertilisation and synergism among them. Among the Foundation's many different projects, *What Next* represents the most extensive exploration of the role of civil society actors.

While most of the participants are linked to institutions, organisations or movements, they have participated in the process in their personal capacity. In the pursuit of common ground, participants have chal-

1 An overview of the Foundation's seminar projects and downloadable publications can be found at [www.dhf.uu.se](http://www.dhf.uu.se).

2 The list of participants in and contributors to the *What Next* project is found in Appendix 1.

lenged each other and exposed contradictions, disagreements and divergent points of view. The *What Next* project, therefore, has not aimed for a watered down consensus on each and every issue, or for any kind of monolithic blueprint, but rather to bring to the fore the many vibrant and crucial debates and the possible future directions that need to be considered.

### *What Next publications*

The *What Next* discussions and deliberations are compiled in the following publications:

#### *What Next Volumes I – III*

Three collections of thematic papers. These contributions to the *What Next* project both serve as stand-alone pieces and provide material that feeds into the *What Next* Report (see below). The first of these volumes is presented in this edition of *Development Dialogue*. Summaries of the articles are found at the end of the volume.

The second volume will extend the analysis, begun in this volume, of global developments in the last 30 years and of current and future trends in such diverse areas as media and communications, multilateralism and international relations, religious, political and economic fundamentalisms, human rights and the politics of disability. A number of the articles take as their starting point local and indigenous perspectives.

The third volume will focus specifically on the field of economics. Contributions will include a questioning of the hegemony of neo-classical theory and neo-liberal policy-making, a reassessment of international and national social contracts in the light of globalisation, and an examination of the limitations of and alternatives to contemporary economics education. It will also explore new economic frameworks both at the local and international levels.

#### *Special reports*

In addition, there are two longer special reports in preparation. The first report focuses on carbon trading, which is currently pursued as the major approach to tackling climate change. It analyses the problems arising from the emerging global carbon market pertaining to the environment, social justice and human rights, and investigates new climate mitigation alternatives. The report, moreover, serves as a case study in which a number of the problems discussed within the *What Next* project come together, as well as a platform for the consolidation of a movement for climate justice.



The second special report examines modern society's deep-seated reliance on technology to tackle social problems. It explores how 'technology waves' have been created historically and whose interests they have served. The report also looks at government's and industry's strategies for technological convergence in the decades ahead and the implications of emergent technologies for the planet and its people.

### *The What Next Report*



*The What Next project has not aimed for a watered down consensus on each and every issue, or for any kind of monolithic blueprint, but rather to bring to the fore the many vibrant and crucial debates and the possible future directions that need to be considered.*

The *What Next* Report summarises the major debates and critical issues raised in the *What Next* process. The Report approaches these issues in an unconventional manner: starting with a careful analysis of current political, corporate and technological trends, it expounds a plausible scenario of what the future may look like over the coming 30 years. Will the world find itself on an irreversible trajectory towards continued environmental destruction, massive inequity, and social unrest and insecurity? What will it take in the way of political will and popular power to prompt the policy shifts that can make another, more humane world possible? Without being naively utopic, what societal changes can we reasonably hope for?

Such a forward-looking exploration, the *What Next* group insists, is urgent. There are many difficulties ahead and it is critical to engage in longer-term reflection before making decisions or closing options. As this exploratory approach cannot presume to forecast future developments with any exactitude, the first part of the Report, 'What's Ahead?', is written as a fictional scenario. The group also found the fictional mode attractive for its capacity to convey facts and circumstances in ways that stir the imagination. This part is followed by an analytical section, which makes the connections between real world developments and the 2005–2035 scenario. The final part of the Report, 'What If?', outlines – also in the form of scenarios – more optimistic futures and ways in which these may be realised.

#### **What's Ahead? A 'business as usual' scenario**

In the first part of the Report, the 2005–2035 scenario, China shares superpower status with the USA and the EU, and has metamorphosed into a multi-party 'democracy'. In Beijing, an investigative journalist unravels the increasingly intricate connections between state and corporate agendas. The world is slipping only half-consciously into the cross-currents of changing climates, converging pandemics and new technologies, compounded by corporate corruption and civil myopia and mediocrity.

The scenario depicts a world where there is increasing reliance on technological quick fixes to solve pressing problems. Instead of attacking the root causes of these problems – multiple forms of injustice, unsustainable lifestyles and the blind faith in economic growth – powerful nations have, among other things, opted for uncertain ‘geo-engineering’ technologies to mitigate the effects of global warming. Governments and corporations work closely together to urge public acceptance of nano-technological strategies in the stratosphere and on the ocean’s surface that alter currents and climates. These schemes, however, often have unforeseen impacts on ecosystems and human health, and prove increasingly difficult to control.

The technologies also pose another threat to human security and to the very notion of democracy. The possibility of high-tech weaponry ending up in the hands of small groups has paved the way for an era of even tighter and more ubiquitous surveillance reinforced by increasingly powerful monitoring technologies. The general public is told that in order to defend democracy, restrictions on democracy and the scope for expressing dissent must be imposed. The future, as envisaged in the scenario, is therefore a world of greater insecurity and less individual freedom and privacy.

At the same time, proponents of these new, converging technologies fervently advocate the seemingly limitless possibilities of ‘improving’ biological systems, the human body and nano-machinery. Increasing job competition and new environmental and health stresses lead to the further commodification of the human body as new drugs and therapies for ‘human performance enhancement’ are introduced on the mass market. As more and more people try to ‘enhance’ themselves, the ‘doping’ phenomenon prevalent in sports becomes commonplace, and enhancement products are available in food stores as well as pharmacies. ‘Designer babies’ become a reality, as couples increasingly use genetic screening to decide which babies should survive with what traits. The scenario depicts a humanity that is rapidly becoming ‘two-tiered’ – those who can afford and are willing to ‘enhance’ and those who cannot afford or do not want to. How will humanity respond? Who is ‘normal’ and able, and who is disabled in this new world?

Underlying these technological developments are increasing marketisation, commodification and militarism. Intense competition between existing and emerging powers for market positions, technological dominance, and critical natural resources cause growing geopolitical tensions and conflict. As the problems of over-consumption



*On the verge of collapse, the world re-learns the sad truth that new technologies can be commercial successes but scientific and human failures.*

and environmental stress increasingly take their toll, the powerful attempt to preserve their privileges and wealth by building barricades around them and setting themselves apart from the rest of humanity. On the verge of collapse, the world re-learns the sad truth that new technologies can be commercial successes but scientific and human failures.

This scenario may seem bleak and pessimistic, but the *What Next* group argues that it is in fact quite logical and plausible in the light of current technological development and mainstream political approaches to tackling urgent global issues. The pervasive trends outlined are certainly met by acts of resistance in the scenario – however, they do not appear early enough and with sufficient strength to have a significant impact.

### What If?

But what if these forces for change did have a significant impact? What if some of these pervasive trends were altered? Societies, and even deep-rooted values and worldviews, change over time. The numerous afflictions described in the scenario above create their own dialectic: in both rich and poor countries, there is growing resistance and a refusal to surrender to these developments. Many actors within civil society, governments and other institutions provide hopeful signs that point to another, more equitable and ecologically sound world. Local initiatives are increasingly being pursued and linked together, weaving a web of global grassroots resilience. What if the destructive trends are halted and more equitable choices take hold, the *What Next* group asked itself. What strategies are most effective to set in motion the processes of change?

The *What If?* part of the Report contains a number of scenarios which focus specifically on civil society action. One scenario looks at local rural resilience and the potential for a global grassroots movement to network into a major force for social change. Another scenario is premised on civil society's capacity to engage in more effective and long-term strategising and to take advantage of decisive moments for mass mobilisation. The scenario illustrates how the confluence of different movements could provide a momentum for social transformation that can hold both governments and corporations more accountable, and alter the current power balance. Yet another scenario starts at the United Nations and the possibility that politically astute, tightly-engaged social actors can utilise the 'soft underbelly' of intergovernmental relations and pivot off complex treaty negotiations to create a new political environment. Once again, the importance of networks

and, also, civil society's persistence and flexibility are emphasised. Here, the scenario argues that 'acting globally' informs and generates 'local' transformations. Each of these stories is independently plausible. Each starts from a different place and benefits from the web of interlocking relationships within civil society around the world.

These *What If?* scenarios are not prescriptive. Within the *What Next* group, there remain differences of opinion and different views on tactics and strategies for the way forward. Ultimately, the goal of the scenarios is to stimulate new ideas and constructive debate that may inspire new thinking and encourage effective organising. The *What Next* group is convinced that social and political movements in collaboration with other actors can turn the tide in favour of positive social change. This is not a pipe dream. A look at history reveals that almost all progressive, equity-enhancing developments, including the end of slavery, decolonisation, the advancement of civil rights, the recognition of women's rights and the victories involving environmental justice, have been, to a considerable extent, the result of popular mobilisation.

★ ★ ★

This first *What Next* volume contains seven contributions brought together under the heading 'Setting the Context'. Taking stock of some of the major political, economic and environmental trends of the past decades, the volume provides a historical context and so builds an important basis for the forthcoming *What Next* publications. This his-



*A look at history reveals that almost all progressive, equity-enhancing developments, including the end of slavery, decolonisation, the advancement of civil rights, the recognition of women's rights and the victories involving environmental justice were the results, to a considerable extent, of popular mobilisation.*

torical survey also comprises reflections on the time in which *What Now* and ‘Another Development’ emerged, revisiting its principles and their relation to the mainstream approach to development today. Moreover, a number of the articles engage, at the conceptual level, in a critical examination of the key assumptions and underpinnings that characterise conventional approaches to politics and development.

In response to the shortcomings of the mainstream framework, the articles in this issue also put forward a set of alternative concepts, ideas and proposals for action. A common thread that runs through the volume is, again, the recognition of the increasingly important role of civil society – as a vital resource for engendering new ideas and solutions and as an agent for progressive change.

Just as the *What Now* team argued 30 years ago, the *What Next* group is convinced both that societies in the world must undergo far-reaching transformation to change the present structures and that this is possible.

It is hoped that the current and forthcoming *What Next* publications provide ideas and proposals that will stimulate ‘development dialogue’ and, in turn, help generate necessary action for change!

*The Editors*



## Setting the Context

### The development debate thirty years after *What Now*

*Sheila Coronel and Kunda Dixit*

#### *Siargao island, the Philippines*

Those who come to the island of Siargao in the southern Philippines may think they have stumbled upon paradise. The tourist guidebooks call it ‘one of the Philippines’ best kept secrets,’ as its ‘pristine beaches, spectacular lagoons and islets make Siargao a special hideaway of rustic charm and beauty.’ It is also a surfer’s dream: the great waves of the sea of Siargao, not far from the Philippine Deep, the world’s deepest ocean trench, are so spectacular, they leave even the most jaded surfers in awe.

But Siargao has a dirty secret: It has possibly the largest per capita concentration of kidney sellers in the world. Between 2001 and 2004, nearly 60 residents of the island – about seven in every 1,000 inhabitants – had sold a kidney to one of the big hospitals in Manila, where their organs were transplanted to wealthy Arab, Japanese, and Filipino patients. Organ brokers offer USD2,000 to USD4,000 for each kidney. While there were few women, the sellers were mostly men in their late 20s and early 30s, impoverished coconut farmers or subsistence fishermen who wish desperately to escape the unrelenting poverty of their lives.

While tourists come to Siargao for the sun and surf, the island’s own residents are fleeing it in search of opportunities that, for all its beauty and perfection, the island can no longer provide. Foreign fishing fleets and years of dynamite fishing ravaging the corals around Siargao have made it difficult to eke a livelihood out of the sea. World coconut prices have been down for years, forcing farmers into bankruptcy. Social services are poor – most schools offer free education only up to the third grade and some residents have to walk two kilometres to the nearest water well. While tourist resorts make good business, they do not employ many locals.

Ricky, a farmer who dropped out of third grade because the nearest school was 11 kilometres from his home, bought a motorcycle

and a karaoke machine after selling his kidney in 2002. Today he remains jobless and survives by recruiting other potential organ donors, for which he gets a commission of USD200 each.

Among his recruits was Richard, 29, who sold his kidney in 2003. Richard was brought to a house in Manila where he was kept with 15 other potential donors. After a series of tests, he was matched with a 17-year-old Arab woman who urgently needed a transplant. Although the surgery has made Richard more prone to illness, he is one of the few organ sellers in Siargao who has had some economic success. He used his kidney earnings to lease coconut land from which he managed to make a profit.

Most aren't so lucky. Many end up like Junior, a farmer who worked for two years escorting kidney vendors from the island to Manila before selling his own kidney as well. Junior bought a TV set and a video karaoke from his earnings, but these were hocked when the money ran out. So weakened by the transplant that he was unable to work for a year, Junior is now penniless. After surgery, kidney donors suffer from physical and psychological trauma. They need regular medical attention even years after the transplant; they are also advised to avoid physical exertion and to lead a healthy lifestyle, including eating well. Medical services, however, are not easy to come by in Siargao. Health care is expensive; local health clinics provide only primary health services and poor farmers like Junior need to leave the island to get the medical attention they need. There are few business opportunities on Siargao, and the kidney sellers, who have little education and entrepreneurial skills, do not know how to invest their money. They earn barely enough to feed their families and put their children to school, so end up neglecting their health.

When the money from the kidney sale runs out, they go back, physically weaker and mentally stressed, to the unrelenting poverty they had hoped to escape.



*Those who come to the island of Siargao in the southern Philippines may think they have stumbled upon paradise.*

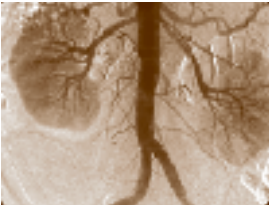
For many of the world's poor, there is no escape. The individual choices that they make – and the range of choices available to them – are determined not by themselves alone but by forces bigger and more powerful than they are. The story from Siargao island is only one of an infinite number of real-life snapshots that would tell a similar story of hopelessness and destitution which is the everyday reality today of



too many people. Expressions differ in different locations, but underlying causes and determinants are often much the same.

Ricky, Richard, and Junior, poor coconut farmers and fisherfolk on a little-known island in the Pacific, are linked to a transnational trade in organs that thrives in a global economy where both humans and their body parts are increasingly being seen as market commodities.

Advances in modern medicine, which have made possible organ and tissue transplants, have increasingly allowed the rich of the world to cheat disability and postpone death. This indefinite extension of life relies not just on technological advancements but on a ready supply of vital, and healthy, body parts. Today the technology of kidney transplants is so developed that they can be performed with relative ease in many parts of the world. Modern medicine has created a demand for transplantable organs. Because of this, there is a rising demand for kidneys in the global market. This is a demand for which a supply can be found – among the poor who have run out of things to sell: The fish are gone, the coconuts are priced too low, and the demand for unskilled labour not as high as that for kidneys.



Today there is a blackmarket peddling human kidneys to those who can afford to buy them. Prices range from as little as USD1,000 for an Indian kidney, USD2,700 for a Romanian one, and USD10,000 for one that comes from Turkey. An international kidney bazaar, albeit underground, already exists, prompting some surgeons and public-health officials to argue for a market-oriented approach that will enable those who want to purchase an organ to do so openly. Already, in many countries, legal barriers to the organ trade are crumbling.



This commodification of the human body is part of a global trend in which life and nature are for sale. The world has truly become a marketplace where everything – including human life, organs, and genetic material – is a commodity that commands a price. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is seeing the emergence of corporate control not just over products but also over knowledge and life forms. Human cells have been patented by private companies, as has genetic material from plants and animals. Biotechnology firms have moved genes from species to species, creating new, genetically engineered organisms that are sold globally. And, just as biotechnology is restructuring life, the emergence of nanotechnology, whose commercial applications include the manufacture and replication of machinery and end products that have been constructed from the atom up, will restructure matter and further entrench corporate ownership of essential knowledge, life forms and matter.

*Ricky, a farmer who dropped out of third grade because the nearest school was 11 kilometres from his home, bought a motorcycle and a karaoke machine after selling his kidney.*

Unless these trends are challenged the future will surely be one of increasing surveillance, as technology makes it easier for states and corporations to monitor a whole range of human activity. It also augurs new forms of life – human cyborgs with computer-chip implants that can control thoughts and feelings, or other forms of machine-human mixes; performance-enhanced humans with exceptional motor skills or mental alertness; genetically engineered designer babies; robots with artificial life and artificial intelligence. The boundary lines will be blurred. What is life? What is human? What is matter? What really matters?

This redefinition of what were once sacred categories is driven by high-tech global oligopolies that dominate life- and matter-controlling technologies. Never have transnational corporations been so rich or so powerful; neither has their reach been as global. Nor has the range of their product lines and business activities been so vast. Never have they invested so much overseas or bought up so many companies abroad. The modern world is one marked by the unquestioning belief in the virtue of markets and the intrusion of corporations in many aspects of life.

In this globalised world, however, there are grossly unequal terms of inclusion. Kidney sellers have found that their role in the global economy is that of body-part suppliers. Others will join the throngs of migrants to rich countries in the hope of finding employment and a better life. A few fortunate enough will be successful, but many more will be stopped at the increasingly impenetrable gates of Fortress North.

Certainly, both in the North and the South, many will find a place as producers or consumers of goods and services that are churned out by the global marketplace. Many more, however, will be left out, part of the redundant multitudes consigned to poverty, alienation and misery.

The sad reality is that despite increasing levels of global wealth and giant leaps in technological development, global poverty and inequity are at higher levels now than 30 years ago. Today over a billion people live in extreme poverty. Even as science has made possible the most sophisticated life-saving and life-extending technologies, the majority of those who live on this planet still don't have access to quality health care.

The most troubling paradox is that even as the world is producing more food than before, with countries like China, India, and Brazil emerging as top agricultural producers, there are more hungry peo-



*Biotechnology firms have moved genes from species to species, creating new, genetically engineered organisms that are then sold globally.*

ple now than in the past. While global food production has outpaced population growth in the last 35 years, the number of undernourished in the developing world continues to grow. Despite overflowing granaries, India has more hungry people than any country on earth: as many as 350 million or about one third of its citizens according to a recent estimate by the United Nations' World Food Programme.

And yet, India in the last few years has fully embraced 'globalisation'. Hi-tech outsourcing centres in cities such as Hyderabad, and Bangalore stand out as models of the new prosperity that foreign investment and a neo-liberal economic policy can bring about. The mechanisation of agriculture has resulted in surpluses of wheat and rice; India today is also one of the world's leading producers of fruits, vegetables, and milk. Yet millions still go hungry, their misery exacerbated by the withdrawal of state subsidies on power and agriculture, the lack of state investment in rural infrastructure, corruption and natural disasters like droughts and floods. In Andhra Pradesh and many other states in India, thousands of cotton farmers commit suicide every year due to indebtedness.

While hunger haunts the poor, overnutrition, a new kind of malnutrition from diets high in calories but low in nutrients, imperils the affluent. With food being so cheap and so abundant in the industrialised world, many in the rich countries suffer from diseases such as stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart ailments, and certain forms of cancer from eating too much of the wrong kinds of food. Already, the World Health Organisation has identified obesity as a 'global public health epidemic'. In the United States, obesity is second to smoking as a cause of preventable deaths. Misery afflicts the affluent as well.

The scale of human suffering in an increasingly rich, technologically advanced, informed, and networked world is made more disturbing by a sense among many that such suffering cannot be helped. Globalisation is widely seen as inevitable. Market mechanisms from the village to the global levels are deemed superior to all others by most economists. They, and the policy- and decision-makers they advise, hold the primacy of the market to be inviolable; the withdrawal of the state from important spheres of human activity to be preferable; and its replacement by corporations desirable, because they are considered to be the more rational, more efficient and less 'political' option.

This kind of thinking, especially in global institutions that are supposed to address the world's most pressing problems, leaves little room

for more innovative and far-reaching solutions. The alternatives being posed to the gospel of globalisation are often seen as extreme and uninformed. Global institutions, to a considerable extent in the hands of rich countries and transnational corporations, are imposing on the rest of the world a view of development based on ‘free trade’ and ‘free’ and ‘open’ markets. This single formula for all ignores the diversity of economic systems that exist in the world, including those in the North, and claims that neo-liberal capitalism is the ideal to which the rest of humanity should aspire.

Furthermore, the political spaces for dissent are shrinking and the social spheres where dissent thrives – academia, mass media, civil society – are themselves increasingly being brought under the spell of the market. The shrinking spaces, meanwhile, provide fertile ground for extremisms and fundamentalisms (Christian, Islamic, Hindu), making civilised discourse more and more difficult. In this situation, war and violence take the place of negotiation and dialogue.

Many have similarly shown how the gospel of ‘sustainable development’ has been infected by the neo-liberal ethos. The prevailing orthodoxy today is that sustainable development must be promoted by continued international financing and increased free trade. It is assumed that environmental protection can take place only in ‘free’ markets, with a minimum of state intervention, and with the cooperation of industry. The contribution to environmental ruin of free (but unequal) trade, of the plunder by corporations, and of global financial institutions that mire poor countries in debt and force them to undertake environmentally unsound policies is glossed over. Moreover, the current paradigm focuses on poverty, when the problems are as much overconsumption and uneven development, which markets have tragically and spectacularly failed to address.

Meanwhile, ecological catastrophes are looming on the horizon: carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere may triple pre-industrial levels by the end of this century. Even if action is taken now by implementing the Kyoto Treaty carbon dioxide levels will double – meaning more intense storms, droughts, spreading deserts, sea level rise submerging island nations and coastal areas, and retreating glaciers in the Himalaya.

### *Looking Back: The time of What Now*

Thirty years ago, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation hosted a series of meetings, bringing together a group of people from the North and the South concerned with development. Many of them had ques-

tioned the development orthodoxy that prevailed at the time and were seriously pondering alternatives and imagining a different world order. One of the outcomes of these meetings was the publication of the report *What Now: Another Development*, whose principles have since constituted the backbone of much of the work of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation.



*The political spaces for dissent are shrinking and the social spheres where dissent thrives – academia, mass media, civil society – are themselves increasingly being brought under the spell of the market.*

At the time of *What Now*, the problem was defined as development, or rather, the lack of it, that consigned most of the world's peoples to lives of poverty and misery. To many of those looking at the state of the world then, the problem was fundamentally that of unequal economic relations between a few dominant countries and the majority of dominated countries. The global divide was seen as that between the North and the South, the First World of rich industrialised countries and the Third World made up of poor and 'underdeveloped' nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

A majority held that the rich countries exploited the poor ones, taking advantage of their natural resources while selling them expensive manufactured products from the North. There was hence a crisis in development, as the majority who were poor did not have the means – the knowledge, skills, capital, and technology – to develop an industrial base and reach a level of 'progress' equal to that of the First World. They were consigned to a 'periphery' that was mired in poverty and 'underdevelopment'. At that time, it was thought that infusions of foreign capital, in the form of loans and foreign aid as well as knowledge and technology from the industrialised 'centre' would bridge the global divide. The North was the model to which poor nations should aspire, and it was a matter of transplanting to the South the economic, political, and social structures of the 'developed' world, including systems of feeding, housing, and educating its people.

It seemed a simple, straightforward notion, and an entire industry providing loans and aid to poor countries sprang up. But the reality was far more complex. By the 1970s, it had become clear to the more insightful thinkers in both the North and the South that the problems of the Third World could not be resolved simply by mimicking the solutions that had been tried in the North. Moreover, it was becoming obvious that development was not simply a matter of enabling economies to grow so the benefits would trickle down to the poor. On the contrary, the fixation with growth was itself a problem, as it neglected issues of equity (growth seldom trickled down), environmental degradation, and the increasing dependence of the Third World on infusions of aid, knowledge, and capital from the First.

The 1970s was the time when concerns about the pollution of the air, the rivers, and the seas led to a realisation that economic growth came at a stiff ecological price. In 1972, world leaders met in Stockholm to assess environmental problems and draw up a plan for the conservation of the biosphere.

At about the same time, E F Schumacher, who was strongly influenced by Buddhism, preached frugal living in an endangered planet. His book *Small Is Beautiful*, published in 1975, and, later, the posthumously edited volume *Small Is Possible*, became a lifestyle guide to a whole generation of ecologically conscious people. The ‘deep ecology’ movement and other non-anthropocentric groups emerged, often giving prominence to non-Western and indigenous cultures and experiences as a critique of the materialism and environmental deterioration of Western culture. In 1972, scientists and economists of the Club of Rome met and wrote deeply alarmist projections on a cataclysmic future in the book, *The Limits to Growth*, which influenced many nascent Green movements in Europe and elsewhere. As it turned out, the prophets of planetary doom underestimated the Earth’s capacity to adapt and change and its ability to heal – despite the scenarios in *Limits to Growth* we are still here. Some of the crises that were forecast have turned out to be either exaggerated or wrong. The Malthusian pronouncements of a population explosion and depleting resources were off the mark. Globally, population growth has gone down dramatically, even though there are regional hotspots. However, the message that there are environmental limits laid the ground for a growing environmental movement within parliamentary politics and civil society.

The early Greens spawned a whole political movement in Europe, which linked up with similar movements in other parts of the world and made ecological thinking a part of the modern credo. And when confronted with a global crisis like acid rain, and later, ozone depletion, the international community showed that when conditions were right, and powerful interests were not too threatened, it could act quite rationally and pragmatically in a time-bound manner to reduce the production and use of pollutants.

The mid-1970s were also a period of heightened Third World assertiveness. The Non-Aligned Movement was gaining ground. The Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) announced a sharp increase in the price of oil and it seemed that for the first time the poor but resource-rich countries of the South had discovered that collectively they had the power to shake the world. The end of the



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Vietnam War had proved that US military power was not invincible. It seemed that the existing world order was coming apart and a new one, more just and more attuned to the needs of the world's poor, was possible. The UN General Assembly adoption of the 'Declaration of the Establishment of a New International Economic Order' (NIEO) in May 1974 was perhaps the most striking example of this.

### *Revisiting What Now: Strengths and weaknesses*

The *What Now* report was therefore written with guarded hope. It called for structural transformations in the global order, rather than mere palliatives. What was needed, it said, was to strengthen the capacity of the Third World for self-reliant development and to transform socio-economic and political structures, including redistributing wealth and means of production.

*What Now* criticised the emphasis on growth and the use of gross national product as an indicator of progress. It said: 'Development is a whole. Its ecological, cultural, social, economic, institutional, and political dimensions can only be understood in their systemic interrelationships, and action in its service must be integrated.' The Report further laid out a framework for a holistic view of development – referred to as 'Another Development' – that was based on five core principles:

- › *Need-oriented.* Development should be geared to meeting human needs, both material and non-material.
- › *Endogenous.* It should stem from the heart of each society, which defines in sovereignty its values and the vision of its future.
- › *Self-reliant.* The development of each society should rely primarily on its own strength and resources in terms of its members' energies and its natural and cultural environment.
- › *Ecologically sound.* The resources of the biosphere must be utilised rationally in full awareness of the potential of local ecosystems as well as the global and local outer limits imposed on present and future generations.
- › *Based on structural transformation.* Structural reforms are needed so as to realise the conditions of self-management and participation in decision-making by all those affected by it, from the rural or urban community to the world as a whole, without which the goals above could not be achieved.

*What Now* in 1975 was revolutionary as it challenged existing models and definitions of development. It rejected the idea of a one-size-fits-all development model, stressing instead pluralism, diversity, and the need for societies to tap the reservoirs of their own cultures and histories. Translated into six languages, the Report was widely read in development circles, in the UN, and by influential thinkers and policymakers around the world. Indeed, parts of its critique of the development paradigm eventually became accepted into mainstream thinking. Alternative, non-GNP-oriented indicators of poverty and development, for example, have been developed and are now in use for policymaking by both international organisations and nation-states. In addition, critical analyses of the environmental dimension of development and concepts such as sustainable development are now part of the everyday discourse in the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Several other core elements have not, however, been adopted.



*What Now's* great attraction lay in the freshness of some of its ideas: Another Development – a new paradigm of development, which aims to satisfy basic human needs on the basis of self-reliance and harmony with the environment. Equally important was its emphasis on endogenousness and equity, and its questioning of Western-dominated positivist notions of modernity and progress. *What Now's* call for redressing North–South inequalities and ushering in a more just and humane world order was in many observers' eyes as passionate as it was coherent and well-argued.

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*What Now* began with a simple premise: 'In a world whose gross national product trebled over the last 25 or 30 years, whereas population increased by barely two-thirds, resources are available to satisfy basic needs without transgressing the "outer limits". The question is primarily one of distributing them more equitably.' Nation-states and state-based multilateral institutions would play the pivotal role here, with the United Nations occupying pride of place among them. The world as it then existed, with all its miseries, injustices and inequalities, was unacceptable. It had to be radically reformed.

Thirty years, however, gives us the benefit of hindsight. For sure, *What Now* was path-breaking; it blazed the trail for more critical thinking about development and the problems of the South. But it was also too focused on the development problematique and the creation of a New International Economic Order that it did not touch on issues such as war and peace, gender and indigenous peoples. Moreover, the prescriptions in *What Now* were almost exclusively directed



toward states and global institutions of governance such as the United Nations. These were envisioned to be the primary agents of change. The role of business and civil society was not given the attention it deserved.

*What Now*, however, should be taken in the context of its time, and in the context of the people who put the report together. They were individuals immersed in the problems of Third World development, as intellectuals, policymakers or international civil servants. There was no one in the group from the peace movement that had emerged in the West as a reaction to U.S. intervention in Vietnam. The feminist movement then gaining ground was also not represented (women and gender equality are hardly mentioned in *What Now*). Certainly, the transnational, global justice, pro-democracy social movements that sprang up in the late 1990s were still unheard of then. The 1970s did not portend the coming together of ecological, feminist, social justice, indigenous, peace and ethnic justice groups in a still-amorphous movement united in the search for new solutions to counteract the problems of globalisation.

In 1975, globalisation as a discourse did not yet exist. The world was still frozen in the Cold War and the age of triumphalism of global markets and the neo-liberal doctrine, a consequence of the collapse of the Soviet Union, was a generation away. Today there is only one superpower, and its hegemony is evident in the market, the battlefields, the mass media and the minds of many.

While the global reach of transnational corporations (TNCs) was cited in the 1975 Report, their power then was confined largely to dominating the market for Third World natural resources, bought cheaply by TNCs, which sold back to the Third World manufactured goods and services. Today the power of corporations far exceeds what they wielded 30 years ago. They not only have a monopoly of goods and services, but also of capital, which can now move around freely and instantaneously. In addition, corporations control to a large extent the mass media, Information Technology and the frontiers of knowledge. Moreover, they exert significant influence on the global governance, trade, and financial institutions that set the rules for the new world order. Thirty years ago, development was the paradigm peddled by these institutions; today globalisation is the new mantra.

Despite its shortcomings, *What Now* held an optimistic, emancipatory view of global realities and passionately advocated ways of changing them for the better. Its overwhelming concern was to transform

the world into a more equal, peaceful, and environmentally sound place in which all of humanity, especially the poor, have a stake. The methods it espoused could be faulted, but hardly the moral clarity of its vision of a more humane future.

### *Development Today*

Thirty years after *What Now*, the bulk of the alternative views expressed there and elsewhere has not materialised, but provides still largely a marginal, ‘counterpoint’ perspective. Certainly, alternative development thinking and practical initiatives have proliferated and matured over the years, constituting a steadily more sophisticated area. But they have had limited impact at the level of policy and state action. While significant concepts and terms with the potential to transform development practice, such as ‘sustainability’, ‘participation’, ‘partnership’ and ‘equity’, have become part of the established development discourse, they have not necessarily been translated into new patterns of concrete action. Despite the numerous drawbacks it is associated with, the mainstream development paradigm continues to hold sway.

Perhaps the most striking expression of contemporary, mainstream development is found in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Signed by the heads of states of 189 countries in the year 2000, albeit without wide popular consultation, the MDGs represent a common agenda for the international community. Appearing highly practical, measurable and feasible, the MDGs have a strong appeal. They have been firmly endorsed by international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, and have also become a major focus for many NGOs and civil society organisations, mobilising support and engagement across different areas of expertise and geographical locations.

Any commitment on the part of the international community to rally around a common framework for combating poverty, disease, hunger and environmental degradation is laudable. In themselves, the MDGs could represent important stepping stones for a more humane, just and sustainable world. Yet, there are limitations that should be recognised.

To begin with, development is perceived as a linear and uniform social process towards Western-style modernisation and increasing economic growth, and the only way forward. The challenge for poor countries is to catch up with the world’s rich nations. Not only does this posit an antiquated worldview which divides the globe into a

‘developed’ North and an ‘underdeveloped’ South. It also fails to recognise the problems that have arisen in the materially rich countries as a result of ‘development’. In other words, the framework appears markedly homogenising and leaves little room for a diversity of development options and self-reliant, ‘endogenous’ approaches.

From this angle it is logical that the goals are almost entirely geared towards developing countries. The fundamental goal of poverty reduction, for example, seems framed as a discrete phenomenon disconnected from structural issues of central concern for North–South economic relations, such as trade regulations, financial flows, investment conditions, the power of transnational companies, levels of indebtedness and labour rights. Instead of recognising the global power dynamics and international political and economic structures and interests as determinants of poverty, there is little contextual analysis. Poverty and development, it seems, are problems situated in a power vacuum.

There is, furthermore, an unquestioning belief in the benefits of the free market and economic growth, and in continued efforts towards privatisation and export-orientation as general solutions to a range of social and economic problems. Although economic growth is necessary for improving the conditions of the very poor, it is far from sufficient. As development scholar Su-ming Khoo puts it: ‘Markets, no matter how fast they grow, do not distribute health, education, clean water, sanitation or shelter.’ If growth is not coupled with social and political reforms beneficial to the least advantaged, social improvement will not be achieved. Poverty must be approached as the multi-

*Development is perceived as a linear and uniform social process towards Western-style modernisation and increasing economic growth.*



faceted problem it is, encompassing such factors as employment possibilities, access to basic services and availability of natural resources crucial for people's livelihood, among others. It cannot be reduced to being primarily a problem of lack of capital.

Moreover, the current emphasis on economic growth is largely discussed without reference to the earth's ecological carrying capacity and the present environmental deterioration. Little demand is made on the rich countries whose ecological footprints and pollution levels far exceed those of the poor countries. Today – thirty years after *What Now*, almost twenty years after the Brundtland report and more than a decade after the Rio conference – the biophysical 'outer limits' are still at best seen as marginal. The MDG framework regrettably fails to engage in a much-needed debate on the problems of economic growth, the evident limits to it and the less than clear-cut relationship between growth and quality of life.

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This view of 'development' propagated by decision-makers around the world has direct bearing on the life chances and living conditions of many people, from the kidney donors on the Philippine island of Siargao to the cotton farmers of Andhra Pradesh in India and many other groups across the South and the North. In the name of 'development', trade agreements are being signed. Markets are being opened. Technologies are being developed and subsidised. Aid projects are being designed.

It is difficult to foretell with certainty what life on Siargao island would be like in the coming decades. Given present trends, it does not seem likely that Siargao would be a thriving, 'developed', mass-consumption society that has finally 'caught up' with Europe, North America and the East Asian Tigers. Many may find such a vision enticing, but it is an impossible mirage. If the 'modernisation' and 'development' project is pursued along current trajectories, both the Siargao of the future, and even some of the more affluent societies in the North, would probably be marked by greater division and inequity, with their ecological resources spent and many of their people mired in poverty.

Echoing the spirit of *What Now*, there must be other ways forward. Can we imagine a different future guided by another, more humane understanding of 'development'? What other, viable ways are there for the people of Siargao to make a living in an increasingly glob-

alised world? Indeed, what movements and ideas in ‘peripheral’ corners of the world are now growing in influence and may contain the seeds of different, and vastly better, modes of living? What proposals and visions for a deepened democracy, radically new forms of governance and organisation of the global economy exist?

The future is not written in stone. Many paths are possible. Let us examine these closely as we envision a better future. What Next?




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# From *What Now* to *What Next* Reflections on three decades of international politics and development

*Praful Bidwai*

It was no mere coincidence that *What Now*<sup>1</sup> was launched just when the world was witnessing momentous events, which would soon define a new era. The globe had just been convulsed by the Oil Price Shock of 1973, marking the end of the era of cheap petroleum and the Second Industrial Revolution based on it. The Golden Age of Capitalism – which began with the end of World War II and which unleashed unprecedented prosperity and a reduction of inequalities in the Northern countries, and some rise in incomes in the newly independent Southern countries too – was in eclipse. The high noon of conventional post-War developmentalism was coming to an end. The dollar-gold link stood severed and the dollar began to decline.

Indeed, in the mid-1970s, global capitalism itself seemed vulnerable. Dire warnings came from the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972. Soon came Susan George's *How the Other Half Dies* circulated at the World Food Conference of 1974 and the revelations of Barnett and Mueller's *Global Reach: Power of the Multinational Corporation* (1974), one of the first major studies of the TNCs. Put in the context provided by the Club of Rome's *The Limits to Growth* and *The Ecologist's* 'Blueprint for Survival' (1973), these spoke of a serious crisis of viability and sustainability of the global capitalist system.

Politically too, many developments highlighted the growing global sense of solidarity, unity and justice, including opposition to General Pinochet in Chile, who had overthrown Salvador Allende in a violent coup. Richard Nixon was ousted as the President of the United States in 1974. Portugal began to withdraw from its colonies in Africa. And the Vietnam War drew to an end in 1975. These historic retreats marked a new shift in the movement for decolonisation and national liberation, especially from Asia towards Africa.

Civil society was yet to emerge as a major player in world affairs. But new social movements were already in the ascendant: environmen-

<sup>1</sup> *What Now: Another Development, Development Dialogue* 1975:1/2, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Uppsala, 1975.

talism, feminism, indigenous people's self-assertion, anti-racist mobilisation, grassroots democracy, etc. The counter-cultures that took root in the 1960s flourished well into the 1970s. And new ideas about re-ordering the world along equitable and just lines were abroad.

One of the most powerful of these was the project for a New International Economic Order (NIEO), which would redress North–South inequalities and make development a right of the world's peoples. Another seminal idea was that environmental protection and sustainability impose 'outer limits' upon economic growth and consumption; these limits must be respected.

Many of these ideas and projects were strongly *state*-centric. At the national level, they placed much faith in the power of the First System – the new, still evolving structures of the national state, and its ability, both independently, and through institutions like the Non-Aligned Movement, to bring about progressive social change. The key instrument would be Keynesian state intervention and import-substituting industrialisation. Full-blown neoliberalism and Structural Adjustment Programmes sponsored by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were not yet on the agenda.

At the international level, the focus of these pro-reform ideas was squarely on the United Nations, its specialised agencies and other multilateral bodies, including the Bretton Woods institutions. Central to them was development, although this meant rescuing development from its own epigones.

What has actually emerged in place of these visions and proposals is a world that is better in some respects, considerably worse in many more respects, and, in a few respects at least, a monstrosity. Today's world is more unjust; more skewed in the concentration and distribution of wealth between and within countries;<sup>2</sup> more cruel to its underprivileged people; more than ever in the grip of predatory capitalist corporations; more violent, strife-torn and turbulent; and more divided than ever before along religious, ethnic and social faultlines.

Planet Earth may be on the brink of an ecological catastrophe through global warming, itself related to runaway consumption of fossil fuels and other exhaustible materials, especially on the part of the rich. In place of the peace that the ending of the Cold War promised to bring, the world could well suffer yet another century of war. This could be



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2 UNDP, *Human Development Report 2005*, 'Trends in Global Income Distribution, 1970-2000', Oxford University Press, 2005.



far bloodier than the terrible century – human history’s most violent – that has just gone by, leaving some 180 million people dead.<sup>3</sup>

### *Understanding the world 30 years on*

Today’s globalised world is deeply contradictory. On the one hand, there is growing interdependence, exchange and interaction between many different parts of the globe. On the other hand, there are huge swathes of land that are virtually excluded from any meaningful interaction with the rest of the world. They have experienced stagnation or decline, want and insecurity, mounting social chaos, and even outright economic and political devastation through war and famine. About two-fifths of the world’s people live in such societies.

Humanity’s accumulated knowledge and its access to resources and technology have advanced adequately for it to abolish poverty, mass deprivation and drudgery, not to speak of degrading forms of labour. Yet, about a third of humanity lives on less than two dollars a day. Some 1.2 billion people have to make do with just one dollar a day.<sup>4</sup> Malnourishment and starvation are prevalent in scores of countries.

Again, the world has never been more ripe for democratisation, equity and balance in its social and political arrangements. Yet, on the other hand, patterns of domination, hegemony and concentration prevail in countless areas: skewed social relations, entrenched inequalities between classes and sexes, warped economic structures, despotic forms of corporate control, manipulative politics within countries, and, of course, structurally unequal relations between the global North and the global South.

Over the past 30 years, the world has undoubtedly registered impressive gains in the average life expectancy of its population (from 60 years at birth, to 67 years). Infant mortality has decreased substantially (from 96 to 56 per 1,000 live births).<sup>5</sup> Modern medicine has helped reduce the toll on human health from several communicable diseases. But malnourishment remains widely prevalent among children and

3 See Kolko, G., *Another Century of War?*, New Press, New York, 2002.

4 See various annual editions of United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report*, Oxford University Press. Also see the latest *Report on the World Social Situation 2005: The Inequality Predicament*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations ([www.un.org/esa.socdev](http://www.un.org/esa.socdev))

5 UNDP, *Human Development Report*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

lactating mothers even in countries that have experienced an overall rise in health indices.

The use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides may have helped raise crop yields through Green Revolution techniques since the mid-1970s. But the use of chemicals has had harmful effects, including a fall in the average sperm count among males<sup>6</sup> and the spread of new diseases.

Literacy rates have more than doubled in the developing world – no mean achievement for some 2 billion people. But there has been a substantial erosion of traditional knowledge of the local environment and micro-climate – and hence of people’s ability to cope with adverse natural phenomena such as floods.

### *Some changes for the better*

Thus the global balance sheet 30 years after *What Now* is not wholly negative or bleak. Rather, it is mixed, with many positive features, which are however outweighed by negative developments. Consider some positive aspects of the balance sheet:

The process of decolonisation and independence has continued despite the general pattern of domination and hegemony by powerful states. Thus, apartheid was replaced by majority rule in South Africa and several small states won independence in Africa and the Pacific. The last vestiges of classical colonialism will soon be eradicated. Freedom has at last opened up the possibility of participatory democracy and brought millions of hitherto disenfranchised people into public life – for the first time ever. This, like the spread of formal or minimal democracy based on periodic elections to an estimated 60 per cent of the world’s countries, is not an insubstantial achievement.<sup>7</sup>

Another gain is the growth of pluralism and cultural diversity in a majority of the world’s countries. Thus, today almost no country is ethnically or culturally homogenous. The world’s nearly 200 coun-

6 See Carlsen, E., Giwercman, A., et al., ‘Evidence for decreasing quality of semen during the past 50 years’, *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 305, 1992, pp. 609–613, and Swan, S. H., Elkin, E. P., et al., ‘Have sperm densities declined? A reanalysis of global trend data’, *Environmental Health Perspectives*, Vol. 105, 1997, pp. 1228–1232.

7 In 1989, the number of countries with electoral democracy was 69. In 2004, it had increased to 119. See ‘Freedom in the World 2005: Civic Power and Electoral Politics’, Freedom House. ([www.freedomhouse.org/research/survey2005.htm](http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/survey2005.htm)).

tries include some 5,000 ethnic groups. Two-thirds of the total have more than one ethnic or religious group making up at least 10 per cent of the population.<sup>8</sup>



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Of the 182 countries recently surveyed (incidentally, by the CIA), only 30 have minority ethnic and religious groups accounting for 10 per cent or less of their population. In another 42 countries, their share is between 10 and 25 per cent. And in 110, it is 25 per cent or more. The last two categories account for 69 per cent of the world's population.<sup>9</sup> In many Northern countries, the number of migrants has steadily risen, as has diversity in their sources of origin. Their political representation has increased too, albeit unevenly.

Despite the persistence of skewed global economic structures and unequal trade-related treaties that seek to cut the industrialisation ladder from under their feet, some countries (most notably in Southeast and East Asia, and to a limited extent, in Latin America) have managed to achieve industrial growth and improve their public services and social welfare. In general, standards of living, including access to health, food, shelter and education, have improved for perhaps a third, if not a half, of the population of the global South over the past 30 years.

Similarly, although deforestation rages on in the Amazon basin and in parts of Southeast Asia, some other parts of the world have in recent years witnessed a modest to moderate improvement in their forest cover and quality of air – after a long period of decline. Urban congestion and pollution have decreased in some countries. Although the growth of renewable sources of energy is still far too slow in relation to their potential, it is noteworthy in countries such as Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, India, and even China (the world leader in solar-thermal technologies).

At an altogether different level, the end of the Cold War has resulted in a receding of the risk of full-scale nuclear war or a nuclear exchange between the Superpowers, which could have led to unspeakable devastation, indeed mass extermination. Aggressive US nuclear policies and Washington's bellicose response to the September 11, 2001 attacks have set back the prospect for global nuclear disarmament for the moment. But other forces, including pro-disarmament governments, civil society groups and a worldwide Mayors' Campaign for Peace, will not let that agenda vanish altogether.

<sup>8</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, and CIA, *World Fact Book*, Potomac Books, Dulles, 2005.

Although the expected peace dividend has not materialised, the end of *bloc* rivalry has meant the cessation of many proxy wars in the Third World, and some reduction in military expenditures in Europe and some other parts of the world. Although internal conflicts have not ended, there has been some progress in the cessation of hostilities and conflict resolution in many countries.

Some of these changes are admittedly reversible. But the very fact that they have occurred is significant and points to the optimistic possibilities in today's world, despite all its flaws and embedded inequalities. Typically, such positive developments have come about not merely as the result of, or as an adjunct to, 'normal' social, economic and political processes, but because of *conscious* pro-active efforts and special initiatives launched to correct imbalances caused by those processes. Thus, it is not reliance on the market and market-led growth that has enhanced welfare in many countries, but protective social security measures on the part of the state, or the creation of rights and entitlements for the underprivileged.

A heartening development is the growing *resistance* to corporate globalisation and the 'natural' tendency of capital to build on the existing structures of inequality and widen it further. For instance, left to the mercy of commercial interests alone, forestry practices based on high-intensity logging would have quickly destroyed all virgin rainforests and a good deal of plant biodiversity. Yet, governments have intervened just in time to save some of these rainforests and control logging. Similarly, the public has intervened to promote equitable urban transportation policies and discourage private transport – thus contributing to a reduction of pollution levels. Again, the promotion of renewable energy sources involves not just financial encouragement, but universal interest-based arguments.

At another level, it was never going to be easy to keep the disarmament flag flying in the face of US recalcitrance and refusal to undertake any reasonable arms-reduction commitments, but the peace movement has interrogated and challenged the terms of this militarist discourse.

A critical question is how these positive trends might be sustained and strengthened, and how some of them might be given institutional expression and support.



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### *Many more changes for the worse*

Undeniable as these positive changes are, they pale in comparison with the negative trends that have dominated global developments over the past three decades. Consider a few salient indicators. North–South disparities have greatly worsened. Measured as the ratio of average incomes in the industrialised and developing countries, they have risen from roughly 30:1 at the end of World War II, to 60:1 in the 1970s, to over 90:1 now.<sup>10</sup> Gross and growing imbalances characterise the structure of the world economy. Industrial wealth is concentrated in fewer than 50 countries. The distribution of technology and patents is more skewed than ever before.

The vast majority of the world’s peoples continue to live in predominantly agricultural and biomass-based societies. Terms of trade between what they export – largely, primary commodities – and what they import – processed goods, manufactures and services – have steadily moved against them. The emergence and growth of new technologies, which were supposed to have the potential to reduce North–South gaps – such as telecommunications, computers and information technology – have in many ways led to wider disparities. The Digital Divide is an ugly reality. About a third of the world is sinking into chronic stagnation and decline and faces a bleak prospect for the foreseeable future.

This global economic apartheid is mirrored both in the South and the North by growing internal chasms within societies. The Northern countries, which half a century ago promised their peoples full or near-full employment, universal access to the amenities of life, including health, education, and shelter, and a decent degree of social security, have retrogressed from that goal and increasingly become ‘one-third–two-thirds’ societies. One-third of their population is affluent and secure; another third is marginalised, depressed and has only a grim future; and the rest hovers uncertainly between the two strata.

In the South, many countries are rapidly becoming ‘one-eighth–seven-eighths’ societies – where only about the top one-eighth of the population is economically secure and is incorporated into the modern economy and benefits from globalisation, while the rest of the

<sup>10</sup> See various editions of UNDP, *Human Development Report*. According to the 2005 edition of the report the richest 20 per cent of the population account for 74 per cent of the income while the poorest 20 per cent account for 2 per cent of the income.

population remains deprived of basic amenities and afflicted by poverty and disease. The prospect of redressal of these gross imbalances is rapidly receding.

Much of the global South, home to four-fifths of the world's population, remains plagued by communicable diseases and disorders caused by water-borne pathogens, which were controlled or eradicated in the North long before powerful new medicines were invented. And yet, the South's peoples also face the onslaught of 'new', lifestyle-related, afflictions such as heart disease and strokes. More than 2 billion people are simply unable to realise their rudimentary potential and capabilities as human beings.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the world finds itself in great turmoil and conflict. One and a half decades after the Cold War ended, the number of armed conflicts raging around the world has indeed decreased from a high of about 50 to roughly 30. But this is still unconscionable. More than half the total number of armed conflicts recorded during 1946–2003 remained active in the post-1989 period. As if to nullify this trend, armed conflicts have become more ferocious and bloody. The post-Cold War world has witnessed an unprecedented number of genocidal wars, especially in Africa. Most armed conflicts have been internal (in 2003, 26 out of 29) rather than inter-state.<sup>11</sup>

This state of the world speaks of great social churning and disorder, economic uncertainty and decline in many countries, displacement and out-migration of large numbers of people, growing ethnic tension and conflict, a considerable weakening of democratic political structures, proneness to violence, greater militarisation of daily life, and widespread violations of human rights in perhaps close to half the countries of the world.<sup>12</sup>

11 See Harbom, L., ed, *States in Armed Conflict 2003*, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2004.

12 The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Fund for Peace (US) have recently developed a 'Failed States Index', based on 12 criteria. These include mounting demographic pressures, massive movement of refugees and internally displaced persons, a legacy of vengeance-seeking group grievance, chronic and sustained human fighting, uneven economic development along group lines, sharp and/or severe economic decline, criminalisation or delegitimation of the state, progressive deterioration of public services, widespread violation of human rights, security apparatus as 'state within a state', the rise of factionalised elites, and the intervention of other states or external actors. In their recent report, carried in *Foreign Policy* (July-August 2005), they have identified as many as 60 different



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A good deal of the responsibility for this appalling state of the world lies in the failure of governance and the growing crisis of the state in many countries of the global South. However, this is inseparable from and has been greatly aggravated in recent years by the skewed structure of world trade, unequal investment regimes, failure of aid, and the galloping process of globalisation under a meanly neoliberal policy regime, which works against the South.

Neoliberal globalisation has weakened the state in scores of countries to a point where it has lost the capacity to provide even a modicum of public services, or intervene to correct gross imbalances in society. The world has never been more turbulent and unequal than it is today.

### *Corporate concentration and the global consumer*

Some of the greatest inequalities take the form of growing asymmetries between the vast power of large corporations and the feeble economic strength of whole nations: the combined sales of the top 200 firms are 18 times the annual income of the 1.2 billion people – roughly one quarter of humanity – who live in severe poverty. The sales of the top 200 companies comprise nearly a third of the economic activity in the world; in absolute terms they are higher than the combined GDP of all but 10 countries of the world. Such monopoly control has enabled corporations to earn unimaginable profits: Between 1983 and 1999, the revenues of the top 200 firms grew 362 percent, allowing the small elite that controls them to enjoy unprecedented levels of wealth.<sup>13</sup>

However, in many ways, the true faultlines do not run between the global North and the global South or the First and Third Worlds. Rather, they run between different classes and social groups in *both* parts of the world. There is a South within many countries of the North – a largish chunk of society that is characterised by chronic poverty, unemployment and economic disempowerment. And there is a North within the South, which is comprised of enclaves of affluence, privilege and high consumption of resources comparable to the

› countries under the 'failed state' category. Among the notable countries are Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Indonesia, Iraq, Bangladesh, Venezuela, Pakistan, Ukraine and Nigeria. The Fund's longer list comprises 76 countries, with the additional inclusion of India, China, Thailand, Malaysia, Brazil, Mexico, Algeria, Morocco and Libya ([www.fundforpeace.org](http://www.fundforpeace.org)).

<sup>13</sup> Cavanagh, J., and Anderson, S., *Top 200. The Rise of Corporate Global Power*, Institute for Policy Studies, Washington D.C., 2000.

consumption pattern of the elite of the Northern or OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries.

The size of the affluent class in the South countries has been growing. According to a Merrill Lynch estimate, as many as 3.3 million of the world's 7.6 million super-affluent people with financial assets exceeding USD1 million each (excluding immovable property) live in the Southern countries.<sup>14</sup> This super-affluent group is only one small component of the globalised consumerist class that has now crystallised across national boundaries and continents.

Another study estimates that the size of this consumerist class, with an average per capita income of USD7,000 (in purchasing power parity), is about 1.7 billion people. Remarkably, about one-half of them are located in countries of the global South!<sup>15</sup>

The wealth and income disparities between North and South are only one part of the pattern of domination/subjugation and concentration. Another, perhaps even more profound, asymmetry lies in the North's deprecations upon the global environment and the transfer of the resultant burden to the South.

A new global division of labour is being consolidated: polluting, dirty and hazardous industries and activities are being shifted to the South. These also include cotton cultivation, shrimp-farming in hatcheries, mining of hazardous ores and minerals, and the growing of fishmeal for, say, the 'clean' salmon of the North. The South is the prime location for the production of toxic chemicals and fertilisers, not to speak of disposal and dumping of industrial and municipal wastes. The North reaps the benefit of this division even as it consumes about three-fourths of the planet's resources.

### *Climate change is here!*

At the same time, global overconsumption of resources – in particular, fossil fuels – is causing climate change at an alarming rate. The effects of the change are not internationally uniform. The brunt of the damage will be borne by the most vulnerable people – for instance, in coastal Senegal and Bangladesh, in parts of the Indian Ocean and



*Global warming, or a generalised rise in ambient temperatures across the world, is not some distant prospect. It is already causing the Himalayan snow-caps to thin, causing unprecedented and unpredictable floods in countries such as Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, India and China.*

14 Merrill Lynch and Capgemini, *Eighth Annual World Wealth Report*, 2004.

15 World Watch Institute, *State of the World 2004: Consumption by the Numbers 2004*, ([www.worldwatch.org/press/news/2004/01/07](http://www.worldwatch.org/press/news/2004/01/07)). See also studies by the Wuppertal Institute of Climate, Energy and Environment, Germany ([www.wupperinst.org](http://www.wupperinst.org)).



the South Pacific, and in parts of the Caribbean. The poor in these countries are liable to be affected far more catastrophically by climate change than people living in the North.

Global warming, or a generalised rise in ambient temperatures across the world, is not some distant prospect. It is *already* causing the Himalayan snow-caps to thin, causing unprecedented and unpredictable floods in countries such as Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, India and China. Should this process continue unchecked, over 2 billion people in Asia, whose main source of surface waters are the rivers originating in the Tibetan plateau, will be affected in dire ways.

The risk of a major atmospheric catastrophe is not fully appreciated by the general public, but insurance companies are well aware of it. *Storm Warning*, a report released in late 2002 by Munich Re, the global insurance concern, calculates the overall economic losses from natural and man-made catastrophes in 2002 at a staggering USD55 billion, compared to USD35 billion in the previous year.<sup>16</sup>

At a less catastrophic level, global warming is leading to the spread of diseases like malaria into regions where it was unknown (such as the Horn of Africa). Even a small rise in sea levels will first destroy nature's protective barriers such as mangroves, and thus greatly magnify the effects of storms, cyclones and tidal waves. At a more advanced stage, rising water levels will submerge low-lying areas, threaten extensive damage to farms and fisheries, and destroy livelihoods. There could be no greater environmental iniquity than this disastrous phenomenon in the South caused mainly by the North's overconsumption.

16 See 'Munich Re 2003 Catastrophe Study – Fatalities up 450 Percent: USD15 Billion Insured Losses', *Insurance Journal*, 30 December 2003. As Dr Gerhard Berz, head of Munich Re's Geo Risks Research Department, states: 'Catastrophe losses are mostly caused by extreme weather events. This was the case in 2002 too. The experience that has been gathered over the years shows that buildings and infrastructure are usually not sufficiently designed to cope with the high strains of extreme weather events. The evidence points to critical extreme wind speeds and precipitation being exceeded with increasing frequency, so that for this reason alone there will inevitably be a stark increase in the loss burdens as well. 2002 was, along with 1998, the warmest year since temperature readings began – and this is evidence of the still unbroken trend of global warming.' The full report is available at [www.munichre.com](http://www.munichre.com).

### *The neoliberal juggernaut*

And yet, the juggernaut of neoliberal developmentalism and consumerism rolls on, powered by governments and multilateral institutions with a stake in policies that favour the privileged and discriminate against the weak. This is the case despite the fact that the principal assumptions and axioms on which neoliberalism is based have been comprehensively discredited or falsified by actual experience. The economic dogma underlying bourgeois developmentalism and neoliberal globalisation remains unshaken by experience or reality.<sup>17</sup>

The triumph of neoliberalism did not come about ‘naturally’ or through the spontaneous decline of Keynesian and neo-Keynesian ideas, or more broadly, through the eclipse of schools of economic thought that see a major role for the state and public action in growth and development.

Rather, the victory was planned and organised consciously by right-wing think-tanks and foundations, which identified and zeroed in on key institutions, media corporations and individuals. They carefully cultivated and funded projects and people who would serve as ardent advocates of that specific ideology. Susan George estimates that as much as USD1 billion has been spent by foundations to promote and sell neoliberal ideas over the past decade or so.<sup>18</sup>

Some of the think-tanks are clearly identifiable, such as the Adam Smith Institute in the UK and the Heritage Foundation in the US. They played a crucial role in the ideological ascendancy of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and drafted neoliberal propaganda material, which was carefully targeted at the corporate media, especially of the News Corporation variety owned by Rupert Murdoch. Sponsoring semi-academic policy-oriented conferences was an important means of gaining adherents to neoliberal ideas from within the university system.

Equally important has been the role of corporate-sponsored event management groups such as the Davos-based World Economic Forum, which receive astounding amounts of publicity in the media as some kind of ‘neutral’ economic ‘experts’, when they are mere extensions or outriders of large multinational corporations.

Thus, in the prevalent establishment discourse, all schools of econom-

<sup>17</sup> This point is further elaborated in Gilbert Rist's article in this volume, 'Before Thinking about *What Next: Prerequisites for alternatives*'.

<sup>18</sup> George, S., *Another World is Possible if...*, Verso, London, 2004.



*In the prevalent establishment discourse, all schools of economics and political economy barring the neoclassical stream have been deliberately marginalised.*

ics and political economy barring the neoclassical stream have been deliberately marginalised. Within the neoclassical spectrum, only the more doctrinaire of New Right schools have been privileged. Meanings of terms such as ‘radical’ and ‘reformer’ have been inverted (especially in the former Communist states), and ‘reform’ (literally, to make things better) has been unethically substituted for the neoliberal restructuring or warping of economies.

Today, the (artificial) hegemony of ‘free market’ ideas seems complete and unshakeable. But it is worth recalling that the ‘free market’ is itself a less-than-legitimate, manipulative, conjoining of two quite different terms – namely, *free enterprise* or *laissez-faire*, with its well-known pitfalls in unduly rewarding only one kind of economic activity, and the *market system* of organising the economy, with all its irrationality, periodic crises, immense destruction of resources, enormous wastefulness and harm to human welfare.

The rise to dominance of economic neoliberalism represents a momentous change in the basic dynamics and character of capitalism in favour of extreme dualism. It carries to completion or consummation the process of transformation of social relations and political decision-making described by Karl Polanyi.<sup>19</sup> Neoliberalism’s sway marks a clean rupture in the conjunction between growing mass production and mass consumption, which was characteristic of Fordism and the US model of capitalism prevalent until the last quarter of the 20th century.

Capitalism thrived for three centuries not only on exploiting ‘backward’ economies and exploiting their natural resources; it also widened and deepened the ‘home market’ and raised the level of consumption of ordinary people, including the working class. Thus, mass prosperity and high corporate profits could go hand in hand for a long time.

This is no longer the case. Under the new ‘model of regulation’, capitalism has adopted technologies, labour processes and methods of production that suit or promote social dualism and growing economic disproportion between workers, on the one hand, and managers and shareholders, on the other, and also between stockholders and top executives, who have come to acquire extraordinary powers. The emphasis is no longer on cheap mass-produced goods that become affordable by the non-affluent because of the economics of scale and low costs and thus deepen the home market. Rather, it is on a high and quick return to capital.

<sup>19</sup> Polanyi, K., *The Great Transformation*, Beacon Publishers, Boston, 1957.

Hundreds of companies have consciously adopted no-union or anti-union policies. McDonald's and Wal-Mart are only two notorious examples. They are, however, among the United States' biggest employers and are being emulated by scores of corporations all over the world. For a century or more, the working class was able to institutionalise into legal guarantees and Constitutions some of its biggest gains, achieved through prolonged, painful and bitterly fought struggles – including the rights to form a union, to minimum wages, to collective bargaining and in many countries, to a decent dignified life with social security.

As union densities fall in one OECD country after another, these gains are rapidly eroding.<sup>20</sup> The power balance between workers and employers has shifted sharply in favour of the latter. In many countries, employers have launched an offensive to undermine workers' fundamental rights.

Workers' bargaining power has badly shrunk under neoliberalism's onslaught, while the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) has emerged omnipotent in 'shareholder-value capitalism'. *Executive Excess*, a report of the Institute for Policy Studies, Washington, finds that after two years of narrowing, the CEO-to-worker wage gap in the US has again been widening. The ratio of CEO-to-worker pay reached 301:1 in 2003, up from 282:1 in 2002. If the minimum wage had increased as quickly as CEO pay since 1990, it would today be USD15.76 per hour, rather than the current USD5.15 per hour.<sup>21</sup>

Neoliberalism has also brought about a major shift in the balance of power between 'old', labour-intensive, 'mass-worker'-oriented and 'heavy' industries, and 'new' or 'light', technology- and 'knowledge'-intensive industries (and importantly, services).

Increasingly, heavy industries that use mass-production methods and an army of blue-collar workers, such as extractive or metallurgical production, bulk chemicals, textiles manufacture, clothing, and shoe-



*The power balance between workers and employers has shifted sharply in favour of the latter. In many countries, employers have launched an offensive to undermine workers' fundamental rights.*

20 OECD *Employment Outlook*, OECD, Paris, 2004.

21 See Institute for Policy Studies, 'Executive Excess 2003: CEOs Win, Workers and Taxpayers Lose' ([www.ips-dc.org](http://www.ips-dc.org)). One rationalisation offered for high executive pay is that CEOs bear tremendous risks and responsibilities for their companies. Yet this report finds that CEOs are far more financially secure than those risking their lives in war. Average CEO pay is 56 times more than the pay for a US Army general with 20 years' experience (USD144,932) and 634 times more than the pay for a starting US soldier (USD12,776).

making, have shifted away from the ‘centre’ of the world economy to the ‘periphery’ in the global South.

The North is concentrating within its borders high-value-added activities, which are, relatively speaking, less raw materials-intensive, demand a high level of skill and are more amenable to computerisation and automation. Even where the developing economies may have made a mark in new service sector areas like Information Technology, the global division of labour remains skewed: low-value-added activities are ‘outsourced’, while the top end of the value chain is controlled from within the North.

### *A contrived triumph*

There are many ways of understanding the ascendancy and acceptance of neoliberalism by powerful states and the greater concentration of corporate power. Neoliberalism has held sway not because it has been successful in legitimising capitalism and making it palatable or acceptable to the world’s peoples, but despite it.

A number of factors explain its dominance: the collapse of the Soviet Union and the seeming disappearance of practical alternatives to the ‘free market’ system, the emergence of new, more aggressive technologies, political-ideological changes in the Euro-trans-Atlantic countries (aided in no small measure by intellectuals and institutions such as universities, themselves allied to power), the transformed role of the mass media as purveyors not of information and reasoned views, but of propaganda and ideological prejudices, and the undermining and silencing of multilateral institutions that once provided an alternative perspective, including the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Centre for Transnational Corporations, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

However, perhaps the single most important reason is *political*: the momentous change wrought by the collapse of the Soviet Union. With this disappeared a restraining or ‘civilising’ influence on capitalism, which right since 1917 forced it to look for ways of self-legitimation through consensus, ‘populist’ programmes such as Roosevelt’s New Deal, or a welfare state system based upon the sharing of wealth and prosperity on a broadly social democratic model. Quite simply, for the past one and a half decades, capital has been under no pressure to make concessions to labour or seek legitimacy and credibility for itself. It can rule unfettered. What has been the effect?

In Western Europe and Japan, neoliberalism has meant a *forced reduction* of the role that governments, development finance institutions and banks played during the boom years of the post-War period (when the German and Japanese ‘miracles’ happened) by *directing* investment into industries, technologies and other activities considered desirable.

In the newly industrialising ‘Asian Tiger’ economies, which boomed from the 1970s to the mid-1990s, neoliberal policies were imposed during the Asian Financial Crisis of the late 1990s to bring about massive policy shifts and a redistribution of assets in favour of global finance capital.<sup>22</sup>

In Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, neoliberalism meant economic slowdown and depression, which impoverished millions of people. It involved the creation and implantation of a new class of private capitalist entrepreneurs, the acceptance of obscene inequalities, and the liquidation or wholesale transfer of gigantic assets (for example in gas and oil, and countless other industries) from the state into private hands. The beneficiaries were typically mafia-style operators and outright criminals, many of them part of the former *Nomenklatura*.



*Natural resources, which could not be colonised and commodified in three centuries of capitalism, are now being privatised and put on the market. These include water, land, beaches and even air.*

<sup>22</sup> Bello, W., *A Siamese Tragedy, Development and Disintegration in Modern Thailand*, Food First Books and Zed Books, London, 1999.

The world over, the neoliberal onslaught has led to the desocialisation and privatisation of wealth on a historically unprecedented scale. Natural resources, which could not be colonised and commodified in three centuries of capitalism, are now being privatised and put on the market. These include water, land, beaches and even air.

These ‘new commodities’ add to the list of public services such as transportation and port operations, all the way to education, which are already on the divestment block. Such privatisation can only have the most harmful consequences in widening inequities of access to services, and raising their costs. This will result in extreme forms of deprivation and further impoverishment of underprivileged people. This has been the experience in both North and South with the privatisation of water.

### *The WTO as inequality’s new handmaiden*

The World Trade Organization (WTO) has contributed to the process in numerous ways – by bringing issues such as investment policies, services, and intellectual property rights and patents into ‘trade-related’ agreements that have the force of international treaty law and are binding on governments. The rich OECD countries continue to mouth the rhetoric of ‘free trade’ even while they subsidise their uncompetitive farmers to the extent of USD400 billion a year, and further inflict an annual loss of USD700 billion on the South by erecting protectionist barriers on imports of its goods and services.<sup>23</sup>

Double standards on ‘free trade’ apart, WTO deliberations under the recent Doha Round are an attempt to prise open the economies of the South for industrial exports and service sector firms from the North. The North offers small concessions in the form of reducing agricultural subsidies, but only to demand greater ‘non-agricultural market access’. This means the South will be under pressure to give ‘national treatment’ to Northern corporations in areas as varied as banking, insurance, education and water supply. Already, under the Uruguay Round, the South had to change its patent laws drastically and create or facilitate monopolies in areas of public importance such as pharmaceuticals.

None of this has bestowed genuine social, moral or political legitimacy on the deeply undemocratic, hierarchical and crudely Social-Darwinist system that rules the world under neoliberalism’s sway. In-

<sup>23</sup> See various UNCTAD and Oxfam (UK) reports on the North’s protectionism ([www.unctad.org](http://www.unctad.org) and [www.oxfam.org.uk](http://www.oxfam.org.uk)).

deed, as iniquities have grown, so have social discontent and strife, both within the boundaries of states and between them. The decline or disappearance of socially cementing and legitimising ideas such as socialism and collective welfare has spurred preoccupation with other identities, especially ethnic and religious ones.

### *Growing dangers of identity politics*

The most worrying form of such *identity politics* is fundamentalism of varying kinds. This has grown enormously over the last decade or more. States, political organisations or groups of people under the sway of one kind of fundamentalism have entered into an increasingly hostile relationship with groups fired by other kinds of fundamentalism.

The most extreme manifestation of this tendency lies in a rise in Islamic *jihad*-inspired extremism after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the US, followed by a massive retaliatory response from Washington in the form of two wars and illegal detention and harassment of suspected terrorists and their associates – and the rise of yet more groups driven by revenge against the US for its excesses.

Religion-driven fundamentalism has provoked and served to legitimise state-level extremism and fundamentalism. This cycle of violence and counter-violence runs uninterrupted as cesspools of social grievances – themselves rooted in injustices suffered by vast numbers of people – grow in size and impact.

Violence, whether driven by identity-based prejudice or practised by the increasingly powerful coercive apparatus of the state, has become a *central fact* of life at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – when things could have been different. The principal objectives of violence remain domination and subjugation of citizens, repression of human rights, enforcement of oppressive economic policy regimes, and punishment for those who transgress the dictates of the neoliberal state. At the national level, this is most starkly reflected in the curtailing of civil liberties, and growing militarisation of state and society.

A major casualty of this violent world is cultural liberty. The UN Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that almost 900 million people – around one in seven persons in the world – belong to groups that are discriminated against or disadvantaged as a result of their identity, and face cultural, economic or political exclusion. Over 500 million of them belong to groups that are estimated to face



*The principal objectives of violence remain domination and subjugation of citizens, repression of human rights, enforcement of oppressive economic policy regimes, and punishment for those who transgress the dictates of the neoliberal state.*



‘living mode exclusion’, including restrictions on religion, language, ceremonies and appearance.<sup>24</sup>

Another form of violence and militarisation, especially at the regional level, is the festering of bloody conflict between ethnic groups that sometimes cut across national boundaries, as in the former Yugoslavia. In recent years, some of these conflicts have become genocidal in nature. It is improbable that any other epoch of world history has witnessed *genocidal conflict* on the same scale as the past 15 years.

At the global level, the trend towards greater violence and coercion is most clearly manifested in the United States’ ambition and effort to set up a Roman-style Empire, based primarily on military force, in which Washington’s war on and occupation of Iraq and its Greater Middle East Initiative are only the first steps. The US has embarked on a project to dominate the world in ways that were inconceivable just 10 or 15 years ago.

### *US project of empire*

When the Cold War ended, some of America’s influential policy-makers and shapers saw a unique opportunity in the transient ‘unipolar moment’ in the world, when for the first time in close to a century, there existed no real competition to the US. Thus, argued the authors of the *Project for a New American Century*, the US must extend the ‘unipolar moment’ indefinitely by raising America’s military expenditure and increasing its weight within NATO and other Western military institutions to acquire global strategic supremacy or dominance.<sup>25</sup>

Washington must then wield its expanded authority to reshape the world as it pleases. Although the authors of the *Project* – including former Defence Advisory Board chairman Richard Perle, Deputy Secretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz and Jeb Bush (the President’s brother) and other luminaries in the Bush administration – were extremely powerful within the Republican Party, and in general, the Pentagon Establishment, their ideas were considered far too ambitious, if not outlandish, by many in the late 1990s.

Then, George W. Bush came to power and September 11 happened. Suddenly, the *Project* became ‘realistic’ and implementable, even in its more extreme components such as the Ballistic Missile Defence pro-

<sup>24</sup> See UNDP, *Human Development Report, 2004*.

<sup>25</sup> See [www.newamericancentury.org](http://www.newamericancentury.org)

gramme, which dangerously changes the rules of the nuclear deterrence game. The *Project's* most important recommendation, even before 9/11, was that the US should invade Iraq and redraw the Middle East's political map.<sup>26</sup>

Bush implemented the first part of the recommendation in the teeth of opposition from the world community, including many of Washington's allies – at the risk of wrecking the Atlantic alliance. The consequences have been disastrous not just for the Iraqi people, but for global security and the international order centred in the United Nations. Washington went to war without authorisation by the Security Council and thus undermined the UN Charter – a cornerstone of the global order.

Washington has set an extraordinarily negative precedent for the rest of the world, which is being followed in the Middle East by its close ally, Israel. Israel has embarked on an attempt to annex Palestinian territory by force – with tacit approval from the US. It has imposed a system of encirclement and enclosure upon the Palestinian people similar to apartheid in South Africa. Once the idea of legality, legitimacy and order in international relations – as distinct from chaos and anarchy – breaks down, all manner of brigandage is encouraged, and roguish behaviour can win impunity.

The worst irony of the present situation is that the US policies and conduct have made it less rather than more secure, even as it has weakened the multi-ethnic and plural character of its own society and greatly militarised the state.

The US military power was pretty much unmatched during the first decade after the Cold War, when it emerged as a bigger military spender than the *next 15 major powers put together*. Today, the US accounts for one-half of the world's total expenditure of USD800 billion on armaments. America alone has the capacity simultaneously to fight two wars in different parts of the world, patrol the seven seas with its aircraft-carrier-centred armadas, conduct surveillance and espionage over any part of the world from space, and rapidly transport hundreds of thousands of troops over continental distances by day and night.

And yet, Washington's *political power* is nowhere near its awesome military strength. With all the power of persuasion, bribery and coercion



*There is very little effective resistance to Washington's hegemony even from Western Europe despite the EU's considerable economic, financial and political clout – let alone from the rest of the world.*

<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Drew, E., 'The Neocons in Power', *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 50, No. 10, 12 June 2003.

at its command, in 2003 it could not muster the majority needed to pass the ‘second resolution’ on Iraq at the Security Council. Not just Mexico, Pakistan and Chile, even Cameroon, Guinea and Angola refused to toe the US line.

The concentration of global political power in the hands of a just a few states is a fact. Besides the OECD countries and a few former major powers such as Russia, these include ‘emerging markets’ like China, India, Brazil and South Africa, and exclude the bulk of the world’s countries and peoples.

The reality of this skewed distribution of power became manifest during the July–August 2004 Geneva negotiations of the WTO, when the rich states managed to break the unity of the G-20 group of developing countries, which had successfully defied them a year earlier at Cancun. The US, European Union (EU) and Australia successfully split India and Brazil away from the rest of the G-20 by including them with themselves in the ‘Five Interested Parties’ group and imposed an unbalanced and unequal ‘Framework Agreement’ upon the global South.<sup>27</sup>

There is very little effective resistance to Washington’s hegemony even from Western Europe despite the EU’s considerable economic, financial and political clout – let alone from the rest of the world. The prospect of genuine reform of the global governance system towards greater democratisation and representation, which was much debated during the UN’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, has definitely receded. If there is any change in the composition and powers of the Security Council, it will be less the result of a democratic impulse to broaden the Council’s representative character than of bargaining among the already powerful and the ambitious craving a place at the world’s High Table.

The structured inequality and skewed distribution of power prevalent globally is also reflected domestically in many societies through hierarchical organisations and institutions and the incorporation of pre-modern forms of social oppression, prejudices and ideologies in the ruling ethos.

<sup>27</sup> Under the Agreement, the rich countries will gradually cut farm subsidies. In return, the developing countries will free trade in services more or less immediately and give the North guaranteed non-agricultural market access by importing its manufacturers. This would seriously hurt nascent industries in many Southern countries. Opening up trade in ‘services’, which are being redefined to include water, electricity, education, etc., could adversely affect large numbers of people in the South.

### *Patriarchy and discrimination*

Examples are institutionalised forms of racism, xenophobia, caste oppression, and other forms of discrimination based on birth or descent. Customs that were considered repugnant to an enlightened conscience, such as bride-burning, ‘honour killings’, *sati* (burning the widow on a dead husband’s pyre) and female circumcision, and above all, female foeticide and infanticide, are on the increase.

Some issues concerning discrimination based on descent were debated at the UN-sponsored World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa, in 2001, which richly documented the prevalence of such discrimination. However, the negative attitude adopted towards the Conference by many powerful states, including the US, robbed its deliberations of much of their impact. At any rate, many international commissions and bodies have investigated such discrimination through UN forums.<sup>28</sup>

Female foeticide is a particularly pernicious practice, which requires the determination of the sex of the foetus at a relatively early stage of development, by using sophisticated techniques, and subsequently, abortion of the female foetus. This necessitates the *active collusion* of the medical profession and speaks appallingly of its ethical standards, and of the prevalence of blatant forms of illegality.

The obsession with having a male child is especially powerful in China and India, the world’s two most populous societies and among its fastest-growing economies. In India, sex ratios in young children (0–6 years) have fallen to alarming levels such as 850 girls to 1,000 boys in many states. This is one of the ugliest faces of patriarchy and male supremacism.

Patriarchy remains a truly global phenomenon cutting across national, ethnic, linguistic and climatic boundaries and differences. This not only remains a shameful legacy of the past. It is doubly reprehensible because it has acquired new, technology-driven, sophisticated, ‘modern’, even fashionable, contemporary forms.

<sup>28</sup> See, in particular, various annual reports of the UN Commission on Human Rights. The group *Women Living under Muslim Laws* has produced a large amount of evidence of the prevalence of anti-women practices in dozens of countries ([www.wluml.org](http://www.wluml.org)). On the issue of caste, see *Broken People*, a report by Human Rights Watch, US, and several reports of (India’s) National Commission on Dalit Human Rights. Many national bodies such as the UK Commission on Racial Equality have noted with distress a rise in xenophobia and racism.

A unifying thread pertaining to social attitudes and mores runs through these patterns of domination and concentration. This is the growing acceptance among social elites of inequity and discrimination as inevitable, unavoidable, indeed legitimate. For instance, even in the relatively more democratic societies of the world, there is growing tolerance of *cascading inequalities of access*.



*This is the growing acceptance among social elites of inequity and discrimination as inevitable, unavoidable, indeed legitimate.*

Poverty at birth denies people opportunities at each stage of life: low weight at birth, poor access to nutrition in childhood (thus reducing the potential for a healthy adult life), restricted access to literacy and elementary education, low skill acquisition, reduced employment and income opportunities, and eventually, poor access to minimal livelihood security with the prospect of near-destitution in old age.

Within this perverse framework, which sees inequality as inevitable, there is a complete failure to make any connection between equity and justice for all, and see the freedom of each individual as a precondition for the freedom of others. This view *severs democracy from equity* and from equal, universal access for all citizens to certain social goods. It also tolerates grotesque economic disparities and prevalence of mass deprivation and poverty – indeed, conditions of mass-level economic servitude and bondage approaching slavery. That this should be the state of humanity at the end of this second millennium is an abiding disgrace.

### *Multiple forms of erosion*

Coupled with the processes of domination and concentration are multiple processes of *erosion* – of natural wealth, the environment, cultures and languages, of security and, worst of all, of democracy. Some of the erosion is well documented, or at least conceptually well understood. For instance, numerous species of life are disappearing at an alarming rate.<sup>29</sup> Dialects and languages too are becoming extinct at an alarming rate. Fifty to ninety per cent of the existing 6,000 languages are likely to become extinct over the next 100 years. But some forms of erosion are not even properly acknowledged – for instance, the erosion of words and meanings, or the erosion of (social) confidence.<sup>30</sup>

29 'Extinction rates based on known extinctions of birds, mammals and amphibians over the past 100 years indicate that current extinction rates are 50 to 500 times higher than extinction rates in the fossil record. If "possibly extinct species" are included, this increases to 100 to 1000 natural (background) extinction rates', Baillie, J., Hilton-Taylor C., et al, *A Global Species Assessment*, Cambridge, 2004.

30 UNDP, *Human Development Report*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

Certain kinds of erosion are related to processes of modernisation, the creation of new identities and formation of national states and tightly-knit, if not monocultural nation-states. These marginalise and displace ‘vernacular’, small and ‘remote’ identities, languages and dialects by suborning them under bigger umbrella groups, if not single languages – as happened in France, Italy or Ireland two or three centuries ago. Similarly, several kinds of culture – folk forms and traditions in particular – have suffocated and died a death during processes of ‘nation-building’, industrialisation and modernisation.

The casualties include countless crafts, skills, various ways of designing, building and using homes and public spaces, methods of conserving water (or heat), types of music, musical instruments, forms of singing, visual patterns, and ways of weaving fabrics, shaping metal or paper, or making natural dyes. Folk songs, which are hundreds of years old and related to particular seasons and cycles of nature, are disappearing under the impact of the commercial culture promoted by the electronic media and cinema.

Similarly, traditional forms of knowledge about soils, crop farming, medicinal plants, grasses, forest trees and animal husbandry have greatly eroded. They are not valued at all, or are severely undermined by ‘standard’ forms of modern ‘technical’ or ‘expert’ knowledge, which alone are recognised by states and laws.

Again, notions of aesthetics and beauty not tied to commercial considerations and promotion of cosmetics and other ‘lifestyle’ products have suffered a serious decline. Under the growing influence of the consumerist culture propagated by the media, ‘standardised’ notions and forms of beauty, often sanitised and embellished into Caucasoid forms, are taking hold among people-turned-into-consumers, who take their cue more from international beauty contests than from their immediate surroundings and physical types.

This loss, immense as it is, is the result of long-run processes that go back to the classical colonial period in many countries, and to over a century ago in most parts of the world. But there is another particularly grievous form of erosion, which derives from relatively recent processes. This is the rapid depletion of humanity’s *natural capital* and its base of resources, without enough regeneration.<sup>31</sup> In some cases, the loss is permanent and irreversible. The causative processes are at once far more aggressive, deeply colonising, contemptuously intoler-



*Traditional forms of knowledge about soils, crop farming, medicinal plants, grasses, forest trees and animal husbandry have greatly eroded.*

31 See ‘Millennium Ecosystem Assessment’ ([www.millenniumassessment.org](http://www.millenniumassessment.org)).

ant of any diversity or ‘deviation’, and more intimately tied up with organised corporate interests than ever before.

For instance, the depletion of plant genetic resources under the impact of new seeds manufactured in corporate laboratories in the past 20 years has proved far faster and more thorough than either the introduction of ‘modern’ agriculture with irrigation in the early 20th century, or the Green Revolution technologies of the 1960s, with their emphasis on high-yielding varieties of seeds and high inputs of water, fertiliser, pesticides and energy.

Similarly, the damage done to the environment through the dumping of toxic wastes (including bio-medical wastes), or from the overflowing of ‘natural sinks’ from overproduction of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, is incomparably greater than the harm caused by all human activity for the preceding 2,000 years. (Contemporary ‘high-technology’ wars, too, leave their own special and lasting damage, as in the case of depleted uranium shells and Agent Orange.)

Rapidly growing consumption of fast foods, especially McDonald-style hamburgers and deep-fried potato chips, has resulted in deforestation in the Amazon as a result of conversion of forests into ranches. Virgin rainforests, with their immense and irreproducible biodiversity, are being brutally felled, to be replaced on a gigantic scale by pastures on which to raise cattle for use as red meat in industrialised food. The devastation of the Amazon basin is the most dramatic and revolting form of the environment’s pillage in living memory. In many other parts of the global South, too, forests are being replaced by cropland in microclimates that are singularly unsuitable for cereal cultivation.

Aggravating this process of ecological devastation is the construction of the gigantic dams such as Three Gorges in China and Sardar Sarovar (on the Narmada) in India. More than 500 such dams have been built or are under construction in the world, mainly in the developing countries.<sup>32</sup> Most such projects involve the massive denudation of land, displacement of people and hydrological changes.

<sup>32</sup> In addition, there are 45,000 large dams (15 metres high or more) in the world, which have displaced some 40-80 million people. See World Commission on Dams, ‘Dams and Development: A New Framework for Decision-Making’, 16 November 2000.

### *Threats from monoculture*

The fragile environment of Planet Earth has had to bear this terrible burden. Even more damaging has been the imposition of monocultures, as in the case of eucalyptus plantations, or just one variety of food crops where dozens, even hundreds, existed not so long ago. (In India, for instance, 3,000 varieties of rice were grown half a century ago. Now only about 12 varieties account for 80 per cent of all paddy sown.)

This kind of erosion extends to loss of diversity in people's dietary habits, with an overemphasis on one kind of cereal or (red) meat in place of the breathtaking variety of grain, pulses, nuts, leaves, roots, fruits, leguminous vegetables and other nourishing matter (for example, bambooshoots or betelnut) that until recently used to be (and in many cases still are) part of the daily diet in the South.

Monoculture is even more menacing in another, deeper way. The erosion it represents is not just the limited one-time loss of living species, but a disruption of ecological balances, and changes in the micro-climate – and hence the disappearance of *yet more species* and other adverse effects. This adds to losses from ozone depletion and global warming, already set in rapid motion by industrial activities and overconsumption of natural resources beyond the earth's absorptive or rejuvenating capacities.

As important as this natural erosion is the erosion of social and legal rights integral to democracy, such as the right to health, to other minimum needs and certain basic services – eventually leading to a decline in the quality of, or loss of, livelihoods. Neoliberalism's impact on public services, compounded by callous or non-performing states, has been extremely corrosive. Not only have public services been cut back or withdrawn in societies which pioneered them with some pride (e.g. the National Health Service in Britain); they are in dire shape in much of the South.

As weak, corrupt and undemocratic governments in many Southern countries become even more dysfunctional or reach the status of failing or failed states, they can no longer generate the financial and administrative wherewithal to provide a modicum of services to their people, like health, water and electricity supply, education and transportation.

A particularly noteworthy form of erosion of rights pertains to health. The global public's health is now endangered by new developments



like the (socially determined) spread of HIV-AIDS and non-provision of treatment for it, and the administration of ultra-neoliberal ‘shock therapy’ to the former Soviet Union, which has led to a contraction of 8 to 10 years in the average person’s life expectancy owing to massive pauperisation, malnutrition, lack of protection from pathogens and extreme weather conditions, and growing incidence of mental disease and psychological distress leading to alcoholism. The collapse of state-run medical services, along with exorbitant increases in cost of drugs, has further aggravated the problem.



*Rights to the freedom of expression and association, the right to privacy, the right to be protected against surveillance, arbitrary arrest and detention. Many of these rights are being drastically pruned, bypassed or blatantly violated.*

Another example is the spread of malaria and tuberculosis in many Southern countries where they were declared to have been eradicated or controlled decades ago. The causes for this are not natural, but social and political: inappropriate agricultural practices, overirrigation, water-logging, lack of drainage, poor design of anti-malaria programmes (with an overemphasis on drug therapy, rather than prevention), rising costs of drugs due to new patent laws under WTO auspices, and lack of political will to address the needs of the people or defend their fundamental rights – if not outright apathy.

This process of erosion of health is not confined to the Third and (former) Second World. Even in the world’s highly industrialised societies such as the US, over 45 million people do not have adequate health insurance.<sup>33</sup> Besides, the wellbeing of large numbers of people is undermined through chemical and vehicular pollution, toxic contamination of water and food (through the overuse of pesticides and fertilisers in vegetable farming and of drugs and hormones in meat production), and environmentally related cancers and leukaemia, etc.

No less important is the consumption of fast foods containing large amounts of saturated fats, sugars and calories, but with little roughage or micronutrients. This is itself driven by aggressive marketing and promotion, especially targeted at children, as well as the illusion of ‘convenience’ in the context of high-entropy, energy-intensive lifestyles. At work here is what has been called ‘voluntary servitude’ to labour (especially drudgery or uncreative employment) which leaves people with little time to cook and eat wholesome food. The fact that a third of all Americans are obese is a sorry reflection of these social pathologies.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2003’, Current Population Reports p.60–226, US Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, Washington D.C., 2004.

One can similarly talk about the erosion of other rights, too, especially labour rights (won after hard and bloody battles over decades), but also rights to the freedom of expression and association, the right to privacy, the right to be protected against surveillance, arbitrary arrest and detention. Many of these rights are being drastically pruned, bypassed or blatantly violated even in countries that pride themselves as great democracies – typically, in the name of ‘security’ and protection against ‘terrorism’, etc. The US is a prime example of such erosion with its draconian Patriot Act. Yet, ironically, it is precisely this erosion of rights and freedoms that is making Americans more and more *insecure*.

### *Human security and confidence in decline*

Real security, or human (or comprehensive) security, cannot even be understood in mainly military terms. Nor is it about security from ‘external’ threats and dangers, real or imagined. Rather, it is about food security, assured rights to health, education and shelter, employment security, security of income, gender security, security of the human person. Such security cannot be achieved by military or police methods, or through a proliferation of privately held firearms.

Human security can only come through entitlements that help the development of people’s capabilities and their human potential to the full, through universal welfare and social security for all, through freedom from strife, and through a high degree of social cohesion. Given the retreat from social security and welfare agendas in much



*Although there has been an increase in the number of states that hold some kind of elections and lay claim to democracy, the quality of public participation in politics in most of them remains distressingly low.*

of the First World, and the absence of these in most other parts of the globe, a substantial erosion of human security has taken place in recent years.

However, even in the limited sphere of military security, the global record is poor. Some 30 armed conflicts, especially internal ones, rage in many countries and regions. The world today is more militarised than, say, a decade ago. A major war rages today in West Asia, to which no end is in sight. The situation in that entire region has become extremely volatile. In international politics as a whole, strategic considerations play a large role in relations between states.

Even more dangerous, the use of force has become an important component and instrument of the foreign policy of major powers such as the US and Russia. Among the world's elite, there is growing belief in and acceptance of the use of force to resolve conflicts. Their peaceful resolution is increasingly ruled out. The importance of the United States' contribution to this violence- and war-obsessed mindset cannot be exaggerated. Growing militarisation of society in many countries further aggravates the problem.

Amidst this distressing general trend, there is a growing danger of nuclear proliferation, both through the possible 'horizontal' spread of nuclear weapons to other countries, and via the 'vertical' route, that is, through the further refinement of, and planned use of, nuclear weapons. North Korea, Iran and Pakistan, with its nuclear materials and centrifuge enrichment black market, all fall within the first category. (Even South Korea now admits it experimented with uranium enrichment in the 1980s.) Other countries such as Libya, which likewise tried to acquire nuclear technology (albeit of a rudimentary nature), set a negative example for others.

Meanwhile, India and Pakistan are moving towards the induction and deployment of nuclear weapons and nuclear-capable missiles – further heightening the nuclear danger in 'the world's most dangerous place'. Although this is still a subject of speculation, the possibility of Israel threatening or even attacking Iran militarily on account of its suspected nuclear programme must not be dismissed. Israel itself maintains its policy of nuclear ambiguity, and more important, its own large nuclear arsenal, believed to contain 200 or more weapons – a major breakout, like India and Pakistan, from the nuclear non-proliferation regime, and a more bellicose or warlike one than them.

The US has had the single greatest disruptive influence on the exist-

ing global nuclear ‘balance of terror’ thanks to its Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) programme and plans to develop new ‘tactical’ nuclear weapons such as ‘bunker-buster’ bombs. BMD will sooner or later provoke a greater effort from China to build long-range ballistic missiles in large enough numbers to penetrate the limited ‘shield’ that the US hopes to build with a highly ambitious, but as yet unproved and extremely difficult technology of detecting hostile missile launches and then intercepting them. (This also spells the militarisation of space – a highly fraught proposition.) A major expansion of China’s nuclear weapons programme may draw a similar response from India – and lead to a new Asian nuclear arms race.

Compounding these processes is the erosion of popular confidence in the possibility of righting wrongs and making the world a better place. The North’s will to resolve global problems has definitely weakened over the past two decades. In powerful states, the quality of political leadership is poor or falling. Cynicism has spread among the public, which is reflected in growing political apathy and declining turnouts in elections. Although there has been an increase in the number of states that hold some kind of elections and lay claim to democracy, the quality of public participation in politics in most of them remains distressingly low.

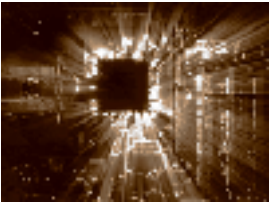
### *Countering the erosion of democracy*

Thanks to neoliberalism’s sway, and to some of the social and political processes discussed above, there has been a contraction of the public sphere and a degree of popular disempowerment. This is not confined to the 100 or so failing or failed states that are unable to muster even a modicum of coherence, maintain basic law and order or provide any service to the public. Rather, the erosion of democracy is pervasive, further compounded by various ideologies of exclusion, such as racism, ethnic chauvinism and religious bigotry, and by xenophobia. The quality of governance has declined in many countries. The need for rejuvenation of democracy has never been greater.

Bleak as the foregoing analysis is, the global scenario does have some redeeming features, or more modestly, a few silver linings. Humanity’s learning process has not ground to a halt. Nor have people become merely passive observers of processes that disempower them or rob them of their rights and reduce their welfare or security. Governments have not uniformly or universally become dysfunctional and hostile to their citizens.

Again, the triumph of neoliberalism has not gone unquestioned or unchallenged. Indeed, historians such as Eric Hobsbawm believe it may be short-lived;<sup>34</sup> market fundamentalism could soon yield to less cruel, less destructive and more sensible policies in which governments and communities will have a greater role.

However, one *great gain*, which outweighs most others, has been an all-round spread and heightening of environmental awareness and the recognition that market-led and corporate-dominated processes of growth cannot carry on indefinitely without destroying ecological balances and causing calamities.



*There is growing, critical, understanding of technology among the global public, coupled with holism and an awareness of the interrelatedness of social and natural processes.*

There have been other, related, major gains too. For instance, there is growing consciousness of the need to oppose patriarchy and discrimination against women and to ‘mainstream’ gender issues. Thus, governments and international/multilateral institutions and, in some instances, even corporations, which are usually conservative and slow to change, have come to embrace equal opportunity policies, and have enacted laws and codes against sexual harassment.

Similarly, notions of transparency and accountability in governance have acquired wide currency. They have entered the mainstream discourse and have even drawn support from leading donor agencies and some otherwise conservative governments (such as the United Kingdom’s). Citizens’ charters and movements are now able to demand answers from ruling institutions in ways that were earlier inconceivable.

Many governments are giving formal expression to the right to the freedom of information through specific laws, and a significant number have come to accept and defend the freedom of expression. These developments have the potential to generate some shifts (albeit at the margin) in power structures and power balances – in favour of the people.

There is growing, critical, understanding of technology among the global public, coupled with holism and an awareness of the interrelatedness of social and natural processes. The mystification and deification of technology and gigantic projects have given way to more sober and balanced approaches, at least partly under the pressure of popular movements. For instance, large dams and other projects that displace huge numbers of people are no longer popular or accept-

<sup>34</sup> See Hobsbawm, E., *The Age of Extremes*, Joseph, London, 1994, and *The New Century*, Little, Brown and Co., London, 2000.

able. Even the World Bank had to withdraw from the Narmada dam project. The utilitarian calculus, which justified the uprooting of vulnerable people such as tribal communities for ‘the greater common good’, is now interrogated more and more critically everywhere.

Certain technologies, especially computers and the Internet, have facilitated instant, low-cost communication among citizens’ groups and social movements. This has created new forms of solidarity.

‘Post-materialist’ ideas, which reject the pursuit of greed and self-interest, as well as other forms of counter-cultural lifestyles and modes of association and interaction (such as communal living, sharing of habitats, transport pools, building non-profit collectives of artists, musicians or activists, and the use of barter or non-monetary forms of accounting for work in cooperative transactions) have acquired currency, especially, among young people.

Projects such as building a ‘green economy’ with no waste flows, and ‘zero-carbon’ or ‘carbon-neutral’ approaches even to cultural events are attracting more and more people. Noteworthy too are campaigns to reclaim roads for pedestrians and cyclists from cars and (especially, and rightly, hated) sport utility vehicles.



*People’s resistance is an irrepressible fact of contemporary life.*

### *Civil society resistance: the New Hope*

A collective, overarching expression of these trends is found in that great, indeed *spectacular*, phenomenon of our time: the unstoppable rise of civil society and citizens’ organisations as major actors in the world and within national boundaries. It is in these civil society movements that some of the most powerful and sustained forms of resistance to the hegemonising, homogenising, dominating and disempowering processes discussed in the previous section are to be found. People’s resistance is an irrepressible fact of contemporary life. Resistance has time and again prevented the worst possible scenarios and dystopias from materialising.

Thus, for virtually every trend and process that has contributed to change for the worse in the world, one can cite opposition and resistance, and a drive for change for the better.

No neoliberal policy, whether of unbridled liberalisation, privatisation or globalisation, has gone unresisted. Governments that brazenly privatised water and electricity distribution have faced so much protest and opposition that they had to roll back such measures or suffer

their effective sabotage – in South Africa, Colombia, Guatemala or the United States.

No World Trade Organization conference or meeting, whether of ministers or top officials, has escaped protest from civil society organisations. When such protest combines with resistance from Southern governments, as it did at Seattle in 1999 and Cancun in 2003, the WTO agenda is beaten back. The same holds true of G-8 and OECD summits, the World Economic Forum's conferences at Davos, and the European Union's deliberations.

The US and the UK went to war in Iraq in violation of the UN Charter and without the Security Council's authorisation. But so powerful was the citizen protest against the war, especially on 25 February 2003 when 25 million people demonstrated in more than 100 cities, that even pro-war conservatives had to announce the birth of 'the world's Second Superpower' – public opinion and the civil society mobilisation for peace.

Again, the US has no intention whatever of honouring the 'unequivocal' and categorical commitment to nuclear disarmament it made at the 2000 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. But that will not prevent the global peace movement from pressing for that demand in every conceivable way – through advocacy and lobbying, public education and criticism of the duplicity of the nuclear powers, and street-level protests or 'direct action' like entering nuclear weapons bases to physically 'inspect' and disarm them.

Fast food and McDonaldisation of nutrition may be a growing trend. But campaigns for 'Slow Food' and organic farming and Jose Bove-type 'direct action' against genetically modified crops are also growing – and with uncontested moral force.

The global corporate media is extremely powerful. But there is growing resistance to it, too – from small publishers, independent radio and TV channels, and Internet-based listserves and websites. These ruthlessly expose the double standards and prejudices of the self-styled 'mainstream' media and undermine its credibility – week after week, day after day.

Finally, a great new space has emerged where all resistance movements can meet and interact. This is the World Social Forum (WSF), a unique expression of a new form of democracy. The WSF originally began as a counter to the Davos World Economic Forum (WEF),

set up by the world's 1,000 biggest and most influential corporations. The first WSF, held in January 2001, in Porto Alegre, Brazil, was timed to coincide with the WEF.

Since then, the WSF has acquired an *independent* identity and a life of its own. Participation in it has increased fivefold from the original level. In January 2004, about 100,000 people attended the WSF in Mumbai. The WSF has developed into a festival of ideas and a moving feast of debates, conferences, seminars, workshops, music, theatre and film as well as alliance-building and solidarity.

The WSF is not an organisation but 'an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas ... free exchange of experiences and inter-linking for effective action'. Its participants are civil society movements 'opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and imperialism ... [and] committed to building a society centred on the human person'.<sup>35</sup> These movements are working to demonstrate that the path to sustainable development and justice lies in people-centred and self-reliant progress, not in bogus 'free market' doctrines.

Even the WSF's critics cannot fail to be impressed by the energies it has unleashed. The WSF is a powerful, massive, people-centred answer to conservative cynics who peddle Social Darwinist dogma. It is a celebration of the people – their humanity, their rights, their aspirations to justice, and their creativity.

It is on these initiatives, these inspiring examples of resistance, and these great surges of sentiment in favour of popular empowerment, that an alternative perspective for a better world must be built. The rudiments of an alternative are already in place.

<sup>35</sup> See [www.forumsocialmundial.org.br](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br).





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# Before Thinking about *What Next* Prerequisites for alternatives

*Gilbert Rist*

*The critique of religion is the condition of any critique.*

Karl Marx

*He who believes that exponential growth can go on for ever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist.*

Kenneth Boulding

The overall task is clear: the *What Next* project has been conceived as a collective effort to imagine and propose practical alternatives that could help change the present course of world affairs, reduce social inequalities between and among nations, reduce or prevent the risk of environmental hazards, restore a sense of justice and confidence among conflicting groups, and open up a new future for humankind.<sup>1</sup> These are indeed fine objectives, which are shared by all men and women of good will. Some would add that the time is ripe to embark on a global programme of social transformation, not only because of a growing dissatisfaction with the present predicament, but also to take advantage of the momentum gained by the civil society movements that have participated in the World Social Forum rallies.

Some of the steps to be taken are already well defined, and the majority of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are calling for important measures, the need for which has, over the years, won a large consensus: development should become 'sustainable'; the international debt of 'poor countries' should be alleviated or cancelled; trade should become 'fair'; military expenditure should be turned into 'poverty reduction programmes' – or swords into ploughshares; official development aid in member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) should be increased to at least 0.7 per cent of GNP, as promised more than 40 years ago; the structures of UN and Bretton Woods institutions should be

<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to my colleague Isabelle Schulte-Tenckhoff for her comments on earlier versions of this text as well as this one.

‘democratised’; human rights should be respected (for example, innocent individuals must be protected from arbitrary arrest; gender equality should be implemented); money laundering and financial corruption should be prosecuted. This list is by no means exhaustive. To mention just a few ‘fashionable’ items currently receiving attention: there is the issue of recommendations on ‘good governance’, to arbitrate on the diverging interests of the State, the private sector and civil society; discussions about the protection of biodiversity, endangered species and nature sanctuaries; and declarations on the necessity to levy taxes on speculative capital-transfer movements. Even if we have reservations about the justification for some of these measures there are reasons to believe that, if they were implemented, a considerable number of people would have a better place to live in. In a sense, therefore, we already know what to do; and what to do next is simply a matter of setting priorities.

Of course, there is a considerable gap between the formulation of a good idea and its implementation. Everything depends on political will. Often, those with an interest in changing a situation lack the power to do so, while those with power have no interest in effecting change. The expectation may be that persisting with hammering in the nail may eventually drive it in: that the balance of power will change, and what was formerly considered unacceptable suddenly becomes feasible.

The trouble is that this outcome is not the most likely one. As so often witnessed, the assumption of power by a former opposition party rarely leads to significant changes in national policy with regard to significant measures to effect much-needed change. This is true not only of so-called democracies, but also of regimes that seize power through a *coup d'état* intended to bring about dramatic change.

Therefore, the question is not, essentially, ‘What to do now?’ or ‘What next?’, but rather ‘Why is it that what we believe to be necessary has proved impossible?’ Radical alternatives to the present system were formulated more than 30 years ago. They are still valid, even if they have never been taken seriously, or have largely been forgotten today. Sometimes, older ideas regain prominence, but they are as difficult to implement as they were previously. Again, my contention is that we should be less concerned with ‘What Next?’ than with a more fundamental question: that is, ‘Why are we unable to translate common-sense alternatives into reality?’



*Why is it that what we believe to be necessary has proved impossible?*

## Reasons for rejecting the ‘development’ paradigm

### *Why are we at a dead end?*

Not long ago, the former USSR tried to build its imperial power through a centrally planned economic system. Four- or five-year plans were solemnly adopted, which defined production objectives to be met by each economic sector. On paper, everything should have worked out smoothly but, in fact, the whole system was chaotic. Moreover, objectives – particularly in agriculture – were rarely met. The weaknesses of the system were public knowledge, including their painful social consequences such as recurring shortages, rationing, a runaway black market, and the like. What was the solution proposed by Soviet bureaucrats to these problems? Starting from the dogma that economic planning was a ‘given’, they argued that failure could only be attributed to lack of proper implementation; thus the remedy to economic planning failure was simply more economic planning.

This reminder of a not-so-distant past could be laughable, had the programme not entailed so many tragic consequences. However, I think that by and large we are not doing any better today than former Soviet bureaucrats. Why? *Because we are so deeply entrenched in our certainties and beliefs that we constantly mistake the problem for the solution.* As the previous example shows, it was easy for those who did not share the dogma of central economic planning to identify the flaw in the reasoning. But this was impossible for those who adhered to such reasoning. It is therefore a matter of identifying the dogma – the belief system – that in our present global society plays the same role as economic planning in the former Soviet society. What is it, today, that is held to be beyond dispute, and a universal solution to all problems? And what, *at the same time*, is the source of the main problems we are faced with? The answer seems pretty obvious: the ‘development’ paradigm and the widely-held belief in the necessity of fostering economic growth are typical of a confusion between problem and solution. In other words, ‘development’ is a serious problem that is usually taken as an all-purpose solution.

Like yesterday’s Soviet bureaucrats, present-day ‘development’ advocates have indeed a blind spot when devising their blueprints for the future. But they are unaware of it. However, to those who have rejected the development-and-growth paradigm, the contradictions are glaring.

More than 50 years after the launching of the ‘development era’ by President Truman, how can we assess it? A very sketchy description of the present situation would show that, in the South, poverty (that is, economic indigence) is still endemic, and basic services such as access to drinkable water, education and medical care are lacking. In the North, unemployment is rampant, and the State can no longer meet its obligations in the field of public services, old age pensions or security. To this rather grim picture might be added the desperate situation of millions of refugees attempting to escape from hunger, war, physical violence, insecurity and repression.

It is not enough merely to list the evils witnessed and experienced today, for there are more to come. As if present circumstances were not worrying enough, the future is likely to be even more gloomy, since man-made ecological catastrophes are in the offing. Here again, the problems lying ahead are well known: among them are the broadening of the hole in the ozone layer, climatic changes due to the greenhouse effect, desertification or flooding of presently vastly populated areas, possible nuclear accidents, exhaustion of non-renewable resources, and drastic reduction of forested areas. Moreover, social catastrophes may also be expected as a result of the development of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) or in the nanobiotechnologies that are likely to produce hybrids or semi-living artefacts whose reproduction may well be beyond control.<sup>2</sup>

In one way or another, all these scourges can be viewed as consequences or by-products of the frantic economic growth witnessed over the last five decades.<sup>3</sup> Although a minority of people have managed to become richer during this period, social inequalities have multiplied and the natural environment has been turned into a mere commodity to be sold to the highest bidder. Indeed, if the state of

2 ‘Nanobiotechnology ... refers to the merging of the living and non-living realms to make hybrid material and organisms. ... The merging of biotech and nanotech gives researchers unprecedented potential to modify existing non-living material but also to create living organisms that have never existed before.’ ETC Group ‘Oligopoly, Inc.’, *Communiqué*, No. 82, November-December 2003.

3 UNDP has repeatedly tried to show that great progress had been achieved in the fields of life expectancy and schooling. This may have been true in former decades and, of course, everything depends on the year of reference that is chosen for constructing the argument. But in Russia alone, life expectancy decreased by seven years between 1985 and 1993. In view of the growing importance of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the frequent transfer of the schooling system from the State to the private sector, signs of progress should be accepted with caution.

the world is as depressed as we have described it, it would appear urgent to reverse the course of events. All efforts should henceforth be geared towards devising radical measures to overcome present crises and guard against future disasters.

*It is not enough merely to list the evils witnessed and experienced today, for there are more to come.*



Surprisingly, the opposite is true. All over the world, politicians, international organisations and the majority of opinion makers (including political parties in opposition, as well as trade unions) propose that we should continue along the same path, in a relentless pursuit of the same economic goals.<sup>4</sup> Since political parties – in democratic societies – are usually fighting over ways and means of solving the current problems, one would expect them to be divided over the course to be taken with regard to issues of such paramount importance. But by and large this is not the case. Left- and right-wing parties share the same creed: namely that economic growth and the free interplay of individual interests are the only valid recipes for improving the situation, for reducing unemployment in the North and for procuring a decent income for the billions of poor in the South. Suffice it to mention the present debate on the economic recovery of OECD countries or the official policies of major non-OECD countries such as China, India, South Africa or Brazil.

‘Development’ and economic growth have led us to a dead end. However, for mainstream ‘experts’, the problem has nothing to do with ‘development’ and economic growth as such, for both continue to be viewed as positive: not just desirable, but also necessary. If something goes wrong – as the experts sometimes admit – it is only the result of ‘mismanagement’: in some places, growth has been too slow or unevenly shared; elsewhere, they maintain, political forces or private interests have promoted a biased or dubious form of ‘development’. Excuses are easily found so as to rescue ‘the true (meaning of) development’ as well as the multiple strategies that are supposed to help achieve it.<sup>5</sup> Once again, the expected solution is the problem. This is the riddle that must be explained and for which we have to find the key.

4 A recent survey carried out on behalf of the World Economic Forum among 7,900 young people in ten Asian countries reveals that the vast majority of them approve of globalisation and that only 2 per cent believe it may have a negative impact. *Le Temps*, 14 October 2003.

5 I include in these strategies what has come to be known as ‘sustainable development’, which is in fact an oxymoron (i.e. a contradiction in terms). Since ‘development’ is nothing but an increase in production with its corresponding increase in destruction (of matter and energy), its ‘sustainability’ is a purely rhetorical one. More often than not, ‘sustainable development’ can be summarised by the formula: ‘Pollute less in order to pollute longer’.

### *What is ‘development’ about?*<sup>6</sup>

History, again, might help us to understand the dangerous confusion that hangs over the term ‘development’. Not so long ago, political scientists used to draw a clear line between ‘socialism’, a 19th-century doctrine promoted by Karl Marx, and its historical implementation. On the one hand the term referred to the aim of sharing wealth according to each person’s needs, putting an end to the exploitation of man by man, and promising the whole of humankind a brilliant future. On the other hand was the ‘real socialism’ as promoted in the former Soviet empire – a regime all too often synonymous with shortages for the many, privileges for the few, and pollution.

The same distinction must be made, today, between the ideal of development, which is supposed to bring wellbeing and happiness to all, and the ‘development’ that actually takes place, the adverse effects of which can be witnessed all over the world. In fact, such a distinction is also necessary for methodological reasons: there is a real danger in talking about things that have not been clearly defined from the outset. But there are rules to follow in order to construct a definition. As Durkheim has shown, first it is necessary to set aside preconceptions vis-à-vis the object to be defined, especially those based on emotions; second, the definition should be constructed with reference to external characteristics that can be validated by anyone.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the definition of ‘development’ has to be constructed without taking into account what we believe ‘development’ to be, or whether we think of it as positive or negative. Moreover, such a definition must be derived from empirical facts.

To cut a long story short, what happens when something called ‘development’ occurs?<sup>8</sup> To put it differently, what are the main char-



*This is only the beginning of a long process of commodification of the natural environment that leads to the (private) appropriation of seeds, plants, and biodiversity generally.*

6 The following paragraphs are largely taken from my book, *The History of Development. From Western Creed to Global Faith*, Zed Books, London, 2001 (1997), and from my article ‘Le “développement”: la violence symbolique d’une croyance’, *Brouillons pour l’avenir. Contributions au débat sur les alternatives, Nouveaux Cahiers de l’IUED*, No. 14, IUED, Geneva, PUF, Paris, 2003, pp. 135–152. As I am obliged to summarise my point of view outrageously, I kindly refer the reader to these texts for a more detailed presentation of my position.

7 Emile Durkheim, *Les règles de la méthode sociologique*, PUF, Paris, 1983 [1895].

8 What follows is a summary. I offer a more detailed definition in my book (see note 6).



acteristics of so-called developed countries?<sup>9</sup> My response is: *we are witnessing a general transformation and destruction of the natural environment and of social relations*. The aim of ‘development’ is to increase the production of commodities (goods and services) geared, by way of exchange, to effective demand. *‘Development’, as it occurs today, is nothing less than the general commodification of nature and social relations*.

Concretely, when a country becomes ‘developed’, one of the first consequences is the privatisation of the commons and the institution of new property rights<sup>10</sup> over land and water. Subsequently, natural resources (especially non-renewable ones) enter the economic system and are converted into products whose recycling is either problematic or impossible. But this is only the beginning of a long process of commodification of the natural environment that leads to the (private) appropriation of seeds, plants, and biodiversity generally, through licensing procedures. Social relations then undergo the same commodification process. This starts with the introduction of wage labour, replacing ‘autonomous’ work and making subsistence dependent on prices on the labour market. Services that used to be free or exchanged within the kin group must be paid for; children are sent to day nurseries rather than being looked after by their grandparents; leisure becomes costly. But there is more: human beings are turned into ‘resources’ and are expected to know how to sell themselves to potential employers. Prostitution may be officially suppressed<sup>11</sup> but it

- 9 I should probably emphasise at this point that I am considering ‘development’ that has ‘succeeded’ in ‘developed’ regions rather than ‘development aid’ or international cooperation that is of marginal importance (0.22 per cent of OECD countries’ GNP). Furthermore, no country has ever become ‘developed’ through foreign-assistance projects or programmes. Development must be envisaged as a global and sweeping movement rather than as a series of success stories about cooperatives, village pumps or vaccination campaigns.
- 10 The introduction of (private) property rights (vs. possession) entails significant consequences since the mortgaging of land is one of the major sources of credit and, hence, of economic growth. For a more detailed presentation of this critical point, see Rolf Steppacher, ‘La petite différence et ses grandes conséquences: possession et propriété’, *Brouillons pour l’avenir. Contributions au débat sur les alternatives, Nouveaux Cahiers de l’IUED*, No. 14, IUED, Geneva, PUF, Paris, 2003, pp. 181–190.
- 11 It is necessary to condemn prostitution (in the narrow sense of engaging in sexual intercourse for money) in order to conceal the fact that, more generally, prostitution is extended to the whole of society, just as it is necessary to create natural parks in order to justify the plundering of natural resources, or to appoint committees on bioethics in order to legitimise further experiments on living material. Let us not be led astray by ‘humanistic’ or ‘ethical’ discourses.

has become the common lot: in a ‘developed’ country, everybody is on sale.<sup>12</sup>

This description of the ‘development process’ – which has been going on since the end of the 18th century – could certainly be more nuanced, but it captures the main elements of a general pattern. Whether we like it or not (and I personally dislike it), ‘development’ is *coeval with the generalisation of the capitalist mode of production*. This lies at the root of the problems we are faced with. It is the only possible explanation for increasing social inequalities and present-day ecological problems. Contrary to a widely held opinion, poverty cannot be ‘cured’, since it is not a form of ‘illness’ that demonstrates the malfunctioning of capitalism. We should look at the problem the other way round: poverty is proof of the ‘good health’ of the capitalist system; it is the spur that stimulates new efforts and new forms of accumulation.<sup>13</sup>

And yet, ‘development’ and economic growth continue to be heralded as the only road to salvation, as the universal goal of humankind. The blind spot is obvious. Why is it that we are unable to see that Dr Jekyll is Mr Hyde and that the carrot is the stick?

### *Development as religion*

Many factors explain the universal craze for ‘development’ (taken as a promise of general well-being), although its success has remained uncertain for a long time. Indeed, many other terms could have carried the same meaning, such as ‘modernisation’, ‘Westernisation’, ‘civilisation’, ‘improvement of living conditions’ or, simply ‘extension of capitalism’. But ‘development’ eventually prevailed – for three main reasons.

First, ‘development’ has a long history, which reaches back to the foundations of Western thought. Aristotle teaches that for a ‘scientific’ understanding of the world everything has to be understood ‘according to its nature’. The interesting thing is that, in Greek, the noun ‘nature’ (*physis*) is taken from a verb (*phuo*) meaning ‘to grow, to develop’. Hence, for Aristotle, scientific knowledge was based on

12 My distinction between ‘natural environment’ and ‘human beings’ is perhaps obsolete. As Pat Mooney has shown, at a certain level there is no longer any difference between matter (atomic structure) and living matter (biology and genetics). The wholesale colonisation of the various ‘resources’ of our planet – in the name of profit – is well under way.

13 See Jeremy Seabrook, *The Race for Riches: The Human Cost of Wealth*, Marshall Pickering, Basingstoke, 1988.

the intrinsic ‘development’ of everything (which also implied decay and death). Due to the considerable influence of the Greek philosopher, it became progressively accepted that it was in the ‘nature’ of ‘things’ – whether plants, animals, human beings or social institutions – to ‘develop’. The same idea was later taken up by Saint Augustine whose influence on Christian thinking throughout the ages has been paramount. He applied the same scheme to salvation history, starting with the creation of the world and of our first parents, Adam and Eve, reaching a climax with the incarnation of Jesus Christ and leading inexorably to the end, with the Last Judgement. It was only in the course of the 17th century that those who came to be known as the Moderns (in the wake of a literary dispute opposing the Ancients to the Moderns) transformed this world view (*Weltgeschichte als Heilgeschichte*<sup>14</sup>). They claimed that far from being doomed to decay, the world was actually headed for unending progress through the constant accumulation of knowledge. Authors such as Pascal, Perrault and, in particular, Fontenelle, retained from Aristotle the idea that history was driven by a kind of ‘nature’ (that is, development), but rejected its intrinsic consequence, namely that anything that grows is also bound to die or to disappear. In this manner they paved the way for the ideology of Progress, which flourished in the following centuries ... and still haunts our imagination.



*Because everything is supposed to grow or develop, the concept of development has become almost synonymous with that of life.*

The second reason derives from the previous one. The positive meaning of ‘development’ is closely linked to the biological metaphor. Because everything is supposed to grow or develop, the concept of development has become almost synonymous with that of life. Of course, this constitutes an unjustifiable transposition of a truth that is valid in the biological realm to the social sciences, where the claim for such a truth lacks legitimacy. Progressively, a philosophy of history came to replace ‘real’ history – that is, the human-made course of events, with its ups and downs, its periods of splendour and its tragedies. Thus, the ideology of ‘development’ is nothing but a way of *naturalising history*. And yet we continue to believe that there is an internal necessity in the unfolding of history, as if the destiny of humankind was sealed at its very beginning. In the West, we are prone to ascribing to members of other cultures an inclination towards fatalism. But we do no better! ‘Development’ has become our destiny, our inescapable fate. This philosophy of history has been with us for so long that it is certainly one of the major reasons why it is so difficult to escape from it.

<sup>14</sup> The italicised phrase in German means ‘world history as salvation history’ in English.

Finally, the word ‘development’ gained international acceptance when President Truman – in his Inaugural Address of January 1949 – radically transformed the way of looking at the world scene by turning colonised peoples into ‘underdeveloped’ ones. Instead of recognising that the world consisted of two major blocs – with colonised nations eager to fight for their independence and colonisers determined to keep their possessions – he simply declared the unity of humankind in a common goal to be shared by all, namely ‘development’. Of course, some parts of the world were ‘still underdeveloped’ whereas the Northern hemisphere – in spite of post-war hardships – was considered ‘developed’. This was not seen as a handicap but rather as a challenge. After all, just as an undergraduate student rightly expects to become a graduate, ‘underdeveloped’ nations had good reasons to believe that they might eventually become ‘developed’, provided they complied with the various measures concocted on their behalf to guide them in the path towards ‘development’, wellbeing and happiness.

These explanations have one thing in common: they have nothing to do with the actual course of history. They propagate a kind of *wishful thinking about an eventual happy outcome for all*; they ignore economic and political upheavals; they ascribe to ‘development’ a kind of *necessity* or inevitability constituting ‘the end of history’. Because it has so long been engraved in Western consciousness (and exported to ‘underdeveloped’ nations), the notion of ‘development’, along with the principle of economic growth, is one of the ‘truths’ that tallies very closely with Durkheim’s definition of religion.<sup>15</sup> It functions as



*It has become a widely shared belief that, through ‘development’, history is heading towards its end goal and that, despite temporary periods of decline, tomorrow will be a better day.*

15 Durkheim has shown that religion is inseparable from society. Actually, the function of religion, understood as a set of beliefs, and of its corresponding social practices, is to create the unity of the group and to bind its members together (*Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse. Le système totémique en Australie*, PUF, Paris, 1960 [1912]). According to Durkheim, religion does not presuppose the existence of a god, nor of a divine being, nor of a ‘supernatural’ sphere. Buddhism is a case in point, since Buddha – although highly praised and respected – has never been turned into a god. There are, therefore, ‘secular’ or ‘civil’ religions whose function is perfectly similar to any other religion as long as it ‘cements’ the group that holds the same values to be true. Essentially ‘religion’ is therefore very different from ideology. Although ideologies may bind together those who claim to draw their opinions from them, they nevertheless remain subject to debate. Different ideologies may coexist in a given society, as is reflected in the various political parties that compete for power in a democratic State. But, according to Durkheim, in any society, it is religion that binds together those who profess different ideologies. I do not imply that ‘development’ is the unique value commonly shared in Western society. Human rights or democracy are also part of our religion in the Durkheimian sense, as they ›

the binding force of society, as an indisputable truth that transcends ideological divisions (as exemplified during the Cold War when East and West disagreed about almost everything except the necessity of promoting ‘development’). It has become a widely shared belief that, through ‘development’, history is heading towards its end goal and that, despite temporary periods of decline, tomorrow will be a better day. Hence the popularity that the term rapidly gained, and has retained, for it conveys the promise of general wellbeing for the entire planet. Of course, private doubts may be allowed about the justification for ‘development’, but when it comes to public statements, orthodoxy regains the upper hand. No politician seeking votes from his or her constituency would ever dare speak out against ‘development’. One may well reply that numerous critiques have nevertheless been voiced against ‘development’, that alternatives *to* ‘development’ have already been proposed, and that their authors have not been cast out. Indeed, burning witches at the stake is no longer fashionable. But there are more subtle forms of exclusion, such as marginalisation and consigning people to oblivion.<sup>16</sup> Society is strong enough to tolerate some eccentric characters, as long as they do not turn into real trouble-makers. There needs to be serious reflection on this point before any attempt to work out what to do next.

It should be emphasised that to speak out against dominant religious beliefs is by no means an easy task. Protective mechanisms to ensure orthodoxy are powerful, particularly when core beliefs are at stake. But it should also be added that a particular belief never goes alone. Beliefs are organised into clusters, and to criticise one of them may well trigger collective resistance. It is not enough to say that we should simply reject ‘development’. For ‘development’ is only the visible part of the iceberg. All preconceptions about economics lie below this iceberg tip, so to speak. To attack ‘development’ also means questioning the *raison d’être* of economic growth, the ‘natural’ (or primordial) state of scarcity, the evidence of unlimited human needs, the virtue of competition, the invisible hand of the market, the assumption that more is always better – to cite but a few of the ‘truths’ that are usually taken for granted since they all pertain to the same world view and the same set of religious beliefs.

› belong to a common stock of values that can be drawn upon in order to legitimise actions. Cf. Marie-Dominique Perrot, Fabrizio Sabelli, Gilbert Rist, *La mythologie programmée. L’économie des croyances dans la société moderne*, Paris, PUF, 1992.

<sup>16</sup> In economics courses, for instance, critical voices are never mentioned.

To conclude this section, a specific character of religion should be underlined: religions are self-immune. Internal criticism is therefore powerless when it comes to reconciling discourse and action. This is why, for example, Christianity can stand *at the same time* as the religion of love and as the justification for the Crusades, the Inquisition or the religious wars between Catholics and Protestants. Similarly, ‘development’ may stand for a universal promise of happiness and, *at the same time*, for the justification of exploitation. What happens in the heavens often bears no relation to what happens on earth. Some people seem to have a particular propensity for looking upwards, in order to ignore down-to-earth realities. I have opted for the opposite posture and I refuse to blur the issue by resorting to an idealistic discourse that legitimises its opposite. After all, when President Bush attacks Iraq in the name of ‘democracy’, those who have a minimum of knowledge in politics are not fooled. Why should one applaud when millions are expropriated (deprived of land and traditional knowledge, etc.) in the name of ‘development’?

A last point remains to be clarified. What about the objection that many people in the South are clamouring for ‘development’? How could ‘we’ refuse to grant them what they want? But who are ‘they’, and ‘what’ do they actually want? In my view, ‘they’ belong to two different categories. The first encompasses those who are supposed to represent ‘the people’, be it in governments, administrations, international organisations or NGOs (and who have generally received a Western-type education). The second category comprises grassroot individuals who have internalised the mainstream discourse and skillfully take advantage of the naivety of donor agencies in order to get their share of the ‘development’ pie. If we leave aside the latter (who often receive substantial rewards for their ingenuity or deviousness), the former certainly want to achieve ‘development’ as it has been promised to them. Their honesty and their good faith cannot be questioned, but they are typically suffering from the effects of *symbolic violence*. Bourdieu has coined this expression to explain how those who wield power exert their domination with the tacit consent of the dominated party.<sup>17</sup> Symbolic violence is based on a world view serving the interests of the ruling group, while at the same time being accepted by the members of the dominated group in such a way that they have no choice but to match their behaviour to it and, in this manner, to reinforce it. The trick consists in describing a particular world order as ‘natural’, so that the very people who are suffering from it accept it as just and desirable. As



*Development is only the visible part of the iceberg. All preconceptions about economics lie below this iceberg tip.*

17 References to symbolic violence are numerous in Bourdieu's work. See, in particular, *Le sens pratique*, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1980, and *La domination masculine*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1998.

we have seen, ‘development’ is ideally suited for this purpose, since the promises it holds seem to correspond to some kind of undisputed ‘natural order’.<sup>18</sup> Victims of ‘development’ are not necessarily critical of it. Instead, they may be among its fiercest supporters. In Bourdieu’s words ‘political subversion presupposes cognitive subversion’.<sup>19</sup> The most difficult task therefore consists in *deconstructing the symbolic order that is taken for granted* and in showing that the collective belief in it results from the arbitrary meaning it has been endowed with – a meaning that has surreptitiously been imposed and whose arbitrary character has so far gone unacknowledged.

Thus, *to impose a world view amounts not only to an intellectual exercise of persuasion. It is first and foremost a political act.* By promoting the image of an enchanted world, where power relations have been euphemised (through the new catchword of ‘governance’) and where poor nations have been made to believe that they might eventually catch up with the wealthy, *the ruling group is transforming the members of the dominated group into accomplices or potential associates.*

### *Redefining a non-ethnocentric agenda*

In the preceding section I showed why the ‘development’ paradigm must be rejected altogether. In my view, it cannot be redeemed, as it is both ecologically unsustainable and socially destructive. To persist, notably by promoting yet another qualifier describing allegedly ‘good development’ (human, sustainable, social, endogenous, cultural, and what not) leads nowhere and only increases semantic and political confusion. Rather, we need to complete the process of *cognitive subversion* initiated by Bourdieu.

However, it would hardly be satisfactory to avoid one ‘development’ pitfall, only to fall into others. Indeed, if our *What Next* project is meant to give food for thought (and, possibly, real rather than canned food!) and if we want it to be taken seriously, *we need to make sure that our suggestions do not simply rest on personal or epoch-dependant convictions.* In other words, we should come up with practical recommendations likely to be widely acceptable and capable of implementation.

<sup>18</sup> I am aware that in many languages, particularly in Africa, there is no word that carries the idea conveyed by our use of the term ‘development’. This is evidence of the mainly Western roots of the concept, and also shows the extent to which the religion of ‘development’ came to be accepted as a result of cultural imperialism.

<sup>19</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre, *Ce que parler veut dire. L’économie des échanges linguistiques*, Paris, Fayard, 1982, p. 150.

Most reports seem to be shelved almost as soon as they are written. This may be either because they take little or no account of existing social and cultural structures or because their recommendations would involve such considerable transformations (at international, national or local levels) before anything could change that they are simply unrealistic. Our aim, therefore, is to propose forms of action that could be taken immediately and that are broadly considered to be legitimate.

In the next section, I shall make a plea both for the politics of cultural relativism and for a strict definition of solidarity. This, I believe, will help us in defining a common agenda and in setting priorities for tackling global problems.

### *On changing beliefs*

We all have beliefs and convictions. We may even be certain that they are ‘true’. I have no problem with that. We all need to rely on guidelines or moral imperatives that we take to be beyond question. The trouble starts when we feel compelled to convince other people that what we think is good for us is also good for them (this is a renewed and personalised version of ‘What is good for General Motors, or Coca-Cola, is good for the United States or the whole world’). This kind of missionary outlook is usually widespread among the faithful of monotheistic religions, including modern lay converts to ‘democracy’, ‘human rights’ and ‘development’. Yet, people of other creeds have a tendency to keep their gods to themselves. They should be respected. Not only because their present belief suits them well, but because history teaches us that we can never be sure that what we believe today will be relevant tomorrow. Intercultural dialogue should not take place around beliefs, but rather around common social practices. The existence (or non-existence) of God (or gods) cannot be put to the test, nor be proven. But common experiences can be shared.

Different societies’ notions of certainty have varied greatly throughout both time and space. What one considers, here and now, to be a certainty is (or was), elsewhere or yesterday, regarded as a mere *belief*, that is (or has often become) an object of ridicule. Sorcery and witchcraft are self-evident for the vast majority of Africans. The practices associated with them are part of daily life. Africans make use of them in order to gain political power, to win a football match or as a protection against illness or bad luck. Outside Africa, such certainties are considered to be the product of (false) *beliefs*. When a Chinese or a Japanese person meets a fellow citizen, his or her first concern is quickly to evaluate relative social standing vis-à-vis the other person,



in order to speak and behave in accordance with the accepted views on superiority and inferiority within a hierarchical system. In other parts of the world, such concerns are considered obsolete since all human beings have once and for all been declared equal in the Universal Declaration of 1948, and these practices are regarded as remnants of now irrelevant *beliefs* that originated in feudal times.



*Our What Next project is meant to give food for thought (and, possibly, real rather than canned food)!*

In the West, even educated people were certain, not so long ago, that witches were capable of causing hailstorms that would destroy the harvest, or that they were responsible for miscarriages among the cattle. It was therefore legitimate to burn them at the stake. Today, such former certainties are considered to be superstitions or outrageous *beliefs* that can only be explained by the domination that men and the clergy exerted over women at the time. Today, in the West, even educated people are sure that economics is a science that deserves respect since it is based on mathematical calculations that are universally valid and contain the necessary recipe for achieving the common good. In other parts of the world, economics is either unknown or considered to be a form of fairy tale.

Many more examples could be added to the previous ones. What I mean to say is simply that *there is no point in trying to compel people who hold other beliefs to accept ours,*<sup>20</sup> firstly because we can never be sure that what we are now proclaiming as ‘*the truth*’ will be forever considered as such and, secondly, because those whom we want to convince may eventually join our cause for reasons that have nothing to do with a ‘conversion’ of their minds.

Finally, the other conclusion that can be drawn from these remarks is that only ‘unbelievers’ are able to identify a (false) ‘belief’ behind what is (or has been) accepted as a truth by the faithful. *The What Next project needs unbelievers* who can draw our attention to any missionary drift based on fake universalism, where a parochial truth is elevated to the level of a universal one.

### *In defence of the politics of cultural relativism*

I am well aware of the debate among anthropologists on the problems of cultural relativism. I fully share the idea that reification of cultures creates insurmountable theoretical problems, and that nobody can be viewed as a representative of his or her culture. I know that all social groups have always migrated and have survived by borrowing and

<sup>20</sup> This, of course, applies to beliefs (which are beyond dispute for those who hold them) and not to ideological stances, which can vary within a given society.

exchanging (willingly or unwillingly) ideas, techniques, languages and experiences. I am convinced that any recourse to ‘authenticity’ is doomed to failure. I have no difficulty in explaining why, in the extreme, cultural relativism may legitimise practices that are injurious to human dignity. For all these reasons, I am aware that what has come to be known as cultural relativism is no longer fashionable in academic circles. Even if some colleagues have gone too far – in my view – in criticising it, they have undoubtedly made some valuable points.<sup>21</sup>

But whereas anthropologists have always been careful to maintain relativism and universalism simultaneously (in spite of cross-criticism), *the scholarly critique of cultural relativism has been recently taken over by political movements or activists in order to comfort universalistic claims.* Universalism is indeed deeply ingrained in monotheism and thus part of Western tradition. Since the Crusades, all through the conquest of the Americas and colonisation, and continuing in the age of globalisation, the West has never ceased to try to convert the rest of the world to its own certainties, whether the Christian faith, ‘civilisation’, economic liberalism, democracy, human rights and the like. *Reasons and motivations have changed over time, but the trend has remained remarkably constant – with repeatedly disastrous consequences.* Good intentions have more often than not played havoc, even if it has sometimes taken generations before this has been admitted. Furthermore, it is certainly illusory to think that, at a particular point in time, all people have the same aspirations and share the same values. About such matters, diversity will always prevail, for better or worse, but we cannot pass judgement on what is right or wrong. We may have our private preferences but we have to accept that other people may disagree with them and choose another course. *If relativism is considered to be ‘dangerous’ today in certain circles, is this not, first of all, because it calls into question the legitimacy of the Western missionary attitude? If Islamic salafism is regarded today as the centre of the ‘axis of evil’, is this not because its followers are disputing the Western monopoly of truth?*<sup>22</sup>



*Since the Crusades, all through the conquest of the Americas and colonisation, and continuing in the age of globalisation, the West has never ceased to try to convert the rest of the world to its own certainties.*

This is why I strongly believe that, *for political reasons, we should not be terrorised by the anti-culturalist stance.* We should refrain from imposing on the world (and on those who do not necessarily share our worldview) issues that have been formatted to suit Western ideology

21 Suffice it to say that cultural relativism (or suspension of judgement) is a prerequisite for any anthropological fieldwork. It is not enough to rely on similarities between human beings of various cultures; differences also exist.

22 Salafism is a doctrine that promotes a strict observance of the principles of the Koran.

and interests.<sup>23</sup> Of course, it may sometimes be hard and destabilising to admit that our most cherished truths are nothing but tomorrow's fairy tales. But this is the price to pay if we want to 'think outside of the box' and refuse to be embroiled – even unwittingly – in the usual Western hegemonic programme. Throughout history, Westerners have been experts in transmogrifying their parochial truths into 'universal' obligations, which they have subsequently imposed on the rest of the world in the name of God or the general good.<sup>24</sup> To repeat such errors would deprive our project of all credibility.

This succession of caveats makes our task rather difficult. But there is a way out of the maze. My contention here is that the content of our project should derive from a clear definition of global solidarity.

### *The demanding conditions for true solidarity*

The term 'solidarity' has been used and abused. The notions of 'development aid', humanitarian action, fundraising in the wake of natural disasters, and relief operations generally, are usually presented as 'expressions of solidarity' with victims. Thus, the term 'solidarity' simply means compassion, pity, tender feelings, unselfishness or generosity. It implies a transitive action from a giver to a receiver, or a beneficiary. No reverse movement is anticipated, except, in some cases, expressions of gratitude. These lofty feelings are certainly commendable, but they have nothing to do with real solidarity, which is much more demanding.

Actually, to establish solidarity, four conditions must be met. Firstly, there needs to be a commonality of interests between partners; secondly, the group of partners needs to face an external group with divergent views or interests; thirdly, partners must be – morally or contractually – obliged to each other; finally, partners must jointly and evenly share both profits and losses resulting from their actions. Examples of solidarity can be found when trade union workers go on strike, when soldiers face their enemies, or when private bankers, who are also the owners of the firm, are managing their business... In these cases, *people are jointly liable*, and no free rider is tolerated.

<sup>23</sup> Of course, the opposite danger also exists. The pseudo-scientific theories elaborated by Samuel Huntington are a case in point.

<sup>24</sup> 'Global proposals are necessarily parochial: they inevitably express the specific vision and interests of a small group of people, even when they are supposedly formulated in the interests of humanity' (Vandana Shiva, quoted in Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash, *Grassroots Post-Modernism*, Zed Books, London, 1998, p. 27).

Whereas the loose meaning of solidarity presupposes that actors are disinterested (and that they are likely to express ‘solidarity’ with people they have never seen!), the full meaning insists on *the necessity of a common interest among associates*. This, of course, means a complete reversal of perspective.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, to establish the *What Next* project on the foundations of true solidarity, we have to abandon the idea that, in order to improve world conditions, the haves should become generous enough to give something to the have-nots, or that those who know what is good for others should disseminate their knowledge among the ignorant ones. Quite the contrary: we have to start by identifying *common interests* that could be fought for collectively.

Of course, the second condition for true solidarity (the existence of an outside group facing the group of associates) is rather problematic at first sight. There seems to be a limit in extending our solidarity to the whole of humankind since, in that case, no ‘enemy’ is left to face the group of associates. If Martians are not likely to invade our planet, other phenomena are clearly endangering our living conditions. Foreign or class enemies have been replaced by ecological ones; the greenhouse effect, the thinning of the ozone layer, deforestation, water shortages, climate change, depletion of natural (mineral and living) resources, etc. (i.e. the consequences of the ‘development’ paradigm) are real threats that should not be underestimated. And depending on whether or not we take them seriously, we will also, collectively, lose or gain. I, therefore, think that it is vital to focus on those issues that can be viewed as ‘global’ and concentrate our energy on commonly shared problems.

### *Thinking differently*

As I have mentioned before, many alternatives have already been proposed. There is no need to repeat, yet again, what is already known. Furthermore, it would be far too easy just to imagine what *should be done*. Actually, this kind of exercise requires no imagination at all since (almost) everything has already been said and written time and again. I do not mean to undervalue the contributions of the many authors who have identified various measures aimed at making the

<sup>25</sup> Development aid is sometimes justified on the basis of a paradoxical formulation: we have an interest in being disinterested. In other words, we have an interest in making other people richer in order that we also acquire new customers. The statement sounds fine but, as we all know, what happens in practice is different, since development assistance mainly benefits donor countries.

world a better place.<sup>26</sup> Quite the contrary: we should re-read what they have written and take stock of it. Many of their ideas are still valid and stimulating. But in repeating what *should* be done, is there not an implicit avowal of powerlessness?

Therefore, priority has to be given to examining the *preconditions* for our reflection, the intellectual framework that determines what we are able to see and conceptualise but also what we fail to grasp or discover. We do not know the many things we are unaware of. In other words, our task lies upstream from politics; it mainly consists in *decolonising our imaginary*, in exposing the fallacy of what we take for granted, in stepping aside from mainstream thinking (not only from neo-classical economic theory but from the epistemological conditions that rendered neo-classical theory possible).

*Foreign or class enemies have been replaced by ecological ones; the greenhouse effect, the thinning of the ozone layer, deforestation, water shortages, climate change, depletion of natural (mineral and living) resources, etc.*



<sup>26</sup> The *What Now* report is a case in point; both its theoretical framework and its concrete proposals still stand. A great number of authors could also be mentioned: Gustavo Esteva, Alain Gras, Ivan Illich, Serge Latouche, François Partant, Majid Rahnema, Pierre Thuiller and Wolfgang Sachs have all been concerned with what has come to be known as the 'post-development' school. Needless to say, many names could be added to the list and I apologise to those I have forgotten.

### *Why don't we believe in what we know to be certain?*

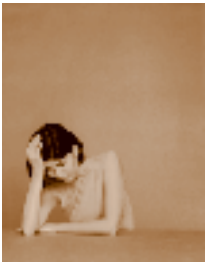
Whether we like it or not, thinking about the risk of various types of catastrophe likely to occur has indeed become a priority. The idea is not, however, to revive the figure of the prophet of doom. To anticipate a catastrophe does not mean to wring one's hands, but rather *to take it so seriously that it will eventually not happen*. An example can be taken from a contemporary piece of news, which, although thought-provoking, went almost unnoticed. Towards the end of September 2003 a terrible earthquake occurred on the island of Hokkaido, reaching 8 degrees on the Richter scale. TV programmes showed upsetting pictures of staggering houses and falling cupboards. And what was the outcome of such an impressive phenomenon? There was only one casualty. One dares not imagine what would have happened in any country other than Japan under similar circumstances. What are the lessons to be drawn from this example? First, the Japanese know very well that earthquakes and subsequent tidal waves (*tsunamis*) are likely to occur. Secondly, their collective behaviour is not dependent on risk evaluation based on probability (if the risk probability is – say – less than 2 per cent, then we are ready to run the risk). On the contrary, *they take the catastrophe for granted*, and behave according to this conviction, enforce anti-seismic standards in the construction industry, etc. Of course, this does not prevent earthquakes from happening, but it prevents them from turning into catastrophes.

In one of his recent books, Jean-Pierre Dupuy recalls that, before September 11, 2001, US intelligence services had intercepted messages indicating that a major terrorist operation involving civilian aircraft was under preparation.<sup>27</sup> So they knew. But the content of the information seemed so unlikely (in the sense of incredible) that *they did not believe it and therefore did not act upon it*. This is why the catastrophe occurred. What had so far been taken as unlikely, unbelievable or impossible suddenly became a reality. But if, beforehand, the possibility of the catastrophe had been taken for granted, it would never have happened.

It has become fashionable to talk about 'risk society'. Experts are requested to evaluate the potential dangers of chemical or nuclear plants, climate warming, pollution of all kinds, etc., in order to tell

27 *Pour un catastrophisme éclairé. Quand l'impossible est certain*, Le Seuil, Paris, 2002. Most of the views that are put forward in this section rely on the aforementioned book as well as on Jean-Pierre Dupuy's article 'Pourquoi la peur peut être une bonne conseillère', *Brouillons pour l'avenir. Contributions au débat sur les alternatives*, (Comelliau, Christian, ed.) *Nouveaux Cahiers de l'IUED*, No. 14, IUED, Geneva, PUF, Paris, 2003, pp. 159–169.

technocrats how to cope with ‘natural’ (actually man-made) hazards. Although concern with potential dangers may seem a positive thing, it may also mean that the real problems elude us. The actual uncertainty of climatic models (some of them forecast a temperature rise of ‘only’ 2 degrees Celsius by the end of the century, whereas others go as high as 5 degrees) is used as an excuse for not taking action. But the well-known fact is that if major countries such as China, India or Brazil persist in trying to catch up, according to the dominant model of ‘development’, present climatic models will become totally obsolete. As Dupuy has shown, what prevents us from taking action is therefore not that we are unable to *imagine* or to anticipate the catastrophe, but that *we do not believe in what we know*. Unlike the Japanese in the previous example, as long as the catastrophe has not occurred, we take it to be impossible, whereas we should regard it as a certainty. The only solution is to replace our old belief in ‘development’ by a new one, based on a certain number of truths that so far we are refusing to take seriously.



*Priority has to be given to examining the preconditions for our reflection, the intellectual framework that determines what we are able to see and conceptualise but also what we fail to grasp or discover.*

How are we to do this? Through the heuristic of fear: that is, a simulation of the fear we might experience when the worst happens. Fear should not be confused with panic. Fear helps us to anticipate the future and retrospectively to assess what we are presently doing (or not doing) – which determines what will happen later and trigger off our fear. A change in belief will only take place if we look at our present time in, as it were, a rear-view mirror placed some decades ahead of us. Instead of deluding ourselves with the unverified idea, implicit in the notion of ‘development’, that tomorrow will be a better day, we have to act now *as if* the most feared catastrophes lying ahead were certain ... in order to prevent them from happening. Amerindian wisdom tells us ‘we hold the Earth in trust for our children’. We therefore have to give greater significance to the future. Our social bonds are not limited to those whom we already know. They extend to our descendants for whose survival we are responsible. Such a change entails a revolutionary shift in our way of looking at history, away from a benign belief in its necessary unfolding, or ‘development’. This also implies changes in our daily lives. If we seriously take into account the various risks that are hanging over us, our behaviour must change, not only because we feel under a moral obligation, but because we must be utterly convinced that changes are not only ‘rationally’ necessary but that they may actually procure a better life. Ecological problems have too often been presented in a rather discouraging way. Necessary efforts to curb the present trend are usually seen as a rationing process, indeed a rather unattractive way of encouraging a move towards change. There is no doubt about

the necessity of slowing down economic growth, limiting pollution, or reducing the rate at which we use up non-renewable resources. But these measures should not be considered as entailing loss, but rather as procuring a gain. *There is a positive side in restoring a sense of limits.* Not only because it may delay the catastrophe but because it may improve our wellbeing, our social relations, etc. In other words, we must consider not only what have we *lost* in the course of the industrialisation and globalisation process, but also what we are to *gain* if we reduce its importance.

### *In the search for new concepts*

In real life, we all behave according to our available kit of terminology that gives meaning to natural or social phenomena, as if they were ‘real’. But we cannot exclude the possibility that some ‘things’ may exist, or be possible, for which we have no word. Thus, in a recent lecture given to a group of English-speaking students, I tried to find a word to convey the idea carried in the French word ‘*décroissance*’. I asked for the help of the audience, but no satisfactory answer emerged. This, of course, does not imply that French is a richer language than English. It means that some French scholars have invented a word, and therefore a way of looking at our social world, which does not (yet) open a ‘window of understanding’ in the English academic world.<sup>28</sup>

Now, what do I mean by ‘*décroissance*’? Certainly not what economists call ‘negative growth’ (a very strange oxymoron!), thus implicitly assuming that (global) economic growth is positive *per se* and that a deficit in economic growth should necessarily be viewed as something negative. The word ‘*décroissance*’ could perhaps be best explained by combining Georgescu-Roegen’s concept of entropy and Illich’s idea of counter-productivity.<sup>29</sup> From this perspective, global (or general) growth is beside the point. *The question is not whether there should be economic growth or not, but how a more decent life can be attained, given natural constraints (the finite quantity of non-renewable resources) with-*



*A change in belief will only take place if we look at our present time in, as it were, a rear-view mirror placed some decades ahead of us.*

28 I hasten to say that I am not entirely satisfied with this word (even if it has become popular among critics of ‘development’) because its negative prefix (‘*dé*-*croissance*) may carry the idea that what is needed is simply ‘less of the same’.

29 Cf. Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, *La décroissance*, Preface and translation by Jacques Grinevald and Ivo Rens, Paris, Sang de la Terre, 1995, and also the proceedings of the symposium, ‘*La décroissance soutenable. Bioéconomie, écologie et simplicité volontaire*’, Lyon, 26–27 September 2003, [www.decroissance.org](http://www.decroissance.org).



out depending on huge techno-structures (producing energy, food, transportation, etc.), and by restoring former social relations that have been destroyed by ‘development’.<sup>30</sup> It is obvious that no one can live indefinitely on his capital, but this is what we actually do by depleting non-renewable resources in order to foster endless economic growth. We therefore need to *regain a sense of limits* in order to live on our income (flows) rather than on a capital that does not belong to us alone.

‘Décroissance’ does not mean ‘decline’. Of course, it entails considerable change in our consumption patterns. But it does not suggest that we should ‘go back’ (whatever that means, if it means anything ...) to previous ages, using candles rather than electricity. It also means, for example, that we may have to reduce drastically our consumption of imported fruits and vegetables (even those labelled as ‘fair trade’ products!), our dependence on cars or aeroplanes, our addiction to dispensable gadgets that are great drains on energy.<sup>31</sup> In other words, instead of relocating industry (abroad) and of multiplying the transfers of goods (and often of the same goods!) from one place to the other (in order to ‘add value’ to it), one should rather ‘relocalise’ trade and industry. We must shift ‘from global dependency to local interdependency’ (Helena Norberg-Hodge). This may of course sound utopian, particularly in the Northern hemisphere. But the potential for ‘décroissance’ – without reducing wellbeing – is very high. *The actual challenge is to show that ‘décroissance’ is not only necessary, but also desirable* and that a more sober life may be as pleasant as what we are used to.<sup>32</sup> What is needed is not so much a ‘simpler life’ but a *simplified* way of life. If we do not start now to accept change voluntarily along these lines, soon governments, faced with overwhelming problems, will have no other solution but to impose an authoritarian society.

30 The car industry is, of course, a case in point. Even in a country such as Switzerland (where there is no car factory) it accounts for 18 per cent of the GNP. A collective change of attitude vis-à-vis ‘private mobility’ (which could be brought about by increasing taxes on, or rationing, petrol) would entail not only a decrease in the GNP – and perhaps an increase in unemployment – but also a reduction of noise and pollution, a more convivial way of life, fewer road accidents, changes in consumption patterns (by making outskirts supermarkets less attractive), etc.

31 We cannot expect the World Trade Organization or individual governments to enforce trade restrictions on dispensable products. But international boycott campaigns could initiate the movement.

32 For example, we should stop confusing the ‘standard of living’ (which measures a level of production and consumption) with the ‘quality of life’. What makes people happy is largely beyond their purchasing power.

To avoid misunderstanding, I am not contending that the above-mentioned ideas or measures could not be imagined unless the concept of ‘décroissance’ is available. What I mean to say is that alternative policies need alternative concepts, which are not simply the opposite of dominant ones (e.g. ‘negative growth’) but which rather convey a different approach to the issues at stake. Finally, to restore the old idea of *self-reliance* (which, before being called a ‘development strategy’, was simply the age-old way of life for humankind) may indicate another way of reaching the main objectives of ‘décroissance’: by and large, the ‘development era’ has lasted for two centuries, indeed a very short period of time compared to the entire history of humankind. The time has come to close the parenthesis.

### *Rebuilding economic theory*

Obviously, economic thinking is largely responsible for the maze in which we are presently trapped. I am not referring to neo-classical economic doctrine only, as if other forms of economics (Marxist, Keynesian, etc.) escape criticism. The problem lies much deeper and points to the basic assumptions shared by all mainstream economists.<sup>33</sup> As mentioned above, these assumptions can be taken as ‘minor beliefs’, which are part and parcel of the religion of ‘development’, and reinforce it. To deconstruct them requires an interdisciplinary approach in which history and social anthropology play a crucial role.

The trouble is that most of the basic assumptions of economics are false. For example, mainstream economics assumes from the outset that human beings have always lived in a state of ‘natural’ scarcity, constantly eking out a living, unable as they are to satisfy their ‘unlimited’ needs. This founding tale of the discipline has been proven wrong a long time ago by economic anthropology,<sup>34</sup> but it is nevertheless recited at the beginning of any economics course. The reason why economists stick to their misrepresentations is quite obvious: if scarcity is ‘natural’ (rather than socially constructed by the market system combined with private ownership regulations) and human beings have unlimited needs, unlimited growth is necessary to satisfy these needs, and the division of labour and market exchange are best suited to increase production. Conversely, the necessity of growth lies at the root of the continued fabrication of new needs. No wonder, there-

<sup>33</sup> For a more detailed presentation of this section, cf. Rist, Gilbert, ‘Préalables à une théorie de l’échange’, *Pratiques de la dissidence économique*, Yvonne Preiswerk and Fabrizio Sabelli (eds.), *Nouveaux Cahiers de l’IUED*, No. 7, IUED, Geneva, PUF, Paris, 1998, pp. 17–41.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Sahlins, Marshall, *Stone Age Economics*, Aldine, Chicago, 1972.

fore, that the economic system produces simultaneously both affluence and scarcity.

*The trouble is that most of the basic assumptions of economics are false.*



The whole question of exchange is also biased by the constant reference to Adam Smith's famous statement that human beings have 'a natural propensity to barter, truck and exchange', which leads him to restrict his theory to *market exchange*, i.e. an immediate exchange of 'values' (goods, services or money) based on the principle of equivalence. Here again, by harping on about the 'natural' foundation of their theory, economists are suggesting that the theory is beyond dispute; thus, it has to be swallowed by anyone who wants to be accepted into the clan. This theory is all the more attractive for being ethically neutral: economic prosperity has replaced the old 'common good' (*bonum commune*). The main problem is that exchange is thus reduced to *one of its possible forms*, i.e. market exchange, whereas historians and anthropologists have shown that exchange can take on a variety of forms, such as gift exchange (simple or generalised reciprocity), redistribution, domestic (autonomous) exchange and symbolic exchange (through ostentatious destruction of wealth in, for example, potlatch).<sup>35</sup> Here is not the proper place to restate the findings of economic anthropology or history (one could again go back to Aristotle who made a clear distinction between 'oikonomia' – domestic management – and 'chrematistics' – financial enrichment). Suffice it to say that *the puzzling aspect of economics lies in its attempt to explain the various social practices that ensure human livelihood, while it is based on fanciful ideas that bear no relation whatsoever to social life.*

Finally, at another level, mainstream economic theory is both anachronistic and obsolete as it is based on a Newtonian and mechanistic paradigm (where celestial mechanics is transposed to the social sphere). It totally ignores the law of entropy, which shows that any production of energy and matter also entails a corresponding destruction. Economic theory is caught in a 19th-century worldview, with dramatic consequences.<sup>36</sup> No wonder, then, that *economists are unable to understand the real functioning of social exchange<sup>37</sup> and of the environment.* Their only way out is to bring the world into conformity with their

35 Cf. Polanyi, Karl, *The Great Transformation*, New York, Rinehart, 1944.

36 Cf. Grinevald, Jacques, 'Georgescu-Roegen, bioéconomie et biosphère', in *Objectif décroissance. Vers une société harmonieuse*, (Bernard, Michel, Cheynet, Vincent, and Clémentin, Bruno, eds.), Parangon, Paris, 2003, pp. 44–57. For relevant publication in English, see the works of Hermann Daly.

37 This has already been explored by Dudley Seers in a forgotten article: 'The Limitation of the Special Case', *Bulletin of the Oxford Institute of Economics and Statistics*, Vol. 25, No. 2, May 1963, pp. 77–98.

theories, to promote ‘development’, generalised commodification of goods and services, and unending growth.

To reverse this trend, there is an urgent need for real change in economic discourse and theory.<sup>38</sup> This should be viewed in a context of decolonising our imagination, as a critique of the religious beliefs that prevent us from formulating real alternatives or, conversely, prevent real alternatives from being taken seriously and adopted.

### *Listening to other voices*

I am not sure that the majority of so-called ‘underdeveloped’ people really envy us our way of life, nor that they are in a hurry to ‘catch up’. Of course, in any country, even in a ‘less developed’ one, a visible minority is already enjoying the delights of Western life, sometimes beyond what Westerners could dream up for themselves. But it certainly cannot be considered as a historical vanguard. In fact, the vast majority of people have not (yet) been corrupted by ‘development’, even if they suffer from it. But they are silent. Not because they have nothing to say, but because they have not been trained to transform their thoughts into acceptable language. Speech access has always been restricted to those who master the basic rules of speech (which are not only grammatical ones) and who are prepared to play in a field whose orthodoxy is defined by those who retain a dominant position. Being silenced, they have no other way of expressing themselves than to behave in a dissident way. Their ‘*language of practices*’ has replaced *explicit speech*. They do not follow the rules of market exchange, nor do they believe they have unlimited needs. They practice other forms of exchange, they spend lavishly what they do not possess because weddings and funerals are socially important, and they are content with what is available to them, without looking for more than they already have. This does not mean restoring the image of the ‘noble savage’. It only describes how those who have been spared from wars, exploitation and ‘development’ are living. In a frugal way, for sure, but which does not preclude moments of real happiness.<sup>39</sup>

To the eyes of World Bank experts, these people are ‘poor’. Which means that they have (or are?) ‘a problem’. Like all those who happen to be discriminated against by those who dominate them. Whites



*Whites also used to have a problem with Blacks and men with women, until it was discovered that this kind of problem results from social relations in which both parties are involved. If there is a poverty problem, there must also be a wealth problem.*

38 Cf. Brockway, George P., *The End of Economic Man. Principles of Any Future Economics*, Cornelia and Michael Bessie Books, New York, 1991.

39 Cf. Rahnama, Majid, *Quand la misère chasse la pauvreté*, Paris, Fayard, Actes Sud, 2003. A book that radically questions the criteria of the World Bank (and other international organisations) for defining poverty.

also used to have a problem with Blacks and men with women, until it was discovered that this kind of problem results from social relations in which both parties are involved. If there is a poverty problem, there must also be a wealth problem. As a Tswana saying goes: ‘Where there is no wealth there is no poverty either’. To attack (or eradicate) poverty, to use the international parlance, makes no sense unless one is also prepared to attack wealth. *Why should poverty be more scandalous than its opposite?* But it is much more difficult to take up the fight against wealth rather than poverty. Once again, we should not be taken in by slogans, even when these are formulated to appeal to human feelings.

Obviously, any human being living in difficult circumstances hopes that his or her children will enjoy a better life than the one he or she was forced to live. For millions, improvement of their living conditions is a necessity. For most, their present predicament depends on exterior factors, such as wars (fought for objectives that are beyond their understanding), unjust laws or political oppression. Some are suffering because of the expropriation of their means of livelihood in the name of commercial or financial interests that lie beyond their control. These cases have nothing to do with ‘development’ or humanitarian aid. They have to be settled at the national or international political level: they require struggle, demonstrations, and even perhaps some forms of violence in order to succeed.<sup>40</sup> As for the rest, strategies

<sup>40</sup> This is why I am not really convinced that ‘development’ will eventually come about thanks to the anarcho-hedonist virtues of ‘civil society’ (just as the suffering proletariat was expected to launch the ‘final struggle’ and open the path for Revolution) or thanks to the managerial virtues that came to be known as ‘governance’ (just another way of excluding politics from the debate). Firstly, ‘civil society’ does not exist *per se*, and it is difficult to define its constituency. Moreover, it lacks political legitimacy since its members are not easily identified (compare the debate between Gramsci and Lenin about this concept, which I cannot go into in such a short presentation). If civil society is what is left once the Prince-government and the Merchant-business have been ‘subtracted’ from global society, one should nevertheless recognise that any member of ‘civil society’ may also be a civil servant or a tradesman during working hours. Secondly, in the Western tradition, ‘civil’ refers to someone who is neither a soldier nor a member of the clergy. But this does not ensure that such a person is necessarily a supporter of democracy. Thirdly, if a tight network of associations (parents’ associations, church choirs, trade unions, women’s groups, etc.) and substantial social capital (in Putnam’s sense) may indeed contribute to social change, the values on which ‘civil society’ is based (e.g. sacrifice of time or money for a common cause) stand in total contradiction to those of the dominant system and run the risk of being eroded by the very success of ‘development’ (cf. Rist, Gilbert, ‘La cultura y el capital social: cómplices o víctimas del “desarrollo?”’, *Capital social y cultura: claves estatégicas* )

are to be invented and we (sitting outside) have no right whatsoever to dictate their course. To take just one example, in an article entitled ‘Development only benefits a tiny minority’<sup>41</sup> the Peruvian anthropologist Grimaldo Rengifo clearly demonstrates that ‘development’ projects have failed, mainly because they have ignored local organisation structures<sup>42</sup> as well as the Andean vision of the cosmos. Instead of ‘development’ – which produces a form of impoverishing wealth – villagers practise what they call ‘reinforcement’ (*vigoracion*), mainly relying on their own traditions without precluding innovation. They have no particular devotion to the past but they have discovered that ‘future-oriented’ models lead nowhere. This confirms what has already been said by Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash: ‘Self-sufficiency and autonomy are now political demands, well rooted in the experience of millions of Indians, *campesinos*, “urban marginals” and many other groups in the southern part of the globe. Re-rooting and regenerating themselves in their own spaces, they are creating effective responses to the “global forces” trying to displace them.’<sup>43</sup>

It would be paradoxical – and dishonest – for me to try to become the spokesman of these ‘other voices’. Especially because *what people do is often more important than what they say*. Their ‘language of practices’ must be deciphered and interpreted. So-called ‘failures’ of well-intentioned ‘development’ projects should not be seen as an indication of ‘native’ stupidity, irrationality, lack of anticipation, and mismanagement, but as *an expression of dissent*, a rejection of a way of life imposed on them.

› *para el desarrollo* (Kliksberg, Bernardo, Tomassini, Luciano, dir.), Banco interamericano de desarrollo, Fundación Felipe Herrera, Universidad de Maryland, Fondo de cultura económica, Washington, Buenos Aires, 2000, pp. 129–150) and also André-Marcel d’Ans: ‘Société civile, gouvernance: nouvelles notions, nouveaux mirages?’, *La lettre du Forum de Delphes*, No. 54, March–April 2004, pp. 2–3. This having been said, I readily admit that some social movements are working for positive social change.

41 ‘Le développement ne profite qu’à une petite minorité’, *Le Courrier*, 15 May 2004, p. 7.

42 This is also evident, to take just one other example, in Afghanistan, according to my colleague Alessandro Monsutti who documents this view in his book, *Guerres et migrations. Réseaux sociaux et stratégies économiques des Hazaras d’Afghanistan*, Neuchâtel, Institut d’ethnologie, Maison des sciences de l’homme, Paris, 2004.

43 Cf. Esteva, Gustavo and Prakash, Madhu Suri, *Grassroots Post-Modernism*, *op.cit.*, p. 26.



*For most, their present predicament depends on exterior factors, such as wars (fought for objectives that are beyond their understanding), unjust laws or political oppression.*

## Concluding remarks

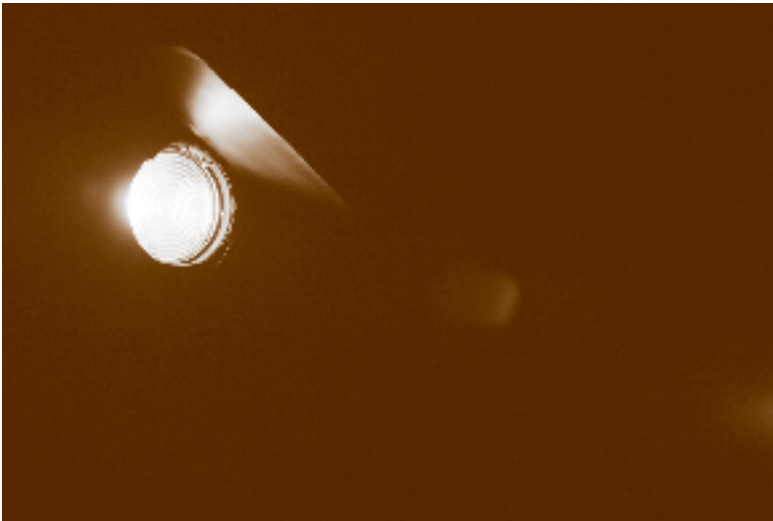
I am fully aware that this paper raises more questions than answers. This is deliberate. I do not feel entitled to speak as if I were looking at reality from above, nor to speak on behalf of other people, nor to give unwanted advice. I have no interest in drafting blueprints for a new and better world and I know too well that change (even for the better) cannot be forced on people. Putting in place what we consider to be desirable is always harmful to opposing interests, and historical change always occurs through struggle, suffering and pain. Reason rarely prevails. Enlightened views are surrounded by darkness and it usually takes a long time before they are acknowledged for what they are. Impatience is often a bad guide.

My purpose is therefore much more modest. I am speaking from my own position in my own society. I am just sharing the results of my research, experience, concerns and doubts. I do not claim to propose universally valid truths or to dictate the course of history. But I feel strongly that intellectuals are responsible for questioning the world in which they live. I have progressively come to ascertain the dangers of mainstream thinking, and I have learned that alternatives start with our way of looking at ‘realities’ that are changing according to the adopted point of view. If we fail to be critical and provocative, we become useless. Sometimes, ideas that were supposedly heretical or irrelevant come to be progressively shared by an increasing number of people. This still does not mean that they are actually implemented. But they find their way into the collective conscience and prepare the ground for new forms of action. To summarise, let me simply reiterate a few points that I believe to be of fundamental importance for our collective reflection.

1. The current ‘development’ paradigm, which entails progressive commodification of the natural environment and social relations, endangers our common survival, as has been clearly documented by the scientific community.
2. The ‘development’ that has taken place has come about through a long historical process that started towards the end of the 18th century and not through a ‘secret plan’ (or plot) devised by a bunch of evil-minded politicians, bureaucrats or managers. It is therefore pointless to imagine a kind of universal ‘counter-plan’ that would lead to ‘good development’. This is not how history proceeds.

3. More and more people, both in the South and the North, are protesting against the devastation of the natural environment and an imposed way of life. They tend to trust their own capabilities, resources, values and imagination rather than ‘global’ solutions.
4. Economic ‘science’ (as taught in universities and put into practice by ‘decision makers’) is based on ‘our obsolete market mentality’ (Polanyi), which ignores the thermo-industrial revolution that took place in the 19th century. It totally distorts reality by selecting some of its aspects and ignoring others, thus making it impossible to understand the world in which we live.
5. It is more illuminating *to consider actual practices* in order to understand reality than to rely on what people believe reality to be.

These points are submitted in the form of statements. They are open to debate. If some kind of agreement can be found on some (or all) of them, it will soon be possible to decide what should be done from now on. The danger would be to start the other way round: to talk about what should be done, before considering what actually happens.



*Enlightened views are surrounded by darkness and it usually takes a long time before they are acknowledged for what they are.*





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# Enough!

## Global challenges and responsible lifestyles

*Göran Bäckstrand and Lars Ingelstam*

### I Looking back

#### *Sweden and the concept of lagom*

In 1975, we (the authors of this article) wrote a paper at the request of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation. Both of us served at that time with the Secretariat for Futures Studies, a think-tank closely linked with the government and parliament in Sweden. The secretariat had been created three years earlier at the suggestion of a commission headed by Alva Myrdal, a government minister whose responsibilities included disarmament. Our paper was part of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation's *What Now* project and, like other contributions to that project, it was a response to the 'development crisis' and sought to offer an alternative to the all-too-simple notion of 'development', as understood at that time. 'Another Development' was the catchword, and our task was to think about an alternative form of development for Sweden.<sup>1</sup> In an industrialised country such as Sweden, what consumption and production patterns would be called for, on the road to a more equitable sharing of world resources between nations and between people?

The paper was published in the summer of 1975 under the title, 'How much is enough?',<sup>2</sup> and a year later in Swedish translation: 'Hur mycket är lagom?' Its core was a number of concrete proposals for changes in consumption patterns in Sweden (a *lagom* Sweden), with-

1 A parallel article, published in immediate conjunction with ours, dealt with Tanzania's development strategy: self-reliance and *ujamaa*. The latter concept has, as we now know, created both enthusiasm and confusion in Tanzania and elsewhere. It might serve as yet another example of a common dilemma: the tension between utopias, 'blueprints', visions and political reality.

2 Bäckstrand, G., and Ingelstam, L., 'How much is enough? - another Sweden', *Development Dialogue* 1975: 1/2, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Uppsala, pp. 44-53.

in the international context. The paper created a very lively debate in Sweden (and subsequently elsewhere<sup>3</sup>), lasting several years. This debate is still of interest, not least because it reveals much about the motivation for sustaining or changing our lifestyles. Some of the determinants for this debate have changed considerably in the 30 years since the publication of our original paper. But it is also fair to admit that some of our assumptions about global ‘background factors’ were already insufficient and questionable at that time.

This article is laid out, however, to reflect the logic of our original argument. In this section, we present a brief review of the concrete proposals that created such an uproar initially, as well as some of the main elements of the Swedish debate in the couple of years following the publication of the paper. Then, in Section 2, we go on to discuss the international assumptions that were, or should have been, relevant to the recommendations for ‘Another Development’ in our country at that time. Some of these existed then as ‘weak signals’,<sup>4</sup> and we try primarily not to second-guess ourselves but rather to update the assumptions about the global situation and its challenges, relevant to the daily lives of our fellow citizens. In Section 3 we start at the other end, with an examination of the arguments, then and now, for assuming that societal development and wellbeing – even material wellbeing – in a relatively rich country is dependent on an ever-increasing level of material consumption, hand in hand with economic growth (as this concept is normally interpreted). Is more always better than less? What we sought to do in our 1975 paper was to make sense of where ‘global challenges’ meet concrete modes of life for individuals. Is there a link, and if so, why is it not taken seriously? In Section 4 we return to this theme with a refreshed and updated view of that core problematique.

As the reader will soon find out, the 1975 paper caused considerable turbulence. There was sharp disagreement regarding our mode of approach, as well as on the suitability of certain concrete measures. Some of those who expressed agreement with us did so very emotionally. This is perfectly legitimate but helped create an impression that what we had stated was something of an extremist position. This was very far from what we intended.



*Is more always better than less?*

3 We are aware of debates in some Scandinavian countries, and several years later (1993) in Japan.

4 A favourite expression and an important idea from our admired friend Robert Jungk (1913–1994). The basic idea is to identify small changes that may prove important for the future. Jungk referred most often to weak signals as the first steps towards changing the world into a better one.

Now, 30 years later, we find that the scientific and common-sense arguments for a *lagom* alternative are even stronger and more conclusive.

### *Our original suggestions*

The proposals in the original (1975) paper were presented as concrete targets, together with brief suggestions on how, politically, to achieve each one of them.

#### 1. A ceiling on meat consumption

In order to produce 1 kg of (red) meat around 7 kg of grain/cereals are required. Annual per capita consumption (1974) was 58.4 kg of meat. A limit of around 40 kg per person per year should be implemented (with the heaviest reduction in the consumption of pork). For various reasons we recommended quotas or rationing rather than increased taxation or fees.

#### 2. A ceiling on oil consumption

From a very low level in 1945 the amount of oil consumed per capita around 1970 was 3.5 tons a year, and was still rising. This ought to be stabilised at that level and in the longer run (10–15 years) reduced to 2.5 tons at the most. The motive was global (a more equitable distribution of easy-to-use energy sources) as well as national self-interest: high oil dependence made Swedish society very vulnerable to disturbances in supply and price. The means were more efficient use of energy in house heating, industry and transportation (see also below) as well as gradual replacement of oil by other sources of energy.

#### 3. More economical use of buildings

On average, every Swede had 135 m<sup>3</sup> of building space, or 40 m<sup>2</sup> of floor area at his or her disposal in 1975. Two-thirds consists of residential space. Many non-residential premises are used only a fraction of the time. The proposed policy aimed at better utilising residential space (lowering the average by 20 per cent) and making more flexible use of public and common facilities: schools, community centres, theatres. Even modest changes in this direction might lower oil consumption by 0.3 to 0.4 tons per capita (see point 2 above).

#### 4. Greater durability of consumer goods

If most consumer goods lasted longer, one motive for increased growth and excessive material turnover would disappear. Policy measures could include legally stated durability (producer-guaranteed) for certain goods and quality inspections for others (since compulsory inspection of motor vehicles was introduced in Sweden, the effective life of vehicles has increased by at least 2 years). For many goods one should require total producer responsibility for all processes, from manufacturing to scrapping, in order to ensure recycling. Certain very basic commodities of very high quality could be provided at low cost by the public sector (we mentioned work clothing, shoes, bicycles).

#### 5. No privately owned automobiles

The motor-car is, for better or for worse, a symbol of modern life. It is flexible and forms part of the fabric of contemporary, industrialised societies. But it must be subjected to controls that prevent its use spreading beyond all reason in the cities and in the economy. A good first step is to take the ownership of automobiles out of the hands of individuals and other private interests. No individual automobile traffic should be allowed in city centres. For medium-range transportation a rental system with high accessibility would take care of most needs. Total travel could be brought down somewhat and the number of cars reduced to 60–70 per cent of the present level. In addition, strictly enforced speed limits (maximum 90 km/h) would have the double benefit of easing the pressure on the environment and energy, and increasing the market for trains and fast buses, including for medium- and long-range travel.

### *The context: the NIEO in particular*

The whole rationale of the 1975 paper has to be understood in the context of international debate and proposals in the period 1974–75. We allowed ourselves to stand by the consensus expressed in the UN and stated that *planned future-oriented decisions were preferable to crisis management*, if and when it became necessary for the richer parts of the world to stand by their commitments to a more just and equitable order: to go from words to deeds.

The debate about the state of the world and events in 1974 and 1975 on the international scene was focused, in the UN in particular, on the need for a new framework for global economic interaction. In a quite precise way, it was codified in the Declaration of the Establishment of a New International Economic Order (NIEO), although without a vote,

as a Plan of Action by a special session of the UN, on 1 May 1974. Later that year (12 December) a similar document, the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States, was issued by the General Assembly.



*The debate about the state of the world and events in 1974 and 1975 on the international scene was focused, in the UN in particular, on the need for a new framework for global economic interaction.*

The background was, of course, the wave of decolonisation during the 1960s. A number of poor countries now emerged as independent actors on the international scene: in the UN and in world markets. However, to a large extent, the pattern established in the colonial era remained the same: Third World countries exported raw materials and imported industrial products. Over and over again poor countries demanded better conditions and a larger share of world wealth. However, they were divided among themselves and their negotiating power was limited. The oil crisis, in 1972–73, meant important change, as the organisation of the oil-producing countries, OPEC, rose to significant power in the world economy. Several OPEC countries joined forces with Third World countries in the so-called Group of 77. This new alliance was able significantly to advance the case for a new order. Moreover, besides its considerable economic and political leverage, the alliance had moral and intellectual support from influential circles in the First World. The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation was one of these, the Club of Rome another. The latter sponsored an important and influential study, *Reshaping the International Order*.<sup>5</sup> The book was publicly launched under the proud sponsorship of the Algerian government, at that time the leader of the Group of 77, in Algiers in 1976.

As for the Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order and the Plan of Action, the main points were:<sup>6</sup>

- › Every state should have full sovereignty over its natural resources, including the right to nationalise them.
- › Control over transnational enterprises should be increased.
- › There should be just and fair price relationships between raw materials and other Third World products on the one hand and such industrial equipment and goods that must be bought from more developed countries on the other.
- › There should be increased development assistance, freed from military, political and commercial ties.

<sup>5</sup> Tinbergen, J. et al., *Reshaping the International Order, A report to the Club of Rome*, Dutton, New York, 1976.

<sup>6</sup> For a full account of the statements we have to refer the reader to original documents. A readable and fairly complete version is found in Tinbergen et al., *op. cit.*

- › Developing countries should be privileged and protected in as many fields of economic cooperation as possible.
- › All countries should put a halt to wasteful and excessive use of natural resources.
- › Cooperation between developing countries, above all in production, should be promoted and encouraged.

Thirty years later, one can of course comment with a slight note of cynicism on two aspects of the foregoing. One has been mentioned above: the alliance of oil-producing countries with the very poor did not last very long. Regional and other interests took over; and besides, oil has become more entangled in other aspects of international affairs, not least military. Another aspect is that international rhetoric is often not taken seriously.

However, we can testify to the fact that the demands for an NIEO were indeed taken very seriously in many circles. In Sweden the government, parliamentary parties and other parts of the political establishment were very determined to follow up on the UN declarations. Not only traditional ‘globalists’ and development professionals but also a broad range of other interest groups were clearly prepared to take the call for a new order at face value. Many official statements were made in support of wide-ranging change that in the long term would be in our own interest. Often, this was linked to the issue of peace and security. As foreign minister Sven Andersson stated in the UN General Assembly in September 1975: ‘As long as injustice, exploitation and misery are conditions for the majority of mankind, no future in peace and freedom can be discerned.’

We did not intend to provoke our Swedish readers: frankly in view of the above we saw no need for it. However, we do not deny that we sharpened and simplified our argument in order to get the points across. What could be done ahead of time, we asked, to ensure that the changes foreseen in, and required for, the NIEO would be smooth and gradual, rather than sudden and painful? It should be in everybody’s interest that the necessary changes were already underway, so that one would not run into a furious and unprepared population, revolting against the prospect of ‘giving up’ this or that element of a comfortable lifestyle. We wanted rather to explore combinations, looking for development paths that could on the one hand conform to the NIEO, and on the other preserve or even enhance the quality of life in our own country. We were looking for plus-sum games and synergies, not sacrifices.



*The alliance of oil-producing countries with the very poor did not last very long. Regional and other interests took over; and besides, oil has become more entangled in other aspects of international affairs, not least military.*



### *A debate on two levels*

The public debate after publication became, to put it mildly, rather heated. The links between the official statements in support of an NIEO and our proposals as concrete expressions of what was being debated in the UN were not generally recognised. The press focused on the impossibility of implementing such ‘stupid and bureaucratic’ measures, which were anyway ‘of no use at all’ to the poor of this world.<sup>7</sup> The intensity of the reactions may, to be fair, have been influenced by two other factors. One is the relative lack of political news in the middle of July: competition for media space was not fierce. The other is the allegation that the authors were the prime minister’s own ‘futures researchers’ and had direct links with the government. The latter was exaggerated, but of course not entirely without foundation.<sup>8</sup>

Several editorials, news features and columns were devoted to the *lagom* theme during the first few months. Most of them expressed the theme as ‘How can the world get richer by us getting poorer?’ – an effective message, yet a fundamental misunderstanding of our line of argument. Clearly these misunderstandings demonstrated that the basic logic of an NIEO had not really penetrated the worldviews of opinion-formers in Sweden at that time. They were mostly familiar with the development aid paradigm as the natural response to world poverty and took that more or less for granted (see also below).

Many, even among those who were basically sympathetic towards our line of argument, were put off by the ‘planned-economy’ and bureaucratic tendency in the five proposals. Those aspects took first place in many critical comments. Should ‘the state’ really be allowed to interfere with the preferences of individuals – for steaks and cars – and prescribe what is necessary for a reasonable and healthy world characterised by solidarity?

7 This phase of the debate as reflected in the Swedish press has been studied scientifically, and the results published in English as well as in Swedish. See Lindholm, S., ‘The rich man who roared. An analysis of the reactions to the proposals of “Another Sweden”’, *Development Dialogue* 1976:1, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Uppsala, and Allard, B., and Lindholm, S., *Lagom? Pressdebatten kring förslaget om ett lagom Sverige*, Pedagogiska institutionen, Stockholm, 1976.

8 We gave the paper both to Prime Minister Olof Palme and the advisory cabinet minister Carl Lidbom, not for approval but for their information. They both reacted in the same way: you are free to publish but also have to deal with the debates yourselves. Olof Palme also expressed interest in the approach. The Minister of transportation and communication, Bengt Norling, was not informed, however, and demanded angrily in public that the report should be thrown in the waste-paper bin immediately.

A few other voices came through during this first phase. One leading paper, *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, stated in an editorial about the ‘futures researchers’: ‘They do open a curtain and let some of the global reality and its cold light into the Swedish *folkhem*.<sup>9</sup> It is an alarm bell. Shall we throw it to the floor, cursing, and pull the cover back over our heads? Or...?’

However, after an initial wave of harsh but relatively superficial criticism, another type of discussion followed. It turned out that this set of rather concrete proposals for Another Development, particularly regarding consumption, served quite well as working material for discussions on global solidarity, the transnational economy and energy, as well as lifestyles and consumption patterns in Sweden. During a period of four to five years it played a role as a trigger for discussion and as a basic text in a host of different contexts: from the Swedish Development Forum (FUF) with close links to SIDA and the Development Week organised jointly by the churches, all the way to several hundred study circles, solidarity groups and local chapters of political parties. The Secretariat for Futures Studies printed the text in Swedish in a brochure that was distributed in many thousand copies.

During this second phase two positions emerged, in response to the core question of whether the concrete changes proposed by us were a rational response to anything at all.

The first position is characterised by an acceptance of the basic underlying assumption in ‘How much is enough?’ The main factors to consider are the characteristics of the global economic system, and the demand for change in that system – or the creation of an NIEO. This change has consequences for rich countries, as part of and partners in, that system: not only as donors of aid. Nationally, it is neither possible nor desirable that we continue to aspire to growth in the consumption of energy and other resources considered scarce on a global level. But such growth is not even necessary for an improvement in wellbeing, given some sensible adjustments. On the contrary, a certain restraint might liberate community values and put the focus in consumption on quality and use values, rather than on quantity and economic turnover. Internationally, a more equitable economic order is necessary, but such an order is not compatible with a pattern where certain ‘developed’ countries consume a disproportionate share of global energy resources, land, water, minerals, etc.

<sup>9</sup> The term ‘folkhem’ (literally, ‘home for the people’) means the Swedish welfare state.

Opposing this line of reasoning was a different mode of thought (in principle no less determined to ease the plight of the poor), which we can call the foreign aid paradigm. According to this, no levelling of resources or consumption was necessary. Through continued economic growth everyone, even in the poorer parts of the world, could raise their living standards. By providing economic assistance richer countries could help speed up this process of growth. The implication for the rich countries was that growth and progress at home were in fact a precondition for development in the Third World: part of the solution rather than part of the problem. Only by relying on a healthy and growing economy of its own would a rich country be able to help the poorer parts of the world along, on their road to prosperity.

This paradigm was no doubt well established at the time – which in itself was a great achievement; 20 years earlier international aid or development assistance were more or less unknown concepts. It is also understandable that, for example, representatives of aid agencies such as SIDA were slightly reluctant to admit that, as Gunnar Myrdal once put it, ‘Assistance in the form of aid can only form a small part of a sensible programme for an equitable international order’.

Sharply differing opinions existed both on the basic nature of the international and global problematique (systems change or redistribution through aid), and about what should be regarded as a reasonable future lifestyle (planned restraint or maximum growth). On the other hand it is worth noticing that there was a fairly broad consensus about the agenda. It was legitimate to discuss our lifestyles, consumption and energy use in relation to the global situation, poverty and the economic order. It was also deemed reasonable at least to ask whether continued, spiralling material consumption did lead to a better and more satisfactory life.

*‘Assistance in the form of aid can only form a small part of a sensible programme for an equitable international order.’*



## II The NIEO as a blueprint: Fallacies and new reality

### *The rational dream*

We use the word ‘blueprint’ in the heading of this section with a clear purpose. The idea of drawing up a plan for the desirable state of the world, just as an architect or engineer produces plans when designing a house or a machine, was also characteristic of the time in which we started this discussion. Let us also state that we have basic sympathy for this kind of rational approach, which could be described as ‘social engineering’. However, this particular approach needs to be problematised.

First of all, it is important to steer clear of ‘utopian thinking’, over and over again criticised by social scientists.<sup>10</sup> In an informal contribution to the *What Next* project Larry Lohmann argues that

... trying to formulate utopias usually involves one in the idea that social action can be divided into, first, positing an end, then finding the means to get ‘from here to there’. This means – end logic is economic and unrealistic. As the saying goes, ‘the world doesn’t work that way’. No social action consists in first setting a goal and then working out how to reach it. Rather, ends and means are constantly in a flux and in a state of mutual readjustment, both being the subject of continual criticism and reasoning. The project of formulating utopias is also demotivating. Instead of the pleasures and pains of the struggle to build solidarity, the search for ‘utopias’ risks cutting us off from dealing with, and being continuously corrected by, and touched by, people with whom we think we may find common cause.<sup>11</sup>

Hence, what seems rational does not necessarily coincide with what is reasonable, as the Finnish philosopher Georg Henrik von Wright has put it.

A good starting point for demonstrating the rational dream of a *great plan*, beyond the UN resolutions mentioned in Section 1 above, is the much-read report, *Reshaping the International Order* (RIO), published in 1976 by a group led by the Dutch Nobel Economic Laure-

10 See Popper, K., *The Poverty of Historicism*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1957.

11 Quoted from Larry Lohmann, informal submission to the *What Next* project, 2005.

ate, Jan Tinbergen, and subsequently entitled ‘A Report to the Club of Rome’. Even that book was very much a product of persons and institutions in the Third System.<sup>12</sup>



*If natural scientists and engineers are able to put a man on the moon, why should not social scientists – through rational planning and sustainable financing – be able to construct systems for universal education, erase crime and eliminate world poverty?*

In fact RIO can be seen not only as an interesting example of effective cooperation being organised outside political, as well as commercial, structures: a *tour de force* by the Third System. It also reflects ‘the rational dream’: in brief, the idea that rational argument, underpinned by a set of ethical principles, can have a decisive impact on world affairs. There are several reasons behind the prevalence of this dream. One of them is no doubt the relative success of the welfare state model in parts of Europe (and Australia, Canada and New Zealand). It has variously been called the Rheinland model (by Rolf Dahrendorff), the Swedish model (by the Swedes) and ‘capitalism with a human face’ (by Johan Galtung). We recall that the project leader, Professor Tinbergen, was Dutch and a well-known champion of the welfare state and democratic socialism. Another reason goes back to sentiments among researchers in the social sciences. If natural scientists and engineers are able to put a man on the moon, why should not social scientists – through rational planning and sustainable financing – be able to construct systems for universal education, erase crime and eliminate world poverty?

At the time of publication of the RIO report, this optimistic but perhaps slightly insular way of thinking had already started to fade out. One reason for this was simply that actual projects (including development assistance to the Third World) had not been very successful. Social problems were simply trickier and more complex than technical ones. A related reason was theoretical: ‘social engineering’ could be identified with authoritarian and anti-humanistic grand schemes for changing the world. Karl Popper, who was very influential in this respect, pointed to Nazism and communism and argued the case for *piecemeal social engineering*: changing society by solving problems and taking small steps, always allowing for corrections or reversals if the social results did not turn out right.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The term ‘the Third System’ was frequently used at the time to describe people, organisations and networks working for a new and more equitable international order. They were by definition based outside government and business, but could often exercise considerable leverage founded on knowledge of international affairs and also positions in international NGOs, governments and UN organisations. The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation functioned as one of the most important nodes in this Third System, as did the Club of Rome.

<sup>13</sup> Popper, K., *op. cit.*

Also, as was suggested above, the mood in the scientific community for producing grand schemes – about anything at all – is presently rather bleak. The contrast to the bold launching in the 1970s of futures studies on important world problems is striking. Few significant studies of that nature are published these days. There is, however, one – increasingly recognised and strong – reason to do very long-range studies, namely the impact of human action on world climate (where the causal factors include energy conversion, traffic, emissions of aerosols ...). The central role of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), established by the UN General Assembly in 1988, and the very concrete indications that climate change with increasingly disastrous effects can have anthropogenic explanations have triggered a new interest in studies with a 50–100 year perspective, focusing on emissions of greenhouse gases and global energy activities.

### *Three fallacies in the original blueprint*

While we certainly want to stand by the main line of the rational approach to international issues as well as to governance at all levels, we have to note the narrow focus of, and certain fallacies in, the NIEO blueprint that dominated international discussion as well as our own work 25–30 years ago.

We are fully aware that simplifications are unavoidable and also necessary (in science, as well as in politics and public debates) and have no quarrel with those who have characterised our 1975 work as being a drastic (but also ‘brave’ and sometimes ‘useful’) simplification. Even so, we must note that at least three major factors require attention and further elaboration:

1. Concern for the *environment*, in particular major changes in the global environment. One could argue that this issue was put squarely on the international agenda with the first UN Conference on the human environment in 1972, also known as the Stockholm conference, and the subsequent creation of a new UN agency, UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme). On the other hand, as the preparations for the Stockholm conference already demonstrated, the issue was more or less ‘either environment or economic growth’, the latter triggered by increasing and unfettered international trade: the two imperatives of development were not yet reconciled.



*A change of world order, yes, but should issues of health, for example, be regarded as more or less important than education, and how should broad social change relate to private consumption?*

2. The military and other *violent conflicts* going on in many parts of the world. Obviously, full-scale war, between nations or national factions, is a tremendous barrier to the kind of development envisaged in the NIEO. It was less apparent that ‘low-level warfare’ and general lack of security at the local level would have very serious negative effects on the prospects of development. Under uncertain circumstances it becomes difficult or more or less impossible to cultivate the land, make investments (big or small) or enter into credible (economic or technical) partnerships.
3. The UN framework presumes that *sovereign states* are the primary unit in negotiating a new order and a blueprint for development. On the other hand, it was already quite clear in the 1970s that it was, rather, *groups of states* that one had to deal with, such as the Group of 77, the OECD, the EC, non-aligned countries, ‘the poorest’ and other similar groupings. What was less remarked on, partly because of diplomatic politeness, was that a number of states contained serious elements of decay: abdicating ‘sovereignty’ to some major power, to corporate interests or (worse!), leading to inner anarchy or pure chaos and thus gradually becoming quasi-states. It has also become apparent that both civil society and the corporate/business worlds have become much more powerful and influential. It is necessary today to consider a much broader spectrum of international actors.

Another point calling for reconsideration is that, despite a rather clear focus on economic issues, the NIEO was very unspecific regarding priorities. A change of world order, yes, but should issues of health, for example, be regarded as more or less important than education, and how should broad social change relate to private consumption? In these respects, the present discussion of international affairs provides, as we shall see, more clearly stated priorities, but is less radical in terms of in-depth systems change involving the ‘rich world’.

### *Environment and growth*

Concern for the environment – global, regional and local – did play a role in the ‘new order’ and ‘Another Development’ discussions in the first half of the 1970s. A very significant event was the Stockholm conference. But however important such issues were, they clearly had to take the back seat to economic issues and questions of world poverty. ‘The crisis of development lies in the poverty of the masses of the Third World, as well as that of others’ and ‘The international crisis is that of a system of unequal economic relations between a few

dominant countries and the majority of dominated countries' are two telling quotes from the Introduction to the 1975 Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation report, *What Now*.<sup>14</sup>

However, the agenda of the international community and the Third System was already then under revision. The well-publicised report, *Limits to Growth*,<sup>15</sup> commissioned and sponsored by the Club of Rome, directed the attention of many to the reality that countering environmental degradation and resource depletion was absolutely critical for human survival. The message from the *Limits* study was that if the industrialised countries did not break their patterns of growth we would face global catastrophe within 70–150 years.

The debate triggered by this study raged on for at least a decade. Fierce criticism was directed at the methodology (based on Professor Jay Forrester's System Dynamics) as well as at the broad-based global recommendations, pointing to zero growth as the only viable alternative. In spite of such criticism, and in the context of recurring oil crises and growing concern for world climate, this kind of agenda gradually took over from the former one: that which directly challenged world poverty. From that perspective two remarks can be made in relation to the *lagom* debate.



*Poverty seemed to be reduced to a secondary concern, while something called 'environment' dictated: 'Sorry but there is no room for you to grow economically and achieve the same prosperity that the rich world has already achieved'.*

14 *Development Dialogue* 1975: 1/2, *op. cit.*

15 Meadows, Dennis L., et al., *Limits to Growth: A report for the Club of Rome's project on the predicament of mankind*, Universe Books, New York, 1972.



The first is that since the theme of holding back consumption was absolutely central to the *Limits* agenda, some participants in the debate quickly jumped to the conclusion that we built our argument on the assumption that growth had to be stopped. We did not, but no doubt the issue got a bit blurred. Some vocal support for the *lagom* recommendations was built not on our line of argument but on a logically quite different one.

Second, it became very clear, for example during the preparations for the Stockholm conference in 1972, that many Third World countries were very upset with the *Limits* report and what they conceived as an agenda with new priorities set by the First World. Their own poverty seemed to be reduced to a secondary concern, while something called ‘environment’ dictated: ‘Sorry but there is no room for you to grow economically and achieve the same prosperity that the rich world has already achieved.’ Several countries threatened to boycott the Stockholm conference, and it took fierce diplomatic efforts to convince them that they should participate.

Clearly, environmental problems must be on the agenda of Third World countries, but environmental concerns must not lessen efforts to come to grips with world poverty.<sup>16</sup>

### *A war-torn world – the quest for security*

Security is an international concept that traditionally has been almost exclusively related to the performance of states. Although this began to change in about 1975, societal and individual wellbeing has, by and large, relied on states providing security.

The relative stability of a post-World War II order is under stress. Many people in the world lead intolerably insecure lives. In many cases, insecurity is the consequence of conflicts in which civilians are deliberately targeted and the perpetrators treated with impunity. In an era of global interdependence, a Swede or any other citizen in the world can no longer feel secure when large parts of the world are insecure. The shortcomings of state security, when war and violence seriously affect efforts to alleviate poverty, raise living standards and

<sup>16</sup> In the framework of the Club of Rome, this dilemma was handled resolutely. As a counterpart to the ‘one world’ approach of the *Limits* report, a Third World study was launched. It was eventually published and is commonly referred to as the Bariloche report. See Herrera, A. O., *Catastrophe or new society? A Latin American world model*, International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, 1979.

improve the quality of life in most countries, have provoked a discussion about a new concept of *human security*.

For many years concern has mounted about dictators violating human rights, and national and international laws, by mistreating their citizens. Nowadays, with the large number of disintegrated or dysfunctional states, violent internal conflicts or prolonged regional political terror in many countries have become multifaceted examples of increasingly widespread violence – often euphemistically called low-level warfare. The distinction between regular armies, guerrilla forces and criminal gangs is blurred. Crimes of all kinds (including drug-trafficking) are becoming internationalised and threatening rich and poor societies alike.

‘Low-level warfare’ and other forms of insecurity are affecting people in most countries. September 11, 2001, the first time that American citizens experienced that their ‘home security’ came under attack, continues to be the all-important turning-point in this respect.

It is evident that all wars – not least low-level warfare – lead to random killing and destruction. The direct, adverse consequences of infringement of human rights, unpredictable rule, crime and low-level warfare are bad enough. However, equally severe are the indirect effects on economic life and the opportunities for gradual, cumulative improvement. As has been demonstrated by Francis Stewart, Valpy Fitzgerald and associates at Queen Elizabeth House in Oxford in the publication *The Economic and Social Consequences of Conflict*, wars will always mean widespread poverty for the surviving population.<sup>17</sup> Certain areas and countries have been sliding backwards, particularly in the 1990s, due to such predicaments.

Increasing concern for individual and community security has led to an emphasis on what the UN, individual states and international cooperation can do to stop a situation of escalating violence and threats in most societies. Great attention has been given to the possibility of international or foreign interventions to meet such challenges in different countries. A major report, ‘The responsibility to protect’, which discussed the role of such interventions, was published in December 2001 by an independent International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. On the other hand, and without denying the importance of more international cooperation between states – bilaterally and within existing UN and other international institu-

<sup>17</sup> Stewart, F., and Fitzgerald, V., eds, *The Economic and Social Consequences of Conflict*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000.

tions – security is becoming a direct concern for people themselves. A basic requirement of governance at all levels is to provide security for citizens. But in the present situation a further prerequisite is active citizenship. Security must always be promoted through governance but the creation of security is basically the work of the people: a society built upon *trust* between fellow humans. We should admit that in these days trust seems to be increasingly eroded. Economic growth will not produce a ‘better life’ or a functioning society if basic trust is absent.



*Security must always be promoted through governance but the creation of security is basically the work of the people: a society built upon trust between fellow humans.*

For about two centuries states have had the French and American revolutions as inspiration for constitutional governance. After the disaster of colonialism, for which the major European powers were responsible, new nations emerged and new states were formed all over the globe. The horrors of World War II made an international blueprint mandatory: cooperation between sovereign states, not just co-existence. The outcome was two major declarations of faith: the UN Charter in 1945 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. However, the blueprint was founded on the principal of states providing law and order within their boundaries, and reflected a European or Western dominance of the international institutions, as expressed in the UN Charter. It was a legalistic approach relying on a well-functioning system of electing representatives to a parliament and then establishing a government built upon the confidence of voting citizens.

World events over the last decade have made it evident that free elections, though essential, are only one of the prerequisites for democratic government. A democracy needs human security to be able to function, security that can only be constituted through trust among people. The fragile situation with respect to human security in so many countries makes it paramount to give civil society a central role. Popular movements and organisations in all walks of life are the pivotal factor around which trust and security can be recreated. The state can and should encourage this development, but the people themselves bring it about.

It can thus be said that the major fallacy of an international blueprint for global development as expressed in the vision of a New International Economic Order in 1974 was that it was just only an Economic Order. It was a reflection of the outstanding economic and technological development that took place in the Western world as a response to the enormous destruction of World War II. Since then such development has also taken place in many other countries, particu-

larly in Asia. This emphasis on growth, involving intense competition among individuals, firms and even nations, is increasingly seen as an obstacle to building the necessary trust among people to meet the need for security in our societies.

The worldwide demand for human security needs to be placed on national and international agendas. Like the call for ‘Another Development’ in 1975, it is a demand for ‘Another Security’: a form of security that is not based on military might, weaponry and other violent tools. While the production of food and material goods can be concentrated in large entities and the goods can then be distributed all over the world, human security rests on locally established trust. In this context it should be stated firmly that ‘Another Security’ will not be achieved unless a major role is taken by women all over the world, in order to change the present patriarchal structures that support violence in all its different forms.

### *The importance of statehood*

Blueprints for a functioning international system have focused on cooperation and institutions based on relations between states. However, members of international organisations with a global reach such as the United Nations, are acting on the basis of states being sovereign and equal, a notion that seems increasingly illusory. There is not only the problem of dealing with the great divide between democratic states and those with autocratic or despotic rulers. There is also the problem that increasing numbers of countries are states only in theory, while lacking all the elements that constitute functioning states. A reformed international system needs to find a way out of these dilemmas.

However, as already demonstrated in relation to the discussion on human security, there is also an increasing fallacy about consigning such an important role to the state in meeting basic human needs. We need the state but we also need supranational entities for the sharing and managing of the global commons – as well as smaller regional entities that can meet the need for expressing diversity and take advantage of local strengths.

As far back as the 1950s Dag Hammarskjöld argued that our generations were witnessing an evolution in social organisation from *an institutional system of coexistence to a constitutional system of cooperation*. It seems today to be a more realistic approach to complement the state with a system of multiple levels of cooperation between people. States should focus on establishing global minimum standards relating to

water, food, health and education. Regional cooperation should be emphasised too, in order to promote diversity in ways of life. There should be equal ambitions with respect to basic human rights and responsibilities but less importance given to indicators such as National Indices or Gross National Product.

Without devaluing the role of states it is necessary to recognise the role of professional associations, trade unions, universities and popular organisations in promoting the wellbeing of people. As an example, the failure of states and the corporate world to fight corruption incited a former employee of the World Bank to create Transparency International, today a successful NGO actor. There are many examples of this kind, and more will follow.

### *The new reality demanding new visions*



*Without devaluing the role of states it is necessary to recognise the role of professional associations, trade unions, universities and popular organisations in promoting the wellbeing of people.*

Human history has had many ‘turning points’. The present international system as we have defined it since World War II is being challenged. People and societies need a vision, with some guidelines expressing basic common values. On such a universal platform, both states and other actors can labour together for a world without abject poverty and without violence. As we have noted above, the NIEO concept – created and put on the agenda between 1973 and 1975 – despite its limitations did serve as such a platform for a limited period of time.

Awareness of the above-mentioned fallacies is crucial for a better understanding of the situation today, and for the possibility of formulating manifestos for change, playing a similar role as the NIEO did in the 1970s. We discuss below three foundations that are used on the international scene as plans, manifestos or guidelines for new visions: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948),<sup>18</sup> the quest for Sustainable Development (first expressed in *A Common Future*, the Brundtland report of 1987)<sup>19</sup> and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).<sup>20</sup> We then present what we believe should constitute the basic elements of a new vision.

18 To this Declaration was later added an International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966).

19 Brundtland, G., ed., *Our Common Future: The Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987.

20 UN Millenium Declaration and Development Goals, [www.un.org/millenniumgoals/](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/), 2000.

## *Human rights and beyond*

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is commonly regarded as one of the major instruments for setting the standard for a tolerable society on this planet and expressing a common responsibility for all people on earth. Solidarity should transcend state borders and requires international cooperation.

Studying the genesis of this Declaration today it is remarkable to what extent important elements of its background and content have been disregarded. During the drafting, one of the major authors of the Declaration, Charles Malik, raised the fundamental question: ‘What is man? Is man merely a social being? Is he merely an animal? Is he merely an economic being?’<sup>21</sup> Man is ‘everything’. Over the past half-century it has become increasingly apparent that the international system has largely disregarded the social dimension of the human existence while giving precedence to the economic dimension. Although relatively late in time, complementary instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child point to a certain evolution in the needed direction.

The present turmoil in our interconnected world shows the urgent need for far greater efforts to continuously emphasise *social* development. Alongside all the UN declarations and resolutions of the last several decades, which all too often remain pious intentions only, there exist some remarkably lucid documents issued by the UN Secretary-General. One example is a note discussed at a seminar on the Ethical and Spiritual Dimensions of Social Progress as part of the preparation for the World Summit for Social Development in 1995. The following points from it, revealing concern and insight, could have spared the world much violence and suffering during the past decade if they had been taken seriously and put into practice:

- › Social progress requires the combined efforts of all actors, from individuals to the state and international organisations.
- › Some of the principal obstacles to social progress are: the cult of money (particularly how moneyed interests increasingly influence scientists), the cult of ‘performance’ (doing well economically can lead to an obsession with growth and rejection of the weak, a trend that draws societies into an endless spiral), and the cult of immediate gratification (which allows no place for patience, prudence and planning for the future).



*‘What is man? Is man merely a social being? Is he merely an animal? Is he merely an economic being?’*

21 Quoted in Urquhart, B., ‘Mrs. Roosevelt’s Revolution’, *The New York Review of Books*, 26 April 2001.

- › Individual freedom is meaningless and dangerous when not rooted in an ethic and enlightened by social and spiritual considerations. The link between freedom and responsibility must be restored.
- › Individual rights and respect for oneself, other people and the planet are inextricable; respect for rights and the exercise of responsibility are important expressions of human dignity. This requires education to be given a central role.
- › Responsible social development needs to strike a balance between individual interests and the common good.
- › The key to the future lies in the search for human dignity and the common good. This vision demands a new pedagogic concept of political action.
- › All wealth calls for social responsibility; the accumulation of wealth at the expense of others destroys social harmony.<sup>22</sup>

The discussion at the world summit and its results could be one contribution in challenging the fallacies of a defunct international system and giving direction for the elaboration of a new platform.

From the point of view taken in this article, the Declaration and subsequent instruments have the merit of being universal: we have common problems and the Declaration makes no distinction between people. On the other hand, its recommendations are phrased in general terms. In order to be effective, they have to be advocated and concretised by citizen groups, NGOs, the legal profession and ‘like-minded’<sup>23</sup> governments.

The worldwide teaching of human rights has, besides its undeniable virtue and good effects, also had a more problematic side to it. It may have reinforced a parallel promotion of individual lifestyles, disregarding many previous social mechanisms of societal control. On the other hand, it has often been forgotten that rights have to be implemented not only by the state, which has a responsibility for overseeing that human rights laws and regulations are respected. The main responsibility for implementing, for example, the Convention on the Rights of the Child is carried by parents, teachers and in fact all adults. The right to life and general protection of the individual is the

22 ‘Proposal for a Seminar on Ethical and Spiritual Dimensions of Development’, issued by the Secretariat of the World Summit for Social Development, United Nations, 31 March 1994.

23 This expression has been used for some time for a loosely defined group of countries, including the Nordic countries, Canada and the Netherlands.

common responsibility of all fellow citizens in a country, expressing and defending a basic value. Such participation in ‘living a value’ will contribute to a culture that will prevent violence and make interventions by the police and other law-enforcement agencies less necessary. Likewise, the right to clean water and air, uncontaminated food and decent shelter, make it a concern and a responsibility to empower individuals/communities and build enforcement mechanisms to guarantee these rights. Satisfying basic needs requires a reconceptualisation of human rights with a focus on new priorities and linkages.

Hence, the connection between human rights and human responsibilities is another important factor illustrating the limitation of seeing the state as the only actor for guaranteeing human security. The state must establish the necessary framework, relevant institutions and tools, but it is citizens who can make a fundamental difference through common actions to create trust among themselves: demonstrating human responsibility while defending human rights.

### *Sustainable development and the Brundtland report*

The double projection of the global predicament – poverty *and* environmental threats – has remained a tension and a dilemma within the global debate ever since the Stockholm UN conference in 1972. This becomes very clear with the next milestone in the series of influential global studies. *Our Common Future* was the title of the Brundtland Commission’s report. It made a very ambitious effort to unite and harmonise the two perspectives, and it launched the concept of sustainable development for that purpose.

Despite its weaknesses (i.e. that it actually and quite openly gives two different meanings to its key concept) the Brundtland report on sustainable development has provided extremely important guidelines for policy, research and debates during the years since its publication.

It can be argued that – for the first time since the adoption of the NIEO resolutions in 1974 – there is a widely accepted blueprint for the betterment of the world. It can also be argued that, for better or worse, the Brundtland blueprint has had a more profound and lasting influence than the earlier (and still extremely relevant) statements about global economic justice. Last, it should also be noted that the term ‘sustainable’ runs the risk of being overused: its challenge thereby risks being seriously blunted. It has become customary to speak about economic, social and ecological sustainability. This might be just what it sounds like – an integration of sustainability in all sec-





*It has become customary to speak about economic, social and ecological sustainability. This might be just what it sounds like – an integration of sustainability in all sectors of society. But it might in practice mean the opposite: each sector minding its own business and renaming its already existing, (hopefully) sensible and long-range policies ‘sustainable’.*

tors of society. But it might in practice mean the opposite: each sector minding its own business and renaming its already existing, (hopefully) sensible and long-range policies ‘sustainable’. Critical observers have noted that ‘sustainable’ has often become a buzzword for ‘all good things’. For instance the Dutch Scientific Council for Governmental Policy (WRR) takes serious issue with the Dutch government, under whose auspices it operates, on such grounds. They argue that sustainability should primarily stand for respect for ecological limits and the resilience of the environment; otherwise it risks losing its meaning altogether.<sup>24</sup>

Relying on the NIEO as a blueprint for another world order, the *lagom* argument sought to reconcile development patterns in rich countries with global necessities. However, a dissenting line of reasoning was that continued economic growth, together with resource transfers in the form of development aid, would solve the problem. Both arguments admitted, however, that there was no drastic contradiction between what was globally desirable and what seemed reasonable and acceptable for citizens of rich countries.

The environmental discourse carried, at least initially, the opposite assumptions. The *Limits to Growth* message was that industrially engineered growth must come to a halt. As early as 1967 a well-known Swedish researcher in the life sciences, Professor Karl-Erik Fichtelius, put it like this: ‘Doomsday prophets have existed as long as humans have been around. What has now happened is that every politically conscious scientist can step forward as a doomsday prophet.’ Global ecological survival and the high-consumption patterns of the industrial world seemed irreconcilable.

Twenty years later, the Brundtland Commission made a heroic attempt to reconcile those two demands – or at least shrink the gap between them. The Commission includes ‘reviving growth’ as well as ‘changing the quality of growth’ among its strategic imperatives and expresses the need for ‘merging environment and economics in decision-making’.<sup>25</sup>

After almost 20 years of research and debate it is not possible to speak of a ‘merger’ between the two. Some changes in problem conception

<sup>24</sup> *Sustainable Development: Administrative Conditions for an Activating Policy, Report to the Government (Netherlands) from WRR (Scientific Council for Government Policy), 2002, www.wrr.nl.*

<sup>25</sup> Brundtland, G., *op. cit.*, p. 49.

and policy orientation have indeed taken place, but few of them point in ‘the right direction’ on the global level.

1. Breaking the formerly strong correlation between GNP growth on the one hand and environmental strain, energy consumption and resource depletion on the other has become a high priority in research as well as practice. *De-coupling* has become much more than a slogan: in several fields the correlations between GNP growth and these other variables have been broken and in some cases destructive trends have begun to be reversed.
2. Many governments now align themselves with the idea that progress, modernisation and growth must not lead to environmental damage. On the contrary, environmental goals and green politics are painted as the true prerequisite of progress. Dutch social scientist Maarten Hajer has named this position ‘ecological modernisation’.<sup>26</sup> His observations are empirical (from Great Britain and the Netherlands) and objectively presented. However, one can sense (and observe for oneself) that the reconciliation and inclusion of environment into ‘the modern project’ is not altogether harmonious, and contains a fair amount of political rhetoric that is not always translated into action. The sharp edge of the environmental challenge tends to be blunted.
3. As if all this had not happened, the concept of growth has acquired a larger, perhaps unprecedented, importance in the political discourse in EU and OECD countries. Great attention is paid to top-ten lists of growth performance, and opposition political parties scold the government for not being successful enough in inter-country comparisons. A host of political issues that formerly sailed under other banners (research, regional policies, employment) are now subsumed under a political meta-goal: *growth*. This is in a way surprising: the material level of the countries in question is quite impressive. The supporting arguments are more often of the kind that growth is a prerequisite for the welfare and social services, and for the maintenance of full employment. Both these arguments are quite shaky, not to say dead wrong.<sup>27</sup> The bottom,



*The political discourse has in large part regressed to the one-dimensional idea of growth as the necessary and sufficient condition for improving society, maintaining social equilibrium and enhancing the quality of life.*

<sup>26</sup> Hajer, M., *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernisation and the Policy Process*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995.

<sup>27</sup> Regarding the relation between social welfare and growth, we can refer to Jansson, J. O., *The Economics of Services: Development and Policy*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 2006 for a simple economic explanation, and to Baumol, W. J., ‘Macroeconomics of Unbalanced Growth: the Anatomy of Urban Crisis’, *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 57, No. 3, 1967 (1987) ›

line, however, is that in spite of a long and rather sophisticated discussion, referred to above, the political discourse has in large part regressed to the one-dimensional idea of growth as the necessary and sufficient condition for improving society, maintaining social equilibrium and enhancing the quality of life.

### *World poverty and the Millennium Development Goals*

Forty years ago a fairly clear ‘world poverty map’ existed, and it seemed reasonable to divide the world into a First, a Second (Communist bloc) and a Third World. The countries of the latter were in many ways heterogeneous, but could still with some justification be lumped together in discussions of world poverty and economic justice. That is no longer possible. Since numerous articles in the *What Next* project deal with that question we refrain from any detailed description of our own. We simply note four facts:

- › Many formerly ‘poor’ countries have become middle-income countries instead, and many show remarkable levels of overall (GDP) economic growth.
- › Many other countries are still very poor.
- › Around 1.2 billion human beings still suffer from abject poverty.
- › Income and means of living are increasingly unevenly distributed *within* countries: ‘North-South’ patterns are internal in many countries.

Hence the two concepts *poverty* and *poor country* no longer coincide.

While poverty has changed character it is still a tremendous challenge to the morals, the security and the wellbeing of the entire world. In view of this, the UN General Assembly established in 2000 some concrete goals for the world community, with numerical targets and set time-lines. The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are:

#### 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

- › for a more profound analysis of the role of (certain) services in relation to industrial growth. Real outcomes of welfare in relation to growth are found in, for example, Vogel, J., ed. *European Welfare Production: Institutional Configuration and Distributional Outcome*, Klüwer Academic Publishers, 2003, and Layard, R. *Happiness: Lessons from a new science*, Penguin/Allen Lane, 2005. The relations between growth and employment are slightly more complex, but an extensive literature documents the phenomenon of ‘jobless growth’ in, for example, the OECD member countries.

2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a Global Partnership for Development

This package shows the determination of the international community to ‘do something’, which should of course be welcomed. On the surface these goals also seem to be universal: applicable and binding for all. However, looked at more closely, the development goals seem to fit quite clearly into the we-should-do-something-for-them tradition in international affairs. The MDGs do not seriously propose a different world order; nor do they make any real demands of the rich, beyond sending money, sharing technical and medical knowledge and writing off debts. Not bad in itself, one might think. But the key question in five decades of development debate – what causes world poverty? – seems to have been forgotten or at least treated in a quite conventional way. In particular, we find very little attention given to questions of international trade and access to capital: structural questions that were central to the NIEO discussions, and proved there to be very difficult, eliciting ambiguous and sometimes counter-intuitive responses.



*The key question in five decades of development debate – what causes world poverty? – seems to have been forgotten or at least treated in a quite conventional way.*

The shortcomings of the MDGs may be illustrated by the case of access to water. Water is critical to combating poverty since lifestyles, to a high degree, are determined by the availability and management of water resources. In structural terms, a strong trend prevails today to transfer water resources into the market place. This policy of privatisation is deeply contested and has, in numerous instances, given rise to dramatic struggles to counter commercialisation and to keep water access a common right.<sup>28</sup> We believe this mode of thinking has to be challenged in view of the negative effects for the world's poor. As an alternative to privatisation, a viable way forward may be to form more alliances that prioritise clean water for all, involving local voluntary organisations cooperating with government agencies at both the giving and the receiving end. How could Swedish NGOs (and state actors) be inventive in supporting 'globe-girdling': transnational-local cooperation between Southern voluntary organisations with similar experiences to share and exchange between them?<sup>29</sup> Vandana Shiva demonstrates, in numerous writings and practical initiatives, how globe-girdling can assist in building constructive counter-forces to the negative aspects of globalisation and transnational capital. With her Green Belt Movement in Kenya, Wangari Maathai, Professor and Nobel Peace Prize Winner in 2004, sets another example of such globe-girdling, which could be an inspiration both for organising development assistance and for discussions about global visions and everyday life – in Sweden as elsewhere. Have these examples of globe-girdling been seriously evaluated as constructive elements for combating poverty?

In general: can the global standards – mostly existing on paper – for basic needs, work conditions, etc., be supported more often and more effectively by field action, and be made available and promoted as the important human rights documents they are? Sweden ought to advance such a course within the European Union, gradually decrease EU farm subsidies and use these resources for supporting fair trade and sound ecological practices as part of its efforts to combat poverty. These farm subsidies are a parallel to the situation regarding water. The former preserves an unjust allocation of resources but in both

<sup>28</sup> For instance, in Cochabamba, Bolivia, popular uprisings broke out in 2000 when the government decided to privatise water. In India, activists recently forced Coca-Cola to close down one of its factories, since its considerable consumption of water prevented people to use water to which they had previously had access.

<sup>29</sup> Globe-girdling is an expression coined by Gayatri Spivak. See her book, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Harvard University Press, 1999.

cases new structures have to be established regarding how basic needs are met in the world market.

### *Summing up: basic elements of a new vision*

We have recorded above our misgivings about too ‘rational’ blueprints, supposed to guide the international community towards a better world. On the other hand, we recognise the need for a shared vision. Quite clearly there is at present no consistent plan for a new ‘international order’ – not even of a mildly utopian character – that can serve as the kind of blueprint from which demands on the rich world and its citizens could be deduced. The relatively simple deductions about required lifestyle changes in Sweden, for example, that were possible around 1975 must today be grounded in a more complex and partly contradictory global picture.

However, such deductions should be attempted and above we have suggested some of the ‘boundary values’ for such an exercise:

- › The quest for *security*, transcending the classical state-related and military-dominated understanding of that concept, stands out as vital. Human security is an imperative, for several compelling reasons. The broad participation of women on equal terms with men is mandatory. Even from the more narrowly conceived perspective of economic development, security is a key factor. Without human security, no economic progress is conceivable. Security includes safeguarding human rights and requires everybody to shoulder the responsibility for achieving these goals.
- › The *environment*, particularly at the global level, has taken its proper role in the global futures picture. The climate question is the most urgent for good reasons: many poverty-stricken areas of the world stand to suffer if global warming is not halted. But even many ‘classical’ environmental problems, such as mismanagement of renewable resources (destruction of arable land, erosion, overgrazing, depletion of aquatic resources etc), mining and waste deposits, and local air pollution, remain high on the agenda and must not be overlooked. Sustainable development may sometimes be used a bit loosely, but ecological sustainability is an absolute necessity for survival.
- › Which is the paramount factor for eradicating poverty? The global *health* situation has in many ways improved, while at the same time HIV/AIDS takes very heavy tolls in many countries. The econom-



*‘Non-economic’ factors of development can never be left out or ‘taken care of later’.*

ic impacts are clear, but according to many observers, the worst effects on economic life and living standards are yet to come. The MDGs (see above) set clear obligations on the part of the international community. Robert Chambers, Professor of Development Studies at Sussex University, has argued since the 1980s that life energy – one’s own health – is the basic ‘resource’ for everyone and particularly decisive for poor people in order to overcome poverty. He has for many years advocated the creation of health centres in all countries, which could be a task for the local Red Cross/Red Crescent, for instance. The need to deflect resources from hospitals to health promotion, generally valid throughout the world, is reinforced by new hard figures/facts.<sup>30</sup>

- › For poor countries and regions, GDP growth – the dominating variable for development economists and often used as the only indicator of progress – is still equated with enhanced quality of life and real development. But as we have seen (compare also Section 3 below), for countries on the same economic level, welfare, happiness and quality of life can vary considerably. ‘Non-economic’ factors of development can never be left out or ‘taken care of later’.

### III Is more better than less?

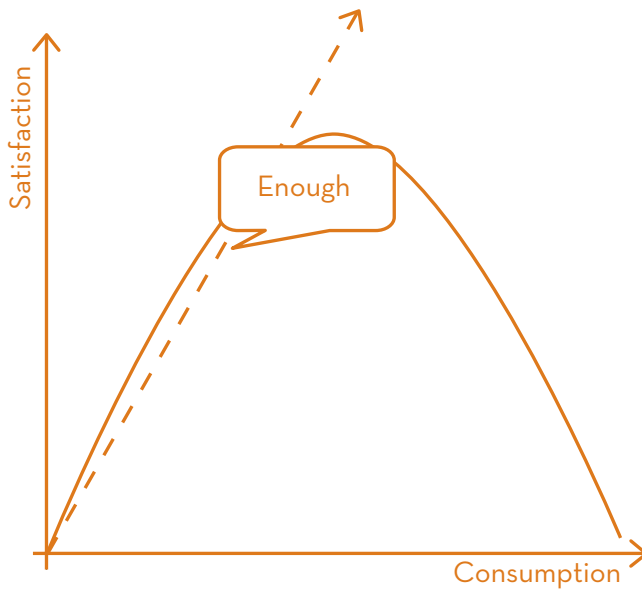
#### *Growth and common sense*

‘In order to believe in unlimited growth in a limited world, one has to be either a fool or an economist.’ This much-quoted dictum by free-thinking economist Kenneth Boulding is, in fact, only a secondary consideration in our line of argument. Our question here is not whether continued growth in consumption is possible but whether it is desirable. Our major thesis runs something like this: ‘In order to believe that ever-increased consumption is compatible with ever-increased quality of life one has to be either a fool or extremely ignorant of a wealth of scientific findings.’

Admittedly the reasoning is not quite that simple. The way growth is in fact measured (the composition of GNP) can complicate the argument, as can the somewhat elusive concepts of quality of life or happiness. Generally, however, the relation between (consumed) quantity and (perceived) quality is not linear, but is better represented by an inverse U-shaped curve (see Figure 1).

<sup>30</sup> Such figures, in a convincing electronic format developed by Professor Hans Rosling, can be found, for example, on [www.undp.se](http://www.undp.se) or [www.ki.se](http://www.ki.se).

Figure 1. Consumption and satisfaction



Source: SOU 2004:119, *Hållbara laster* [Sustainable Consumption].

A Swedish saying ‘too much and too little spoils everything’ has much going for it.

If we keep the discussion in general terms two examples suffice to support the argument.

1. Regarding *food*, a starving person or population of course benefits from an increased intake of calories, vitamins and minerals. On the other hand beyond a certain point an increase in calories will lead to obesity, and increase of vitamins and minerals to malfunction and poisoning. Clearly, with food consumption, exceeding what is *lagom* or ‘enough’ interval will make things not better but worse, and eventually dangerous. Quality in food consumption can, on the other hand, probably be much further improved.
2. An equally straightforward example concerns *information*. A person with access to very little information risks being isolated, ignorant and irrational in his or her mental and practical affairs. On the other hand, many people today can testify to the ills of over-information. Vast quantities of information are directed at the individual through newspapers, electronic media, advertising, e-mail and numerous other channels. In professional as well as private situations symp-



toms of malfunction abound: stress, ‘information overload’, ‘snip-peting’<sup>31</sup> and the drowning of important information in the flow of less important items.



*Our question here is not whether continued growth in consumption is possible but whether it is desirable.*

Thus, in information as well as in food, the idea that more is always better than less is clearly absurd. Here again, the (multi-dimensional) concept of *quality* emerges and demands attention.

If our arguments are to link up seriously with the scientific debate and empirical data, some additional concepts need to be introduced. The following five-layer conceptual scheme makes reasonably good sense in relation to scientific work on the relation between growth and other variables.

1. Economic macro (GNP) growth
2. Growth in consumption as an economic measure
3. Growth in consumption in real terms
4. Growth in satisfactory consumption (qualitative, partly subjective)
5. Growth in quality of life/happiness (subjective)

Our examples above have, though in rather sweeping terms, dealt with the relation 3→4 and 3→5. We have claimed that this relation was inverted-U-shaped rather than linear or (in some other form) monotonous.

It has surprised us that economic research has remained rather stubbornly on levels 1 and 2. In order to understand the social role of economic progress it would seem necessary to relate to levels 3–5 in some way. We think however that the implicit assumption, in support of GNP growth, is that in the relation 1→5 the co-variation is positive over a very large interval (if there is a turn, it is commonly assumed that we have not yet reached it).<sup>32</sup>

It is interesting to note that even the relation 1→2 (does economic growth in fact lead to increased consumption?) has not been studied to any great extent, although it would seem to be relevant to economists’ mainstream concerns. However, two of the great figures in US economics, William D Nordhaus and James Tobin, became interest-

<sup>31</sup> This is a recommended translation of the Swedish ‘snuttifiering’; nowadays a household word describing the phenomenon of information being offered and taken in small packages with little or no relation to one another.

<sup>32</sup> See also Douthwaite, R., *The Growth Illusion*, Council Oaks Books, Tulsa, 1992.

ed in the problem. Their study demonstrates that, historically, GDP growth contributes to growth in consumption, but the relationship is not as strong (or necessarily prevailing over time) as one would believe.<sup>33</sup> It is often assumed that this prestigious study dispelled or eased possible doubts among economists that the relationship between economic macro growth and other indicators of improvement (even to happiness) was something they needed to worry about.

In the next section, however, we will refer to results that bear more directly on the possible relation between growth and the good life: 1→5.

### *Growth and happiness*

When we wrote our 1975 paper, we already had access to data that supported the following point:

During the last hundred years there has been in Sweden, as in comparable countries, a very clear correlation between GNP growth and increase in other indicators of welfare. From the middle of the 1960's this correlation seems to have been broken in a number of key aspects. One fairly clear case, often referred to, is the expected life span for males. This indicator shows that a long period of increase came to an end around 1965, and there is also a slight tendency to decrease in recent years.<sup>34</sup>

As this quote also suggests, there was, in the 1960s and 1970s a strong interest in 'other indicators of welfare'. It is fair to say, however, that development in these respects has been relatively weak. In professional circles methodology has improved and data collection continued, but the use of social and human indicators in the public debate and in policy-making has tended to decline, occurring only on a coincidental or haphazard basis. We will return to this question shortly.

During the last few years, however, interest in indicators of the good life has increased considerably. Under the heading of *happiness research* it even seems to be something of a fad.<sup>35</sup> We would like to comment on three aspects of this issue.

The *first aspect*, a 'classical' research area, is the individual perception

<sup>33</sup> Nordhaus, W., and Tobin, J., *Economic Growth*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1972.

<sup>34</sup> This information has been supplied by Sten Johansson, professor of sociology and later head of Statistics Sweden (SCB).

<sup>35</sup> TIME Magazine devoted a large part of its February 2005 issue (Vol. 165, No. 6; European edition) to 'The New Science of Happiness'.

of happiness or satisfaction. On this count, research results present no surprise. Everyone knows that being rich is not the same as being happy. For a particular person many factors – personal, psychological, social – can clearly negate or reduce the supposed benefits of money and purchasing power. ‘All I want is a chance to prove that money does not make me happy,’ as Woody Allen has put it. This said, many interesting dimensions of happiness and human satisfaction can be deduced from research on individual happiness. One such dimension is to recognise the conditions conducive to the experience of extremely happy moments in life (studied by prominent psychologists, and called *peak experiences* by Abraham Maslow, or *flow* by Mihaly Csikszentmihaly). Another dimension concerns the experience of *security*, certainly a multi-dimensional and ambiguous concept on the personal level, but which ties in well with what we have described above as *human security* (see also below).

What we here call the *second aspect* is ‘classical’ as well, but (as we have just noted) has been kept in the background for quite a long time. It concerns the quality of whole societies, measured on a one-dimensional or a multidimensional scale. The basis of this is ‘objective measures of welfare’ and is built on interviews and statistical indicators of the existing conditions for citizens. Such measurements are based on broad surveys that cover areas such as education, work, income, housing, material assets, leisure, social networks, vulnerability to crime, and health (e.g. average life span and infant mortality). Sometimes attempts are made to merge these indicators so as to create some kind of composite index. However controversial the latter operation may seem, results of, for example, inter-country comparisons are surprisingly robust. In other words, in the rating of countries according to welfare it does not matter too much how separate social indicators are combined into an overall welfare index or how much weight is given to them.<sup>36</sup> (One has to remember that GDP, so often used as the ‘natural’ measure of wellbeing is also a composite index, which brings together such diverse things as goods, services, information and financial income, while excluding unpaid work and being blind to the distribution of wealth or welfare.)

What emerges quite distinctly from the research of the ‘social indicators’ school:

- › All reasonable hybrid or composite indexes of welfare give different ranking between countries than that yielded by the conven-

<sup>36</sup> See Vogel, J., *op. cit.*

tional measure of average income per head. As a general pattern, the USA comes out worse, and the Nordic ‘welfare states’ come out better, than they do when purely economic measures are used. The correlation (statistically measured) between income and wellbeing is almost zero in the industrialised world.<sup>37</sup>

- › Measured on, for example, a country basis, there is no significant increase in wellbeing with time and/or increasing GDP beyond a level of about USD13,000 (11,000 €) per annum and head. Above a certain economic level welfare does not increase with wealth.
- › For most disaggregated social indicators, the level has neither increased nor decreased over the last 30–40 years. (Significant exceptions exist. One is Russia, where conditions on an aggregate level have worsened considerably. But here both economic and social indicators show decline.)

The pattern is surprisingly clear, and confirms observations made by sociologists and statisticians already in the 1970s (see quote above). *Above a certain level of income there seems to be no correlation whatsoever – positive or negative – between economic level on the one hand, and indicators of welfare on the other.* This threshold in income is far below the average level of income for most ‘developed’ nations.

The *third aspect* we would like to highlight comes squarely from a professional economist, Richard Layard, emeritus professor at the London School of Economics. He attacks the problem head on under the heading *happiness research*, and launches this as ‘a new science’. While the latter of course is not altogether true, Layard’s approach is refreshing and enriching. He states his starting point, which is also summary of his findings, in the following way:

... economics equates changes in happiness of a society with changes in its purchasing power – or roughly so. I have never accepted that view, and the history of the last fifty years has disproved it. Instead, the new science of happiness makes it possible to construct an alternative view, based on evidence rather than assertion.<sup>38</sup>

Layard’s method is in many ways similar to that of the classical school of social indicators. However, he bases much of his reasoning on an-



*Above a certain level of income there seems to be no correlation whatsoever – positive or negative – between economic level on the one hand, and indicators of welfare on the other. This threshold in income is far below the average level of income for most ‘developed’ nations.*

<sup>37</sup> See Vogel, J., *op. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> Layard, R., 2003, *Happiness: Has social science a clue?* The Robbins Lectures, see <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/layard>.

swers to the following question: ‘Taking all things together, would you say that you are very happy, quite happy, or not very happy?’. From this three-point scale, Layard attempts to trace background factors that can explain variations of happiness. In this, he draws on many scientific sources: from major sociological surveys to psychology and even brain research. While the breadth of inputs is impressive, Layard in principle follows a mainstream approach to empirical work in the social sciences, including economics. It would be grossly unfair to try to summarise his findings in a few lines here, but we can point to his main conclusions. Layard sums up his empirical findings in what he calls ‘The Big Seven’ factors affecting human happiness:

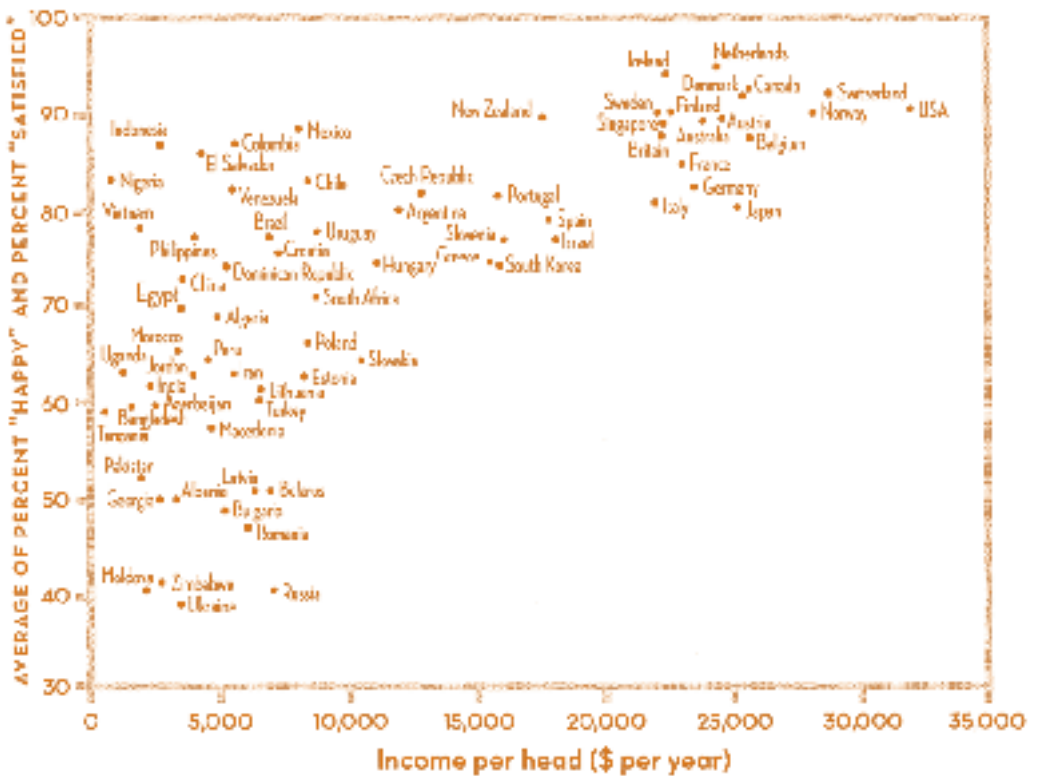
- › Family relationships
- › Financial situation
- › Work
- › Community and friends
- › Health
- › Personal freedom
- › Personal values (such as personal faith)

The statistical inference could be described simply by noting that a worsening in, for example, a person’s situation vis-à-vis community and friends results in a decrease in happiness. An increase works the other way but the effect is normally smaller: an asymmetry depending on a saturation or getting-used-to effect which can be found in almost all variables.

Some findings stand out as somewhat surprising. Layard points to the increasing importance of *comparisons* in our society. He quotes results to the effect that a person’s happiness depends much more on his standing (for example, financially) *relative* to that of his colleagues and friends, than on the absolute level. He also notes that being compared with others, on a formal or informal basis, is a significantly negative factor in happiness. His recommendations from this are, on the individual level, always to compare oneself with those who are worse off, not those who are better off; and to society, to avoid as far as possible comparisons and competition between citizens. Inequality is bad for happiness, but perceived inequality and envy are even worse.

What concerns us most here, however, is how whole societies, particularly in the rich world would be affected by changes in GDP, consumption changes (more or less voluntary) and other material factors influencing lifestyles. On the most general level, happiness research records much the same conclusions as those of the ‘classical school’. In Figure 2 below, comparing countries with regard to income and happiness, the main results stand out very clearly:

Figure 2. Income and happiness: Comparing countries



- › For countries on a level above USD18,000 per head, there is no correlation whatsoever between income and happiness. Happiness does not vary very much between rich countries, on an aggregated basis.
- › Poorer countries show a remarkable span between high and low levels of happiness, even amongst people on the same income level.
- › The unhappiest cases are not to be found among the poorest, but among those who lack human security, are plagued by corruption and civil rights abuse, or suffer from AIDS or alcoholism.

Granted certain differences in methodology and aim, the social indicators research and happiness research arrive at very much the same conclusions. The happiness and wellbeing of our societies have practically no relation to GDP per head or to continued economic growth. The factors that in reality bring about improvement or decline in the quality of life are to be found elsewhere.

### *Summing up: a liberating message*

For some commentators, the facts presented above may seem discouraging. If economic progress, including new inventions, creative finance management, enhanced information and communications technology (ICT), higher levels of private comfort, and more extensive travelling, does not make us happier, where should we turn? It may seem that the road to the golden future has come to a dead end.

For others (ourselves included) the message rather rings of liberation. Since happiness and a better life cannot be expected through aggregate economic growth, which in countries such as Sweden is essentially synonymous with material growth (articles and services that can be bought on the market) the message above emancipates us as individuals and as a nation from the too narrow dictates of 'progress'. There is simply no need for 'growth mania'. Whether we end up second, 13th or 27th in the GDP-per-head contest makes little difference. Data suggest that for many variables in the 'welfare equation' we have reached saturation levels. There is no scientific evidence that economic growth or higher material consumption will make us happier or produce an enhanced quality of life. If anything, data point the other way. Then so be it. Enough is enough.

Put into the international context, if the global situation requires us to make changes in our material and economic life – even if such

changes implied a slowing-down or a reversal of economic growth – this would not in itself be a road-block to our adaptation. Data suggest that such changes could well be implemented in such a way that our quality of life or happiness increases, rather than their imposing hardship on the population.

However, the words ‘implemented’ and ‘impose’ we have just used lead us on (or back, as it were) to the core of our 1975 paper. Who is to tell individuals and households to change, and what should they do? This is the theme of the next and final section of our paper.

## IV Structural policies and personal lifestyles

### *The personal versus the political*

As we have already noted, ‘How much is enough?’ (the ‘Lagom Sweden’ proposal) was energetically discussed in various local groups. These had, of course, different histories and varying rationales – political, religious, philanthropic, environmental, etc. – for what they normally did. There were different emphases, but overall a dual pattern could quite clearly be discerned.

Groups that had a political basis generally showed a rather suspicious attitude towards questions about lifestyles as a personal challenge. Certain individuals responded, but in large measure they were much more inclined to take energetically questions of a structural or macro-political nature. Typical issues that attracted interest were: control of multinationals, restricting advertising, taxing automobiles, and promoting alternative sources of energy.

In groups with a religious or idealistic background, one could sense the opposite. They were always a bit shy and reluctant to speak out on political issues and to make suggestions for major reforms (except for higher development assistance and the 1 per cent target, about which these groups were very well informed and to which they were deeply committed). Instead they stressed the responsibility of the individual, and said that all Swedes of good will ought to change their lifestyles – for example, sell their cars, and burn wood instead of oil.

This discrepancy is thought-provoking and needs further analysis. One might assume that today, after several decades of debate, extensive legislation and attempts to influence attitudes concerning the *environment*, the message would have got through. One would think



*What makes us unique is that we can restrain ourselves. We can decide not to do something that we are able to do. We can set limits on our desires. We can say, ‘Enough’.*



that at least in issues related to the environment a majority would recognise that personal lifestyles and environmental problems are closely related. This does not seem to be the case. Perhaps an increasing individualism is part of the explanation, in connection with diminishing trust in the state and official authority.

However, the question cannot be left there. ‘Freedom’ is a relative concept, and some are prepared to argue that general restrictive measures imposed by the state are less of a threat to personal freedom than unbridled consumerism or aggressively marketed infotainment. We return to that question later – always keeping in mind that *we have to choose our freedoms*.

In discussing how we could stay ‘human in an engineered age’ Bill McKibben writes

We (human beings) aren’t special. Except for one thing. Just one small thing, which the apostles of our technological future have overlooked. One small thing that actually does set us apart. What makes us unique is that we can restrain ourselves. We can decide not to do something that we are able to do. We can set limits on our desires. We can say, ‘Enough’.<sup>39</sup>

Irrespective of how we choose or argue, we could certainly agree that every society must ask itself: how can the political be interpreted in personal life, and how does personal life relate to the political? If private morals and citizens’ sense of decency and convictions about what ought to be done do not relate in some reasonable way to political decisions and the macro-development of society those two worlds will slide apart. Society runs the risk of cracking up.

### *Change and choice*

There are still voices in the debate that express genuine surprise that rational and well-meaning proposals for change (such as the NIEO or the MDGs) are not swiftly implemented. ‘Just do it!’ is their attitude. On the other side, there are many who cultivate a well-mannered cynicism on the issues: ‘we are not prepared to change the American way of life’, ‘war is a part of human nature’ or ‘poverty will always exist’. Obviously both these positions are oversimplified. The issue demands a more sophisticated approach. While decisive research results are scarce, some positions in real life and debate can be distinguished.

<sup>39</sup> McKibben, B., *Enough - Staying Human in an Engineered Age*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2003.

There are several kinds of motives for individuals to choose to change their lives in accordance with international justice. We can point to the following:

- › *Pure idealism.* Without much glancing sideways at the effects of his actions on himself a person is determined to do what is right. This may be based on emotional conviction, moral principle or some absolute doctrine, such as ‘it is wrong to kill’ or ‘property is theft’. We think that the idealistic position is often too quickly discarded, in the pragmatic and instrumental climate prevailing in our own country, for example.
- › *Acting in accordance with a common moral norm, applicable to the whole of society.* ‘Your actions should be compatible with what you would like to be the common maxim for the society.’ This position has a strong standing in the intellectual debate, and has been advocated (with notable differences, of course) by Kant, Thoreau, Gandhi and Jesus, among others.
- › *Pragmatic long-term self-interest.* ‘A more secure, just and sustainable world is in my/our self-interest in the long run. Hence we can rationally and pragmatically accept certain limitations and expenses today, in order to get greater benefits (or even secure survival) in the future.’ (This line of argument was, as we have noted above, dominant in the Swedish position on a NIEO, and was also the basic assumption in our 1975 paper.) This position does not require any moral judgement, beyond a somewhat generalised self-interest.
- › *Generalised group interest: community self-organisation.* While doctrine among economists has been built on the idea of ‘economic man’, acting in his self-interest and on the principle of instant satisfaction, other social scientists have found differing patterns, more or less contradicting the economic man paradigm. One of them is sociologist Amitai Etzioni who presented the scientific foundations for a dissenting view in *The Moral Dimension*<sup>40</sup> and followed up by studying and promoting community organising (including as editor of the journal *The Responsive Community* in 1990–91). Other important contributions have come from political scientist Elinor Ostrom, who has provided theory and empirical examples showing how people are able to organise in order to promote the

<sup>40</sup> Etzioni, A., *The Moral Dimension: Toward a New Economics*, The Free Press, Macmillan, New York, 1988.

common good and manage scarce resources in a responsible way.<sup>41</sup> In rich and poor countries alike it is today a crucial question how public interests will be balanced with local ones and particularly with local expertise. Local expertise consists of abilities and skills that may be even more important than the theoretical knowledge of ‘world experts’.



*It is unpleasant to live with large differences and divisions in wealth, status or power, even if you are on the favoured side.*

- › *A different variation of (generalised) self-interest can be expressed as follows: ‘it is unpleasant to live with large differences and divisions in wealth, status or power, even if you are on the favoured side’. This may seem to be idealism again, or ideosyncrasy on the part of certain individuals, but data from, for example, Layard suggest that social comparison has a negative correlation with happiness.<sup>42</sup> We can also note that in 1930 J. M. Keynes worked out a proposal for a fair financial and trade regime aiming at global economic stability.<sup>43</sup> This proposal included conventional means of discouraging excessive debt among debtor nations but also contained a key innovation – unfortunately disregarded ever since – that nations with a trade surplus (creditor nations) would be subject to identical pressures. This should make it expensive for countries to ‘grow away’ from their fellows in the economic organisation. In a world with growing international communication, being exposed to injustice, poverty and violence may generate a will to change in many people; and not primarily on the grounds of idealism but to do with one’s own quality of life.*

With this, we have been able to suggest only some of the moral and pragmatic forces at work, which could pull in the direction of a better and more just world. Given the discussion of climate in our own country we think that the position called ‘pragmatic long-term self-interest’ might carry the greatest weight. One should not neglect the others, however. We do not know the true force of ‘pure’ idealism, nor the power of the deeply embedded (Kant’s) categorical imperative.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Dolsak, N., and Ostrom, E., *The Commons in the New Millennium*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2003.

<sup>42</sup> Layard, R., *op. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> Keynes, J. M., ‘Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren’, in *Essays in Persuasion, the Collected Writings of J M Keynes*, Vol. IX, Macmillan, London, 1972.

### *Changing life-styles: motives, methods, examples*

We think that by now we have conclusively demonstrated the following:

1. The quest for a more equitable world will demand changes in life-styles in rich countries such as Sweden. In this respect the main message of our 1975 *Lagom* paper stands firm.
2. We have also claimed (backed up by scientific evidence) that changes, even if they would mean slowing economic growth or limiting the scope of material consumption, would not necessarily result in lowering the quality of life or reducing happiness. In sectors such as food, energy and transportation we are already on the far side of the optimal point (see Section 3 above). Hence ‘*Enough!*’ is not an extremist view but firmly based on social and medical evidence.
3. Finally we have suggested, in the last subsection, a number of reasons or motives (moral and pragmatic) that may be relevant for individuals, groups and even countries in achieving such changes. In this latter respect we depart considerably from our 1975 paper, which dealt almost exclusively with changes that governments (albeit after due democratic process) would impose on the citizens. In the conclusion of the present article, we find reason to expand the repertoire of means for the implementation of change.

We would like to stress once more that we do not, in this final section of our essay, want to draw firm conclusions about international politics or global governance as such, nor of the efforts of our own country on the international scene. Such efforts – continued support for and critical loyalty to the UN and other international organisations, active participation in the prevention of violent conflict and keeping of the peace, generous development assistance and the reduction of debt, etc. – are well worth arguing for. However, we concentrate here on *changes that are grounded in a global perspective and have a broad bearing on the living conditions of large segments of the Swedish population.* Some (or even all) of the issues below also have a bearing on state policies, in the sense that public awareness of the state of the world and concrete reminders thereof are important contributions to their democratic legitimacy.

On the basis of our two imperatives – *we have to choose our freedoms, and most global problems are shared problems* – we choose to sort changes into two main categories, according to the manner in which they ‘come



*We have to choose our freedoms, and most global problems are shared problems.*

to us' from the global reality. We are also keenly aware that much depends on the spread of interest in and informed knowledge about the state of the world. Such knowledge is a prerequisite of all true implementation in this field. We do not, however, make educational campaigns or appeals to mass media explicitly part of the package.<sup>44</sup> The cultivation and extension of an international mind-set is a subtle task – but one that can certainly in part come as a spin-off from the points discussed below.

In the *first category* of 'action' we place those necessary or desired changes that are prompted by international agreements and subsequent government action.

### Climate change

The restrictions on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions prompted by the Kyoto agreements are being followed up in various ways. There is no doubt that our 'ecological footprints' (and those of other industrialised nations) are far too large and deep at present, and will remain so even after modest implementation of the agreements. The main direction is restraint in the use of fossil fuels and if possible their replacement by alternative sources of energy. Regarding lifestyles and 'sacrifice' two factors stand out:

- › The transport sector will constitute a climate problem for a long time to come. Unlike most European countries, most Swedish cars have become less energy-efficient in the last 10–15 years. Restrictions and punitive taxations have been discussed, but very little has happened, and the alarming trend has not been broken. The government should establish very firm rules so as to change the present pattern of use of fossil fuels for transportation. A measure that should be used more aggressively in order to promote energy-efficient vehicles are the rules for service cars (cars belonging to the employer but used for private transport; these form a substantial part of the fleet, and in particular in the sale of *new* cars).
- › Scientific progress in alternative energy sources and carriers, such as fuel cells (hydrocarbons or hydrogen) and solar cells, has been impressive but industrial application is as yet only marginal. Rich countries such as Sweden should take it on themselves to introduce such techniques. The cost may be high (non-competitive) initially,

<sup>44</sup> We should note, of course, that efforts in this direction are very much part of the work of Sida and other state and private organisations in the development field. Projects and initiatives in schools, universities and elsewhere are numerous.

but a market introduction will pave the way for cheap equipment that will become within reach for the poorer parts of the world. In certain rich countries (such as Germany) such measures have been taken, and have also increased the status value of ‘climate-friendly’ energy technologies. Such evidence points to the realism in introducing such technologies, though they will initially be somewhat more cumbersome and complex to handle for households and firms. In the medium term they will be considered more elegant, and above all they are globally sustainable in the long run.

### Development assistance

It is natural to think about the established system of organisations for development assistance (in Sweden the Foreign Ministry and Sida in the state sector, and a number of NGOs involved in the implementation of assistance) as an area in which new and more lateral thinking can take place.

It is perhaps easy to forget that tax-financed assistance per year amounts to 22 billion SEK (USD 2.8 billion), or 2700 SEK (USD350) per Swede (men, women and children), in foregone consumption. Whether that is a lot or only a trifle is a matter of value judgement.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand it does affect the purchasing for consumerist lifestyles somewhat – and definitely more than is the case for some other rich countries. The most important issue, of course, is not the absolute level but that development assistance gets its priorities right!

Development politics<sup>46</sup> has recently been laid down as a responsibility for the whole government, in practice meaning all ministries, not just the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We have our doubts about the wisdom and effectiveness of such a move. Similar signals – that issues such as gender equality or sustainable development (see above) should be everybody’s responsibility – indicate that it may eventually be nobody’s. This remains to be seen: if serious efforts indeed follow, this principle will be an important stepping-stone for several of the broadly based changes that we discuss below.

<sup>45</sup> The assistance budget has been built up over quite a long period of time, and only a small fraction (in some years up to 10 per cent) of the increase in national income has been diverted to the aid budget. Hence it is not possible to claim that aid money has considerably halted growth (for example in consumption). But it is equally impossible to claim that we need high growth in order to afford development assistance.

<sup>46</sup> See ‘Shared Responsibility – Sweden’s Policy for Global Development’, Government Bill 2002/03, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Stockholm, p.122.

*A second category of changes* comprise those that are politically motivated, but are not (yet) confirmed or laid down in government commitments or policies. Here we have to do with a mix of opinion formation, government intervention and individual decisions.

### Health issues

We have noted above that the concept of *enough* is easy to recognise and accept with regard to the consumption of food in the rich world. Paradoxically, an issue shared by ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ regions of the world is that of obesity. Statistics show that in rich countries increasing numbers of children and grown-ups are overweight, and develop obesity-related diseases. Statistics also demonstrate that obesity is strongly class-related. At the same time, in several poor parts of the world, starvation or almost-starvation and obesity exist side by side. It is evident that the adaptation to healthier lifestyles – more exercise and differently composed diets – must be a priority for rich and poor regions alike. Many countries formulate obesity policies. It remains to be seen whether this kind of dilemma can be ‘informed away’, or if other means of influencing behaviour will eventually have to be chosen. Irrespective of policies chosen, one should be very much aware of the fact that our lifestyle (mediated through TV, film and advertising) will provide strong and convincing examples to people in all parts of the world. In an ongoing Swedish government study on sustainable consumption, the responsible minister and the investigator Stefan Edman make a big point of the fact that a consumption shift towards ecologically ‘better’ products will also contribute to a better health situation in the population.<sup>47</sup>

### Enhanced international contact through voluntary organisations and civil society

At international conferences and intergovernmental meetings praise is routinely given to civil society. This is all very well, but does this vague reference to a multitude of actors (popular movements, voluntary organisations and certain parts of the corporate sector) make clear the decisive role they have in meeting the global challenge we want to address? We say no! Civil society rests on a moral relationship, which is covenantal rather than contractual. The model of human interaction is neither the market nor the state.

In terms of lifestyles and international awareness, it is quite important that several thousands of Swedes have been professionally active in assistance work (to a large extent financed by Sida) and through that have

<sup>47</sup> SOU 2004:119 *Hållbara laster* [Sustainable Consumption] (in Swedish with English summary).

had concrete experiences of living in different, and mostly very poor, parts of the world. In our view, this familiarity effect is quite an important asset with regard to change in our country: not only ‘study trips’ but more extended exposure for a wide variety of people to poor and/or insecure parts of our world should be considered a central element in the international politics – the ‘foreign policy’ – of the country.

Citizens’ diplomacy is of greater importance than ever. Professional associations, and institutions related to education, sports or the arts, can all give contributions. In order to avoid and reinforce ‘First World’ perspectives, countervailing forces and complementing experiences should be highly prioritised. Processes in this direction can be found in NGOs relating to other NGOs. This happens in many ways not necessarily related to assistance or aid, but with other interests as the main concern – such as religion, wildlife, research or sport. We take two examples – the Gothia Cup and ‘1325’ – and comment finally on the corporate sector.

The first example that we have in mind is the Gothia Cup, a gigantic football (soccer) event with 25,000 participants: boys and girls from all parts of the world. What started out as an odd idea amongst a group of young sports leaders developed into the world’s largest and most international youth tournament. The organisers state their value base thus:

We believe that matches against other countries will broaden the minds of young players. We want every match to be exciting, challenging and an everlasting memory, regardless of the score.

Our second example of exemplary voluntary action has, somewhat paradoxically, its roots in a UN Security Council Resolution – 1325:2000 – especially the first paragraph. In this, the Security Council:

Urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict.

In his reports on the implementation of resolution 1325, the UN Secretary General observes that major gaps remain in all areas, including, in particular, in relation to women’s participation in conflict prevention and peace processes. He points out the need for education and capacity building for a great number of functions in conflict areas and in peace missions. He also focuses on the need for pro-active recruitment of women for conflict prevention and peace-building.



*The corporate sector at large must address a broader agenda than an overall aim of higher profits.*



By appealing in reality less to governments than directly to independent women's organisations, this Resolution has mobilised women in impressive and imaginative ways: in many countries groups of women who have formerly seen themselves as having no role at all in public affairs. In the Swedish '1325' effort the main focuses will be

- › education and capacity building, in order to further the personal and professional development of women for equal participation in all aspects of prevention of violent conflict and peace-building,
- › development of methods, structures and networks for active recruitment of women for education and training.

The corporate sector at large must address a broader agenda than an overall aim of higher profits. The agenda should i.e. include offering more consciously chosen products to meet poor people's needs and promoting a more equitable world. There are signs of a changing mood and a broader conception of corporate responsibility. The Global Compact, the UN Secretary General's initiative in inviting the private sector to be an integrated partner in efforts to reach UN objectives for economic and social development, has received much attention but has also been criticised for its lack of binding commitments. But there are also weak signals on the micro-level. The following citations are taken from a management journal of business excellence following meetings of chief executive officers (CEOs) with NGO leaders in Mozambique. 'We visited a sugar mill that was barely functioning because of the massive subsidies the EU pays to its sugar farmers. One of our group-members was a banker from Sweden who commented that he sees fancy yachts in Malmö harbour with names like Sweetness, the result of EU agricultural handouts to sugar beet growers. The visit was a hands-on education in the outrageousness of the current world trade system.'<sup>48</sup> Another CEO said that his internal model of what makes a good leader needed to be changed. His organisation has since 'moved from being a strictly for-profit organisation that invests in start-ups to one that invests in start-ups both for profit and for social good'. We would like to see this 'both-and' become a general pattern of business lifestyles!

### Consumption patterns and propaganda

Nowadays it is well recognised – and proven – that certain restraints are necessary for ecological survival and the wellbeing of human beings. In what ways can consumption patterns take such restraints into account?

<sup>48</sup> Altman, Vivien, 'Worlds Apart', *Insead Quarterly*, No. 9, 2004.

In politics, everyone agrees that representatives of different positions or parties should be treated fairly: equal time on TV, restrictions on campaign contributions, proportionality in cash grants to parties, etc. How might a debate between the two positions ‘consume!!’ and ‘restrain consumption for life’s sake’ be promoted or given a platform? Today the playing field between consumerism and restraint is severely tilted to the advantage of the former.

In the search for the desired debate about consumerism even weak ‘signals’ must be recognised and strengthened. The local government in the city of Örebro, for example, demonstrated courage and foresight in banning all publicity in public buses from 1 January 2005. This decision meant an income loss of USD57,000 a year, but a gain in setting limits on publicity and propaganda in the public space.

Citizens and civil society can act in the same spirit, following the lead of local authorities – or pushing them forward. The right of free expression must not be identified with the present invasion of advertisements and information, more often than not disguised as infotainment, into public and private lives.

Individuals are increasingly aware of how their buying habits can change consumption patterns by giving their custom and preference to firms that do not violate environmental norms, mistreat their employees or use child labour. Over-consumption and consumerism are destructive of life in all its forms, affecting the mental climate and attitudes in society. Hence they are not ‘private’ but should be regarded as a matter of common concern. They deserve a place on our private agendas as well as in political life.

#### Human security: a common goal

A concept of security based on mistrust and control is spreading to all countries (reinforced by terrorist acts, such as the ones in New York, Beslan and Madrid). People in our country are constantly reminded of security based on suspicion and mistrust, through immigration controls, security inspections in public places, ‘safer’ passports, etc. – albeit mostly in a rather mild form. How can this trend be broken and a new form of *human security* be introduced, based on trust rather than suspicion?

One factor, seemingly too simple to be put on paper, is that the more people from different cultures and walks of life come to know each other the more difficult it is to demonise ‘the other’ and fear him as a potential terrorist, criminal or ‘social tourist’. In that sense, widened



*No one from the political establishment makes any attempt at all to link international politics, ecological sustainability, security policy or development assistance to what we do, how we live or how much we consume in this country.*

contacts (as discussed above between NGOs) may play a significant role. During the last stage of the Cold War states instituted a system of security and confidence-building measures, visiting each other's military academies and institutions. Would it be possible to create a similar system of 'tolerance-building measures' through worldwide NGO cooperation as a contribution to creating human security?

Another very clear issue (discussed earlier) is the tendency for insecurity to escalate into armed conflict, low-level warfare or outright war. It would be rational, and a great gain for human security, if one could implement an international order in which the spiral could go the other way. We have no doubt that the weapons trade, a rather shady part of the international economy, has a role in the perpetration and worsening of the security situation, enhancing the risk of armed violence. It is hard for a single country to take the first step and opt out of this trade. We think that this step should be taken, however. Our own country has become one of the large exporters of weapons (counted on a per capita basis) following reductions in domestic orders: the Swedish military now have less money to buy weapons with. A reduction and eventual withdrawal would cost money (less production and the foregoing of export revenue), and probably generate unemployment and other forms of hardship. It would be a demonstration of the humane qualities of our society if it could both opt out of an evil system, and give decent and sufficient support to those who stand in the first line to take the consequences of change.

### *Conclusions: what then?*

A young friend of ours visits a wide variety of Swedish schools regularly, with the task of teaching about the state of the world, poverty, global problems – and Swedish development assistance.<sup>49</sup> She notes that practically no one makes any connection between lifestyle and consumption in our country and the problems on the international and global agenda. We get the same impression from observing, for example, the most recent (four to five) electoral campaigns for the national parliament.<sup>50</sup> No one from the political establishment makes any attempt at all to link international politics, ecological sustainability, security policy or development assistance to what we do, how we live or how much we consume in this country.

<sup>49</sup> We refer here to *Globala skolan* (the Global School), a project sponsored by Sida and the Central Board for School Development in Sweden.

<sup>50</sup> A few campaigns back, the environmental issue (in a precise sense) triggered some comments about the need to change our lifestyles. Even that has been absent during the last 10 years or so.

We find this disturbing, and also a bit hard to understand. The prevalence of a nation-centric or Euro-centric world-view is reinforced by the media, but on the other hand these same media do quite an impressive job in demonstrating other aspects of our global situation: much of it from outside Europe and often with good background coverage. Most recently, the tsunami catastrophe of December 26, 2004 (which took close to 400 Swedish lives, among over 200,000 victims totally) did visibly change the perspective: we share the same predicament, but some have to take a much harder blow than others. We think that this might produce some more durable change in outlook, even in the medium and longer term. Building higher national walls or gated communities may feel comforting but this is an illusion. Our only hope is that people will be restrained by internal norms and values.

In spite of the present disregard for global *interdependence*, we believe that lifestyle changes, including moderation in material consumption, are both necessary and realistic in relation to the state of the world. We would like to see such issues put back on the agenda, and hope that this article can be a contribution to this end. However, we need to be wary of ‘all-too-rational’, sweeping utopian thinking, as Larry Lohmann points out.<sup>51</sup> Our wish is that people with whom we think we may find common cause will recognise the potential for change and work for it.

We are aware that a line of argument consistently based on *ecological sustainability* – including strong efforts to put a halt to climate change – would lead to recommendations perhaps more stringent than those we have discussed. However, this is not our main line of argument. We are convinced that due regard to such factors points to the need for very much the same kind of measures as those we have indicated.

The arguments above follow two different lines. The first has to do with change of the international order. Such change would be facilitated by – and in some aspect require – adaptive change in leading rich countries and regions. The links between our lives and the situation of the world are physical (as in the case of climate change), economic (as in the case of most issues discussed in this paper), medical (health problems) and psychological. On the latter point it is worth stating again that the experience of wide chasms of economic standards, security and health are detrimental to the happiness of both those on top and those at the bottom. Inequality and unfair distribu-

51 Cf. footnote 11.

tion are objectively negative factors affecting the lives of people and hence development, in the true sense of that word. The second line of argument is that our materialistic lifestyles do not contribute to either health or happiness. In a concrete, measurable sense, we would be better off if we reorganised our priorities away from ‘growth’ and material expansion. It is somewhat embarrassing that remarks to this effect are still often regarded as marginal, and countered in the debate with epithets such as unrealistic, utopian or backward-looking. Since common sense and scientific evidence in fact point in the opposite direction, we are not one bit hesitant to finish as we started. *Enough is enough!*




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# Activism, Expertise, Commons

*Larry Lohmann*

For many of us wondering ‘what next?’ it has often seemed common sense to see a world of coherent global processes following a similar logic everywhere in opposition to the diversity or chaos of local particularity. For the formally-educated middle classes in particular, something called ‘capitalism’ or ‘globalisation’ is usually seen (for better or for worse) as imposing a new order on what lies ‘outside’ or ‘before’ it, or on ‘the local’; ‘the market’ is seen (for good or ill) as overcoming custom and coercion; human agency, ingenuity and technology as reorganising a non-technical, inhuman nature (whether the results are seen as productive or disastrous); law as overcoming violence, corruption and arbitrary uses of power; and science (love it or loathe it) as bringing a new kind of order to rational discussion which transcends interest and ‘non-scientific’ impurities of ideology or bias. And it has often seemed reasonable to take these seemingly coherent global processes and try to oppose them to counterparts operating at the same level.

Yet, strictly speaking, such dualisms are impossible. Forever incomplete, they are always breaking down. The breakdowns are usually more immediately visible both to ‘hands-on elites’ and to what I’ll call ‘commoners’ than to the educated public in between – including many activists. Yet the dualisms are not just a middle-class illusion. The idea of potent, transcendental ‘global’ entities makes sense because a range of practices that appears to embody them is entrenched in the world and in everyday life. These practices, and their perpetual failures and attempted reformations, make up much of the play of power distinctive to the contemporary world. Those of us with ambitions to be activists neglect this play at our cost – and at the cost of movement-building. Let me take a few examples.

## *Dams*

The story of big dam-building is still sometimes told among the middle classes, whether fans or critics, as one of the taming of rivers by human master-planners. This is an illusion. What happens is invariably the replacement not of a natural with an engineered landscape but of one social/technical body, no more natural than human, with another. Dam projects do not introduce knowledge and technology to a place where there was none, but rather reorganise and redistribute knowledge and technology. As they concentrate hydraulic power and technical control at single sites, they replace or dilute, for example, most existing knowledge of flood basin irrigation, typically distributed along the whole length of rivers, with new forms of accounting and description. Nor does this expertise, or the capital it accompanies, arrive on site fully formed and waiting to be applied. Instead, like the knowledge it nudges aside, it is created largely on-site. Engineering is messy. Underlying rock formations never turn out as expected. Improvised materials need to be brought into play. Mischievous leaks result in erosion and cost overruns. Delay leads to delay. The science is worked out on the ground. Calculations have to be redone and new calculation techniques thought up (such as cost-benefit analysis) which, while more centralised, turn out to be no more ‘accurate’ than their forebears. Then again, the project itself has to be constantly reconjured and ever more implausibly widened in its social scope as it meets with failure after failure. (See Box, ‘How development unfolds’.)



*Dam projects do not introduce knowledge and technology to a place where there was none.*

### *How development unfolds*

The first impulse of development agency planners, on being told that a proposed agricultural project will be counterproductive because it will damage local soils and water through monocropping or salinisation, may be to write an environmental component into the plan. When told that this environmental plan is unimplementable because it is bound to be subverted or ignored by local power-holders, the planners may respond by writing more enforcement into the plan. When asked where the enforcement will come from, planners may add a police academy to the plan; when asked how this academy is to be prevented from being used by a corrupt military, they will lay out schemes for ‘good governance’; and so on ad infinitum. At each stage, specialists in new fields are called in to create their own roles in the story of the global application of expertise.



Similar dialectics unfold once projects have been executed. An irrigation scheme on the Huay Mong tributary of the Mekong River in Northeast Thailand offers a mundane example.

In the late 1970s, the Huay Mong project was envisaged as an appendage to the grandiose proposed Pa Mong dam on the Mekong mainstream, from whose reservoir it was slated to draw irrigation water by gravity. When Pa Mong was shelved in 1979 – original proposals called for the resettlement of 250,000 people or more – planners consoled themselves by hurriedly redrawing Huay Mong as a stand-alone pumped irrigation and flood control scheme. An agreement securing partial funding was signed with the European Commission in 1981 and the completed project, fitted out with Belgian machines, launched in 1987 under Thailand's National Energy Administration.

At first, this 'social experiment' – as it is described by officials responsible for the project – consisted of nothing more than basic engineering works. Insufficient arrangements had been made, for example, for getting irrigation water to farmers. A new project was added to adapt the landscape to what had already been built. Tertiary canals were dug to ensure that every field had easy access to water, and the Agricultural Land Reform Office was drawn in as lead agency.

Yet many local farmers objected to the canals crossing their land, and those local residents on the side of the river that enabled them to benefit from the project's engineering works were reluctant to join the associated 'on-farm development' scheme. By 1993, European Union donors were demanding that someone 'create the need for the structure' – to quote the candid phrase of a Belgian consultant engineer who spoke to visitors in January 1998 about the project. Policy was rewritten and new agencies arrived to improve agricultural output and develop 'local institutions' and 'human resources'. Tertiary canals were now to be constructed only when requested by farmers, and villager 'self-reliance' and a 'sense of belonging' were to be fostered. Admittedly, these last phrases carried an Orwellian ring, given that the project had been imposed on the local area and that developing the financial and technical skills to manage it locally meant dependence on official schooling rather than local skills. But the real problem was that European donor pressure to retrofit the project to make it more 'participatory' – by making water-user group committees democratically elected, increasing their

role in maintaining the project's infrastructure, 'empowering' farmers' organisations, inducing government field staff to concern themselves with 'community development', and so forth – had ignited a further phase of resistance. This originated from the Thai government bureaucracies running Huay Mong, which understandably dragged their feet in the face of the Europeans' criticism of their prerogatives, working methods and 'top-down' approach.

To this, the European response was as absurd as it was inevitable: 'reform Thai government agencies'. In order to make sense out of concrete which had been poured at Huay Mong in the early and mid-1980s, it had become necessary by 1998 for the concerned European agencies to adopt a stance at once quixotic and openly imperialistic: that of remakers of the Thai state. The technician's dream of imposing effective irrigation and flood-control infrastructure on a Mekong tributary, instead of being checked and moderated by other realities, had, when faced with failure, resistance and the consequences of falsehood, ultimately merely engendered other hubristic fantasies calling for the political re-engineering of a larger society.

Policy reforms, too, lead to the proliferation of new fictions. For example, Northern activists have sometimes demanded that the World Bank abide by its reform pledges to 'promote participation' in the hope that this will check its tendency to impose locally inappropriate schemes on unwilling villagers. One of the Bank's responses has been to require of countries receiving loans that they conduct public hearings on plans for Bank-funded projects.

As Bank officials are well aware, these hearings are often reluctantly undertaken and officially supervised in a way which allows little discussion. The outcome is threefold. First, the activists' attention to the Bank's bogus 'participation' initiatives legitimises them for donor-country audiences. Second, the activists' usefulness to grassroots movements is diminished when they are tarred with charges of imperialism, which issue from officials of the recipient country inconvenienced by the demand for hearings. Third, local officials can be conveniently blamed for obstructionism by the Bank when the hearings turn out to be spurious, confirming the Bank's claim that 'we have the best of intentions but cannot be held responsible for local backwardness'. A new, more extensive set of falsehoods about 'participation' is born to replace the old.



*Nor, do engineers or economists ever arrive at a point at which they can identify in their own terminology, once and for all, what big dams are about.*

The response of development to the promptings of truth-tellers, in short, has little in common with the linear process by which a super-tanker's captain corrects course in response to repeated instrument readings and landmark sightings. If geometric metaphors must be used, it more closely resembles the processes of iteration which produce the convoluted, unpredictable patterns of mathematical chaos. Simple critical inputs into development tend to result not in asymptotic convergence to truth and effectiveness, but rather in a political Mandelbrot set of endlessly detailed curlicues and blobs beyond which unfolds a further infinite perspective of crazily saw-toothed coastlines, islands and indefinitely receding spirals.

Source: Larry Lohmann, 'Missing the Point of Development Talk: Reflections for Activists' (1998), available at [www.thecornerhouse.co.uk](http://www.thecornerhouse.co.uk)

Nowhere is there a single line dividing human from non-human, or intentions from the world to which they refer. Nowhere do engineers or economists suddenly step from imagination to reality, from plan to real thing.<sup>1</sup> Nor, as big dams respond to circumstances by restlessly shifting their shapes from power generators to multipurpose projects to opportunities for social engineering to tourist attractions, do engineers or economists ever arrive at a point at which they can identify in their own terminology, once and for all, what big dams are about.

Yet the whole centralising process is good at creating, as an artefact, the notion that the world *can* be divided between abstract human calculation, expertise and the wealth-creating ability of 'the economy' on one side and a material world of waiting, indifferent natural resources on the other. The dam teaches the engineers and the economists, and they take what they learn away with them even as they, and the physical works of the dam itself, also work to make obsolete the knowledge of local farmers and fisher folk. Rivers become experienced (though not by those who have lived with them) as 'forces of nature' tamed by expert humans, even if the 'nature' in question is manufactured by the dam projects themselves. When the centralisation and simplification associated with big dams leads to their characteristic and familiar failures,<sup>2</sup> which are one moment in their evo-

1 For examples involving mosquitoes, irrigation, estates, debt, public health and mud bricks, see Mitchell, Timothy, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Technopolitics, Modernity*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2002.

2 See, for example, McCully, P., *Silenced Rivers*, Zed, London, 1997.

lution, these failures come to appear not as a problem of the redistribution and reshaping of control and knowledge, but at most as resistance or falsification by this external ‘nature’, to be countered by adjustments in the expert text that represents it. The idealistic narrative of change as the application of a detached body of expertise and surplus-producing capacity to an essentially passive clay is preserved and repeatedly relaunched. Hence the chain of technical fixes and repackagings, followed by inevitable further failures and further fixes, that characterises the continuing story of big dams everywhere (as well as the stories of industrial agriculture, genetic engineering, international development, cost-benefit analysis, technical climate fixes, and so on).<sup>3</sup>

### *Lessons for activists*

The lessons for activists, as I struggled to sum them up some years ago in an article based on experience of grassroots movements opposing large dams in the Mekong and Chao Phraya basins, are many:

...the intellectual aspect to the struggle against damaging development projects is not about whether what the experts say is true or false. More fundamentally, the struggle is about – so to speak – which genre of performance [see Box, ‘Development as Drama’] will prevail... Looking at activism in this way opens up new resources of power and influence for campaigners, and points toward contexts of truth-telling which are less likely to contribute to the production of more falsehoods and to defeats for popular movements. It encourages ways of facing up to, and creatively contending with, a number of political realities:

First, development can translate everything, including acts of opposition and their consequences, into its own terms, if not necessarily turn it to its advantage. There is no point in trying to find some Archimedean fulcrum ‘outside’ development, which development cannot attempt to make part of itself, and building opposition from there. This is only an extreme version of the illusion that development itself works to propagate – that it is converting

3 I’ve described this chain in a series of articles available on: [www.thecornerhouse.org.uk](http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk) for dams and development projects, ‘Mekong Dams in the Drama of Development’ and ‘Missing the Point of Development Talk: Reflections for Activists’ (1998); for cost-benefit analysis ‘Whose Voice is Talking? How Opinion Polling and Cost-Benefit Analysis Synthesize New “Publics”’ (1998); for genetic modification, ‘Genetic Dialectic: The Biological Politics of Genetically Modified Trees’ (with Viola Sampson, 2000); and for the Kyoto Protocol’s ‘flexible mechanisms’, ‘Democracy or Carbocracy: Intellectual Corruption and the Future of the Climate Debate’, 2001.

something undeveloped or underdeveloped into something developed. It is an illusion which carries all the risks of Orientalism and of mischaracterisation of change as being due to the power of a distinct entity called ‘development’.



*More fundamentally,  
the struggle is about  
– so to speak – which  
genre of performance  
will prevail.*

Second, there is equally no point in seeking an ‘inside’ to development from which it might be reformed so that it is, in the aggregate, more responsive to the facts, more effective, or more accountable. No such reform is possible, and there is no conceivable point from which it could be undertaken... Discarding the notion that development is the implementation of theories or plans makes possible a more nuanced understanding of development officials which avoids the facile assumption that they must either believe or not believe the falsehoods they express.

Third, actions in the struggle against development projects are taken in an intercultural space occupied simultaneously by what is called development and by other social forms and populated by actors playing concurrent roles in performances in multiple genres. Each action has both ‘development meanings’ and many other meanings. Seen as part of the drama of development, a protest against a World Bank-funded dam can be read only as an obstacle to progress, a call for ‘alternatives’, or a prelude to further development schemes to mitigate or compensate for losses connected with the dam. Approached as an event within another genre of performance, the same event may be read as a moment in the struggle to sustain or create local livelihoods and as a battle *against* ‘alternatives’ (i.e., those embodied by the dam and its effects), while the actions of World Bank staff involved are construed as obstructionist, mendacious or exploitative. Thus while the opponents of a development project cannot escape having their actions feed into an interpretive mechanism geared up to produce more such projects, development officials also cannot escape having their own actions reciprocally ‘contained’ within other performances which accord them few of the privileges they seek. If development can process everything, so, simultaneously, can other genres (e.g., the modes of storytelling proper to coffeehouses rather than offices, to in-shore artisanal fishing rounds rather than master-planning meetings, to forest honey-gathering rather than air travel).<sup>4</sup>

Fourth, development critics accordingly need not believe their actions are intelligible or effective only within the narrow gen-

<sup>4</sup> Zerner, Charles, ed., *Culture and the Question of Rights*, Duke University Press, Raleigh, 2001; review of same at [www.thecornerhouse.org.uk](http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk).

res of development or anti-development talk, with its intellectual formulas and global solutions. Making themselves answerable to specific movements can help campaigners see their actions as multiple in meaning and consequences. Understanding whom they are telling the truth to and for enables activists better to select those contexts of truth-telling which strain performances in the development genre to breaking point while simultaneously helping to craft effective concurrent performances in those other genres in which truth matters more (see Box, ‘Development as drama’).

Finally, there is no such thing as a campaign goal whose articulation ‘can’t possibly do any harm’. Even innocuous-sounding appeals for ‘more participation’ can lead, depending on where they are made and to whom, to outcomes that undermine participation (see Box, ‘How development unfolds’). The political meanings of such appeals are not contained in their texts but depend on the performances in which they find a place. Understanding these meanings is not a matter of academic theory but is itself a performance art requiring practice, experience, intuition, flexibility, improvisation, sensitivity to historical and political circumstances, a sense of what lies over the horizon, and an ability to handle unforeseen consequences.<sup>5</sup>



*There is no such thing as a campaign goal whose articulation ‘can’t possibly do any harm’.*

### *Development as drama*

A seminar in Bangkok in December 1997 gave a fragmentary glimpse of the multiple theatre of power in which development unfolds. Academics and officials who had been charged to come up with a plan to prevent or mitigate adverse impacts of a proposed Thai dam project on the seasonally flooded Nam Songkhram tributary of the Mekong were invited to Chulalongkorn University to set out their provisional conclusions for discussion before an audience of academics, villagers and activists.

In accordance with official policies of ‘openness’ forced by recent democracy movements, the protagonists abjured any claims to awful power or pomp, instead putting on a show of receptiveness to public opinion. During the first quarter of the seminar, representatives of the Department of Energy Development

5 ‘Missing the Point of Development Talk: Reflections for Activists’, see note 3.

and Promotion, which is responsible for the Nam Songkhram project, held the floor in easy, confident style, together with the academics it had hired. Officials and lecturers took turns explaining how this flood-control, dry-season irrigation project had been studied and restudied over the years as its specifications changed, following recommendations from the National Environment Board, from a project with a high-water level of 143.5 metres to one with a level of 139.5 metres above sea level; and how, given the necessity for compensation to the public for any damages that might result, it was necessary to discuss the project in advance with those who were to be affected. ‘If we know the project is useful’, said one, it is necessary to figure out ‘how to get them to agree’. In the meantime the audience played the role of complaisant listeners who believed that what they were hearing constituted respectable research and planning, in line with Borges’s classic definition of the actor, who ‘on a stage plays at being another before a gathering of people who play at taking him for that other person’.

As the day wore on, however, some of the participants’ boredom with the performance began to show. Polite questions were succeeded by pointed observations of factual error. These observations then shaded into the sort of insinuation that can’t be held in the mind for any length of time either by a character in a play or by its audience: that the whole thing was a charade. Instead of treating the academics’ findings as a *substitute* for genuine debate, as the script called for, the listeners had the effrontery to begin to treat them as a pretext for a real one. Instead of suspending disbelief during the performance on offer, they began to discuss the agenda behind its multiple falsehoods.

Thus after Wanpen Wirotnakut of Khon Kaen University asserted blandly that the archaeological effects of the proposed project were ‘zero’, since only six ancient sites of cultural interest were in the vicinity, all of which were above the flood line, Srisakara Vallibhotama, a prominent anthropologist who had done the research Wanpen was citing, could hold his peace no longer. Pronouncing himself ‘shocked’, Srisakara pointed out that the true figure was 90 sites, and that all 90 would be submerged. But Wanpen’s fictional numbers, he went on with rising pique, ‘were not the important thing’:

‘Why is the person who did the original report not presenting these results? It makes me think that the decision about Nam

Songkhram has already long been made, right? You have to bring in this data to support the decision, right? So it's not transparent. Beware! You might not be able to do this. With the new Constitution, the people have the right to oppose the state. It's not for the state to come and make excuses... I study archaeology as the relationship between humans and environment. Archaeology is life and culture. The point is to study it from within. Do you see? Nam Songkhram and other dam projects are impositions from outside, led by the state... This is to look down on local people.'

Encouraged by this example, others leapt in. Chaovalit Witayanon, an expert on the diverse Nam Songkhram fisheries from which locals derive two-thirds of their income, noted that while the project's EIA (environmental impact assessment) advanced the 'sloppy' claim that none of the local fish studied were migratory, the truth is that nearly all are. The EIA's notion that if any migratory fish species were later found to have been eliminated, then they could be bred and released into the post-project water system, was, Chaovalit continued, 'absolutely uninformed by any scientific thought process or research'. Prasat Tongsiri, president of the Chamber of Commerce in the provincial town nearest the proposed dam, observed that another project of a similar type built 30 years before had wiped out fish populations and exacerbated local conflict, and wondered out loud why this history seemed to have held no lessons for the present study team. A provincial teachers college instructor, Ekachai Khasawong, cross-examined Dr Boonyoke Wannthanupoot, a corporate consultant, who had assured the listeners that fish catches 'should not be altered' by the project because its gates would be opened to the surge of the Mekong in May. When Ekachai pointed out that the fish needed to migrate into the Songkhram river from the Mekong in March and April as well, Dr Boonyoke temporised: 'The details will have to be discussed further after construction. This is only the study period.' Other participants interrupted speakers to point out that while no plans were being made to compensate villagers for either lost fisheries or lost land, and the project planners had claimed the dam would not force floodwaters over the banks of the river, it was nevertheless admitted that 1,600 hectares of seasonally flooded forest would be permanently inundated. Moreover, the crude 1:50,000 maps the planners were working with made the drawing of high-water marks in this flat landscape wholly speculative.

Summing up succinctly, Ekachai and other representatives from





*Tourism? Who would come to see an area whose riverine forest had been permanently flooded, together with much of its biodiversity?*

the locality observed that the Nam Songkhram dam was a project with momentum but no rationale. Land at the headworks site had already been bought in anticipation of approval, but even with – or perhaps because of – decades of studies and modifications, no one could explain any more why it should be built. Irrigation? The National Environment Board had already said that this objective was inappropriate for the revised project. Flood control? The current level of the proposed dam was already below the annual high-water mark. Fishery promotion? Experts were in agreement that fisheries would be devastated, not improved. Tourism? Who would come to see an area whose riverine forest had been permanently flooded, together with much of its biodiversity? Vested interests, including political parties, quarrying interests and bureaucracies were the main parties pressing for construction, Ekachai and other local residents concluded.

How do actors in a drama handle this sort of unexpected outburst from an audience? One path is to ignore it; another to shrug it off as philistinism; another to treat it with the bewildered indulgence one accords the lunatic who leaps up on stage to denounce *The Tempest* as a pack of lies. ‘Of course there are some falsehoods here,’ goes the unspoken subtext. ‘We know that. It’s our duty to provide them. The show must go on. Why are you making such a fuss?’ But when the complicity of the audience is waning and even the coherence of the script is in doubt, other measures must be called into play. Staying in character, defter dramatic performers treat listeners’ dissatisfaction as an occasion for virtuoso ad libs, in order to incorporate it into the play itself.

Thus the beleaguered heroes of the December performance at Chulalongkorn did their best to recaptivate a restless audience by accounting for fanciful figures and impossible contradictions by even more fantastical explanations of the order of ‘the dog ate my homework’. When Witoon Permpongsacharoen of TER-RA, an independent organisation monitoring Mekong developments, pointed out that the mitigation report under discussion appeared to have smuggled in figures for internal rates of return from previous versions of the project, resulting in inconsistent figures (on page 23 the internal rate of return was given as 11.87 per cent, on page 65 as 12.8 per cent; the project’s Net Present Value was given in different places as both 21.94 and –57.19 million baht), the reply was that page 23 had been removed from the ‘final draft’ and had only mistakenly been left in Witoon’s copy. When the plausibility of this was challenged it was implied that

Witoon had obtained his copy through unauthorised means, or perhaps forged it.

The ripples of derision that greeted these sallies, however, signalled that the audience was finding the actors' improvisational skills as charmless as the script itself. Piling fantasy on fantasy couldn't cover the implicit uproar beginning to fill the hall. Not only were the spectators impatient; it began to look as if they had shown up at the theatre for an entirely different kind of performance: one in which the difference between truth and fraudulence *mattered*, in which belief and disbelief were relevant, learning possible, debate real, rationalism corrosive and cleansing, and the fate of the heroes of development of no greater importance than anyone else's. The struggle was not about whether what the experts said was true or false, but about which genre of performance would prevail. Would the audience be able assert a different treatment of the theme, the action, the characters themselves? Just as the listeners had shown themselves capable of switching between their Borgesian role and an entirely new one, so the impact mitigation study team suddenly began to appear not only as all-too-human members of an embattled middle class trying to make ends meet through thespian hack-work, but also – at the same time – as mendacious fraudsters ('hired academic guns' in Srisakara's smouldering phrase) conniving in the robbery of other people's livelihoods. Struggling to keep the play going, they increasingly had to step out of character to throw back the tomatoes and rotten eggs now being lobbed over the footlights.

In the circumstances, striding up to the stage apron in order to try to shout out an explicit defence of the play would have been tantamount to admitting things were out of control. Actors are not symposiasts. Who could defend *The Tempest* as a treatise on the geography of Bermuda in the face of a hooting, literal-minded mob? Riot was about to break out in the development theatre, and in a type of confusion which surely predates the postmodern era by centuries, the actors seemed momentarily unsure whether to try to continue the play or wade into the audience for an all-house duke-out.

With the assistance of the moderator, Chanthana Banphasirichote of the university's Institute for Social Research, some equilibrium was restored. The development drama, though now somewhat ragged, was allowed to resume its course. Recovering his face together with his place in the script, the senior represen-

tative of the Department of Power Development and Promotion present reiterated that he would submit to his chief all the helpful ‘views’ and ‘suggestions’ that had been received. Again taking up their roles in the play, many villagers who had travelled from upcountry to the meeting took care to deposit additional ‘observations’ and ‘questions’ in his basket.

But out of the confusion had emerged an additional performance, which was now proceeding along a parallel track. It was now possible to say new things, to examine publically the whole development drama from the outside, to ‘contain’ it just as it strives to ‘contain’ everything else. Wittoon, for example, took the microphone to propose that, drawing a lesson from the debacle that had just occurred, the Department of Power Development Promotion simply give up trying to invent new visions for a Nam Songkhram dam – or any other irrigation-cum-power projects. Having been given its head in the irrigation field by the Democrat Party for its own ends, the Department had got itself into an institutional rut promoting comprehensive, abstract engineering projects which, when brought face to face with other existing social realities, had to be modified so thoroughly that they no longer had any coherent rationale, in spite of years of studies and revised plans costing millions of baht. Why not start all over again and take up energy conservation or some other type of future that would not lead to such endless contradictions? If the Department had sufficient daring, the site at Nam Songkhram which had been purchased so prematurely could even be converted into a solar energy experimental station or a fishery development centre.

Turning his back on Nam Songkhram entirely for the moment in order to explore an even wider theme, Srisuwan Kuankachorn of the Project for Ecological Recovery meanwhile opened a conversation with Wipada Apinan of the Environmental Policy and Planning Office. Concerned at the extent to which EIAs had become mere tools in legitimising decisions made on engineering and economic grounds, Srisuwan asked Wipada whether it would be possible for state environmental agencies to press for a policy of not approving environmentally inadequate projects no matter how highly they were rated in engineering and economic terms. Out of 200 EIAs he had studied, he noted, only one had recommended that the project in question not be built, and all were of worryingly low quality.

And so the meeting ended inconclusively, as most such meetings do. The episode may not mean much to the overall course of development along the Nam Songkhram, or the Mekong. But the clash of fields of force connected with different genres of performance that it exemplified is not something politically minded activists in the region or elsewhere can ignore. The authors and heroes of the development drama have been given repeated opportunities to indulge a wonderful and terrible capacity to turn truth into fantasy. If the biographies of other playwrights and actors are any guide, that capacity is unlikely to be restrained just by giving them more truth and more life to work on.

### *Commodification, privatisation and 'the economy'*

One story of commodification and privatisation frequently told among the middle classes, whether fans or critics, is that of the application of universal principles of property and exchange to diverse things and places so that the price mechanism and other latent market forces are liberated to do their work, overcoming 'command and control' inefficiencies, irrationalities, subsidies, corruption and colonialist-style coercion. Property law is promulgated where before, it is said, there was arbitrary or unrestrained rule, chaos or the *res nullius* or open access of unpoliced land, water or ideas. Contract, corporate, tax and criminal law is reformed and deployed. Lands are mapped and surveyed whose extent and boundaries no one is felt quite to have had an accurate, calculable grasp of before. Trade is channelled here and rechannelled there. New equivalences, calculation, exchange and efficiency become possible through the drawing of boundaries between what is internal and what is external to 'the economy', which is imagined to have been walled off – by, among other things, the state (and government, law, statistical production, economic knowledge) – as a machine which exists separate from the state, from a passive 'nature' which is categorised as 'resources', from a world of coercion, violence and unpredictability, from a past, historical world of 'primitive accumulation', from reasoning about ends and the development of desire, from self-provisioning ways of livelihood on which it is said to be everywhere encroaching, from an informal, unwritten, unmeasurable, implicitly-understood background of 'external' social practice, and from all possible claims, costs, interruptions and misunderstandings that might make the act of exchange, and thus the economy itself, impossible to complete. These walled-off



*Meanwhile, the boundaries defining what the market will deliver 'efficiently', and what count as 'subsidies' and 'state interventions', turn out to be shifting, unstable and constantly reimprovised.*

acts of exchange are modelled as gravitating towards equilibrium, and their aggregate, ‘the economy’, as being self-contained, measurable and manageable, in contrast to a secondary, accidental, residual ‘outside’. For economics texts or International Monetary Fund or World Trade Organization documents to acknowledge the existence of politics – racism, colonialism – or the details of local rural life, or even the need to investigate whether past liberalisation efforts have done what they said they would do, would be self-evidently to ‘change the subject’. Whenever parts of the imagined ‘outside’ do need to be ‘assimilated’ (due, for example, to the need to ensure social welfare or environmental protection) to the imagined ‘inside’, simplifying institutions go to work, from government departments of statistics employing thousands of clerks, to World Bank projects on ‘the informal economy’ or ‘water privatisation’, all the way down to Chicago lecture halls or the rooms in which the new social practice of ‘contingent valuation’ questions (‘What would you be willing to pay not to have a radon-contaminated environment?’) is floated.

Yet this narrative, too, has an illusory subject. The forms of accounting associated with macroeconomic management – which arose out of a colonial and immediately post-colonial political experience – do not provide a more ‘accurate’ understanding of a pre-existing world, but just set up new practices in new places whose ostensible ambitions come to grief again and again. New mapping projects cannot create the disembodied form of knowledge they aspire to but only introduce a different set of social instabilities, conflicts and crises. These involve everything from the moving of survey marks to boundary disputes to the shrinkage of the paper that maps are printed on to the disruptive politics of rural property claims exacerbated by the attempt to transfer political conflicts to new, centralised sites of calculation in offices. New regimes of private ownership, land titling, or ‘structural adjustment’ have never been separable from the process of excluding a welter of claims and entitlements in favour of certain monopolies, engendering fresh chains of organised violence, reaction, retreat, legal argument, charges of arbitrariness and economic theory. Similarly, to realise orthodox environmental economics’ dream of a world of expanded calculation in which all ‘externalities’ are ‘internalised’ would ultimately make calculation and exchange impossible. Violating Miss Piggy’s rule ‘never eat anything bigger than your head’, it would entail exploding ‘the economy’ as an entity and as a concept – a state of affairs which, for the economically interested, would naturally invite a cascade of further ill-fated stabs at technical fixes. In many ways, such ‘technical’ initiatives and their consequences make the world less, not more, calculable.<sup>6</sup>

6 For further examples, see Mitchell, *op. cit.*

Meanwhile, the boundaries defining what the market will deliver ‘efficiently’, and what count as ‘subsidies’ and ‘state interventions’, turn out to be shifting, unstable and constantly reimprovised. As one World Bank consultant said in the 1990s, ‘the Bank can never challenge the dominance of the motor car because of the fact that it is run in the service of the oil companies, and they cannot countenance change in the dominance of road transport. As a result, in the World Bank, new roads enjoy “investments”, while railways only receive “subsidies”.’<sup>7</sup> Aggregates of larger market actors as well as institutions of economic assessment and governance constantly alter ends as well as means on both social and individual levels, meaning that the application of purportedly ‘non-political’ notions of ‘efficiency’, ‘growth’, ‘contraction’, ‘competition’, ‘economies of scale’, ‘fine-tuning’, ‘demand’, ‘economic choice’ and ‘utility’ turn out to be, crudely speaking, pieces of Whiggish politics.<sup>8</sup> ‘The market’ shows itself to be impossible to pin down as a discrete entity separable from the ‘non-market’. As Gertrude Stein might have put it, ‘there is no *there* there’.

First, candidates for the title of ‘the market’ or ‘world trade’ turn out always to have had ever-varying ‘non-market’ practices at their centre (colonialism, East India Company-style monopolies, enclosure, family labour, slavery, price supports, patriarchy, import quotas, dumping, immigration laws, subsidies, self-provisioning, households, kin or ethnic networks, joint stock companies, transnational companies and their cultures, non-market movement of goods within corporate hierarchies, games by which labourers ‘make out’). For example, for the North to dominate the trade in sugar cane, which needed tropical sun, slavery, which is a ‘non-market’ institution, was necessary. With the loss of the Caribbean came sugar beet, which had to be protected with the ‘non-market’ instruments of price supports and import quotas. Surplus beet sugar was then dumped (a ‘non-market’ practice) on the world market, depressing cane prices and costing Southern producers billions. The sugar glut of the second half of the 1990s was generated by EU and US subsidies (a ‘non-market’ institution) which pushed prices below production costs for all countries except Brazil. The price of sugar in the US included hundreds of thousands of dollars paid by the sugar industry to buy votes (a ‘non-market’ distortion) in



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7 Interview cited in Young, Zoe, *A New Green Order? The World Bank and the Politics of the Global Environment Facility*, Pluto, London, 2002.

8 See, for example, ‘Pulp, Paper and Power: How an Industry Reshapes its Social Environment’ (1995) and ‘Whose Voice is Talking? How Opinion Polling and Cost-Benefit Analysis Synthesize New “Publics”’ (1998), available at [www.thecornerhouse.org.uk](http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk).

Congress to keep subsidies in place.<sup>9</sup> Second, any movement towards commodification of basic non-commodifiables such as land, livelihood activity, water or money necessarily engenders, at different levels of society, what Karl Polanyi called answering movements of self-protection.<sup>10</sup> Third, and perhaps even more important, what is described as the march of ‘free markets’ or ‘capitalism’ has such divergent and contradictory effects that it is hard to locate a single logic in it anywhere. Timothy Mitchell, the political scientist and close scholar of Middle Eastern societies whose insights I am relying on throughout this paper,<sup>11</sup> documents how in the case of Egypt, for example, ‘free market’ reforms generally ‘produced results opposite from those their proponents anticipated. Instead of moving towards high-value export crops such as cotton and vegetables, farmers increased their production of staples’, while ‘monopolisation, hoarding, speculation and the exposure of farmers to international price swings that everywhere in the world make free-market farming impossible’ wreaked further havoc.<sup>12</sup> To deal with the instabilities their programmes had caused, market reformers called for future markets to enable farmers to sell in advance at more stable prices, but such measures tend simply to open up another field of financial speculation, shifting still more income away from growers. The push toward a single price for wheat and reductions in subsidised wheat (allowing subsidised US white flour into the country) resulted in smallholders setting aside more of their land to grow the grain not for sale, but to process at tiny village mills using non-commercialisable fuels (including rubbish from the international tourist industry) for their own household bread. Others involved themselves in the ‘market’ crop of sugar (though cane was hardly a textbook commodity since government-owned mills fixed the purchase price, and even with privatisation farmers still had no choice of who to sell the crop to) only to get state loans that were then used to support the larger system of subsistence activity. In this case, ‘rather than a subsistence sector surviving in support of capitalism, market crops, protected and promoted by the state, survived in support of self-provisioning.’ In Lesotho, meanwhile, a society

<sup>9</sup> Mitchell, *op. cit.*, see note 1. .

<sup>10</sup> In an age in which, as E. P. Thompson puts it (*Customs in Common*, Free Press, New York, 1990), the market is such a ‘great personage’, it is easy to forget the empirical truth that as Polanyi put it, complete marketisation ‘would result in the demolition of society’. See Polanyi, Karl, *The Great Transformation*, Beacon Press, Boston, 2001 [1944].

<sup>11</sup> Mitchell, *op. cit.*; Mitchell, ‘Everyday Metaphors of Power’, *Theory and Society* 19, 1990, pp. 545-577; Mitchell, ‘Fixing the Economy’, *Cultural Studies* 12 (1), 1998, pp. 82-101.

<sup>12</sup> Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

as ‘marketised’ as one would wish – being dependent on wage labour, having centuries of experience of buying and selling – the placement of cows in a separate domain from cash is actively maintained, especially by men, as prestige and retirement fund,<sup>13</sup> just as people in industrialised societies have consistently greeted the advent of ‘market-friendly’ standardised national currencies by breaking them into discrete, *less* ‘inter-countable’ categories such as pin money, clothes money, education money, and so forth.<sup>14</sup> In a world in which the continuing enclosure of land, water and livelihood activity is supplemented by new enclosures of wombs, genes, knowledge, atoms, and even the atmosphere, nowhere does ‘primitive accumulation’ turn out to be quite distinguishable from ‘advanced accumulation’. Nor, as tycoons such as Russia’s Roman Abramovich or Thailand’s Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and politicians such as Mozambique’s Joaquim Chissano feed off processes of liberalisation or ‘economic shock therapy’, does corruption turn out to be anywhere in retreat in the face of the ‘free market’. Privatisation of electricity and water regularly takes forms unanticipated by its neoliberal would-be architects.

Thailand, for example, as Chuenchom Sangasri points out, has spent tens of millions of dollars on ‘designing competitive market mechanisms, legal and regulatory arrangements, and assorted contracts’ to privatise electricity supply on the assumption that ‘the economy’ can



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13 Ferguson, James, *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

14 Zelizer, Viviana, *The Social Meaning of Money: Pin Money, Pay Checks, Poor Relief and Other Currencies*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1997.



be separated from 60 years of shifting political relationships among the government, parastatals, the private sector and civil society. The result has been only to raise capital for debt-ridden state-owned utilities and salaries for upper management and other staff. No competition has resulted, no protection from monopoly abuses, no transparency, only a sale of minority shares of state monopolies that are to remain partially self-regulated. An interview with a senior manager at Thailand's Provincial Electricity Authority (PEA), for instance, shows the reaction of top utility management to incentives that are driving the privatisation programme, and the changes necessary within the organisation in order to make privatisation operative:

*PEA senior manager:* 'Under competition everything will be the same, our arrangements for the documents, everything the same by the state agency... (but salaries change)... The PEA Governor salary will change the most. Now he only makes 100,000 baht a month. But if we privatise he will have salary 460,000 baht per month. So the Governor, he is very enthusiastic to privatise. [laughter] We had planned to privatise in the mid next year, the Governor said "NO!", he said, "you have to privatise this year".'

*Interviewer:* 'Within this year?'

*PEA senior manager:* 'Yeah – easy. You only change the signboard, the papers, the business cards. It is OK.'<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, prices have gone up while services decline as a result of privatisation in the UK, Sweden and the USA. Old bugbears of corruption, force, arbitrariness, and local particularity are nowhere made marginal, but are merely redistributed, remaining central to anything we might want to call 'the market'. The social networks and types of control that attempt to set off 'the economy' or the 'free market' from the 'non-economic' or 'non-market' constitute, as Mitchell puts it, both a 'limit and a horizon', constantly opening what is conceived as 'the economic' to other forces and logics.

Yet, again, the processes that have striven to give birth to 'the economy' have been good at producing the impression of a coherent, abstract, overarching, unitary entity, which is somehow different in kind from ordinary, particular practices. To move calculation from the field to the survey office, from the farmer to the district official, from the iron triangulation marker to the paper map, from the fac-

<sup>15</sup> Graecen, Chuenchom Sangasri, and Graecen, Chris, forthcoming in *Pacific Affairs*.

tory to the computer-human complexes calculating GDP, from the shrimp fisher to the yearbook publisher, from the part-time opinion poll employee through the questionnaire form through the statistical tabulator to the political pundit, is to take such a big step that it can begin to seem not an action or a chain of sweaty, contested social practices but the symbol of an absolute gap between reality and its representations, between deed and word. In the North particularly, some of the physical and temporal distances between (on the one hand) the people involved in ‘programming’ institutions like schools, universities, agricultural extension departments, statistics offices, organised churches and mosques, management institutes, development agencies and economic planning ministries, which imagine they oppose themselves to, and stand outside, something called ‘real life’, offering operating codes to be mastered before taking up practice and (on the other hand) what is seen as the ‘outside’ world have grown so large that it seems there could be no other explanation than that the one must be concerned with something (a locationless or utopian ‘theory’ or ‘author’) metaphysically different from what the other is involved with (a located or, so to speak, topos ‘practice’). It is in part this physical distance that requires and enables expertise as domination, through, for example, development programmes that treat countries as objects laid out like a map or engineering projects that reorganise rivers and transform the distribution of power, technology and information across the countryside.<sup>16</sup> Truth and accuracy have become increasingly a matter of the degree of correspondence between imagined theory and practice, imagined mind and material – a problem which it is the prerogative of experts to investigate, adjudicate and claim credit for. All the while, as Noam Chomsky puts it in another context, ‘everyone is led to think that what he knows represents a local exception’.<sup>17</sup> This is one reason why it has become so natural, since about 1950, to refer to countries and regions as independent ‘economies’, not communities, people or societies. ‘Market forces’ are experienced as operating on a wholly different level from acts of bargaining in the village square. ‘A (growing) economy’ is experienced as something that has always been there. Both are seen as potent, living abstractions for which experts and the politicians and officials they advise are the proper spokespeople.

Here, accordingly, as in the example of large hydroelectric dams, one starting point for activists is to uncover and challenge what happens in



*To most ‘educated’ people, scientific facts seem to represent a kind of closure which ordinary agreements never achieve.*

<sup>16</sup> Mitchell, *Rules of experts*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Chomsky, N., *Language and Responsibility*, quoted in Chomsky, N., *Class Warfare*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, p. 61.

these physical distances that are so easily translated into metaphysical gaps. For village-level leaders in the South, and for the unemployed or homeless in the North, this move is so obvious it hardly needs to be stated – and it is also often easy for expert ‘turncoats’ with a working understanding of what goes on over those physical distances to grasp. But for middle-class NGOs, especially in the North, for whom it is easier to ‘black-box’ these physical distances and for whom, accordingly, the dualistic metaphysics tends to be common sense, it has sometimes seemed more ‘realistic’ simply to try to feed more expert ‘truth’ or ‘ethics’ into the imagined ‘theory’ or ‘rule’ or ‘plan’ side of the dualism by erecting new institutions of text-formation. The practical result is often to help reproduce the sources of power the NGOs are battling. For middle-class activists to pay more serious attention to grassroots protests against this move, rather than dismissing them as ‘rhetorical’ or ‘political’, could lead to greater awareness that their well-intentioned actions may not always have the political consequences they aim at.

### *Science*

To most ‘educated’ people, scientific facts seem to represent a kind of closure which ordinary agreements never achieve. They look, to cite the phrase of sociologist of science Harry Collins, like ships in bottles that seem always to have been there and can never get out again. Even among scientists, as Collins notes, the hard graft by which the ships got in the bottles ‘is so routinised that the tricks are only visible when some self-conscious attention is given to them’,<sup>18</sup> as happens in scientific controversy or in cases involving commoners whose interests lie in making public the mechanics of the craft, and how it can go right or wrong.

One source of the power that radiates from the finished product consisting of ships in bottles is, again, institutions that embed in society the experience of a dualistic world of disembodied ‘representations’ or ‘texts’ versus an embodied ‘reality’. In the words of the late Bernard Williams, natural science is generally seen as an activity in which a ‘nature’ purified of human activity ‘inscribes itself into scientific journals without benefit of human intervention’. Such views help engender (for instance) the false cliché that it is possible to have a ‘science-based’ or ‘science-led’ policy whose science is not also at the same time policy-based.

‘Science studies’ scholars like Collins (a close student of what hap-

<sup>18</sup> Collins, H. M., *Changing Order: Replication and Induction in Scientific Practice*, Sage, London, 1985, p. 6.

pens day to day on the laboratory bench), together with critical anthropologists and political scientists like Mitchell (a close student of rural Egypt), do what they can to take stock of this very 20th- and 21st-century power, by undermining the credibility of the dualism. Mitchell points to the ever-renewing failures of attempts to ‘fix’ or ‘enframe’ an arena for economic actions, to exclude, to keep out of the picture all those claims, costs, interruptions and misunderstandings that would make the act of exchange, and thus the economy itself, impossible to complete, by rules, procedures, institutions and methods of enforcement which are thought to have a special, metaphysical, extra-economic status (as a picture frame seems distinct from the painting it surrounds). ‘The constraints, understandings, and powers that frame the economic act and the economy as a whole and thus make the economy possible, at the same time render it incomplete.’ Pieces of the frame that involve rules for exchange, for instance, involve potential exchanges of their own; no rule contains or encloses its own interpretation, and applying it involves negotiating its limits and exceptions, just as translation and translational disputes are prior to meaning.<sup>19</sup> These negotiations become part of the act of exchange they

19 See Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations*, Cambridge University Press, 1953; Quine, W. V. O., *Word and Object*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1960; and review of Zerner, Charles, ed., *Culture and the Question of Rights*, [www.thecornerhouse.org.uk](http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk). While Mitchell prefers the French ‘governmentality’ vocabulary of Foucault and the dramatic ‘frame’ metaphors of Goffman and Michel Callon, and Collins favours the concepts of ‘rule’ and ‘same’ explored by the later Wittgenstein (that early ‘deprofessionalised’ intellectual), both, I would argue, deploy a tradition most elegantly represented by paragraph 201 of the *Philosophical Investigations* and its immediate surroundings:

‘This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here. It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it. What this shows is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, but which is exhibited in what we call “obeying the rule” and “going against it” in actual cases. Hence there is an inclination to say: every action according to the rule is an interpretation. But we ought to restrict the term “interpretation” to the substitution of one expression of the rule for another... If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: “This is simply what I do.”’

In fact, the bizarre dualisms Mitchell goes on at such length about are all, in one way or another, variants of the ‘rule/social practice’ dichotomy undermined by Wittgenstein.



*Imagine someone whose experience of a 'market' has always involved bargaining trying to deal with a supermarket.*

are supposed to regulate. Acting according to an implicitly understood or accepted norm unavoidably involves engaging over time in a series of exchanges, 'economic' and 'non-economic', out of which the norm or understanding emerges. (Imagine someone whose experience of a 'market' has always involved bargaining trying to deal with a supermarket; or see the attempts of contingent valuation specialists to evade the reality of subject 'gaming'.) To enforce a regulation involves all the expense and interactions of adjudication, resort to force, and monitoring. At every one of these points the 'frame' opens up and reveals its dual nature. Instead of acting as a limit, containing the economic, it becomes a series of exchanges and connections that involve the act of exchange in a potentially limitless series of further interactions. Thus the problem of setting apart 'the economy' is not a 'residual one of accounting for informal and clandestine activities, or turning externalities into internal costs. The problem is that the frame or border of the economy is not a line on a map, but a horizon that at every point opens up into other territories.'<sup>20</sup>

Collins, meanwhile, throws into relief the impossibility of there being some disembodied, higher-order algorithm that can be used to determine whether a scientific experiment has been replicated or not, by invoking what he calls the 'experimenter's regress'. In order to know whether an original experiment has been repeated in the 'same way', it is necessary to build a good second set of equipment and ensure it is manipulated by good researchers. But the quality of the equipment and researchers can't be determined until it is seen whether they obtain the correct outcome, which can't be determined until it is seen whether the equipment and researchers are doing their jobs right, and so on *ad infinitum*. The only way of breaking into this circle, and thus entrenching scientific facts, is to fall back on what any abstract, disembodied algorithm tries to exclude – webs of practices involving what in the terms of the dualism would be called 'non-scientific' criteria (see Box, 'Reviving the ether'). Changing knowledge is changing social order. Science is both politics and culture. Unfortunately, the structure of contemporary scientific and other political institutions such as technology or treasury ministries, or law courts, tends to discourage attention being paid to these social interests and contingencies, which are instead tacitly 'black-boxed', particularly after scientific agreement has been achieved, and particularly when the boundary between the subculture of scientists immediately involved in an experimental controversy and that of the general middle-class public is crossed. Whether in controversies over cold

<sup>20</sup> Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

fusion or nuclear missile targeting, what was controversial among scientists and resolved only through political bargaining in the scientific community becomes a magically incontrovertible scientific fact when the agreement is finally presented to society at large. The result is what Collins calls a ‘model of science and the natural world that is positively dangerous for democracy and for the long-term future of science itself.’<sup>21</sup> This model ‘allows the citizen only two responses to science: either awe at science’s authority along with a total acceptance of scientists’ *ex cathedra* statements, or rejection – the uncomprehending anti-science reaction.’ Centralisation of certified inquiry within certain groups (Collins calls this the ‘privacy of core sets’ of researchers) helps create the illusion that the only choices are between a purified science that in fact never existed – the ship magically appearing in the bottle (the very image of the rule as it appears in modern forms of power) – and a shady, ‘impure’ ideological enterprise. Thus Justice Parker, in the Windscale Enquiry of 1977 in the UK, regarded questions about the interests underlying conflicting expert opinions over nuclear risks not as revealing the relevant social factors within the scientific debate but as accusations of personal dishonesty.<sup>22</sup>

*This model ‘allows the citizen only two responses to science: either awe at science’s authority along with a total acceptance of scientists’ ex cathedra statements, or rejection – the uncomprehending anti-science reaction.’*



### *Reviving the ether*

The Michelson-Morley experiment of 1887 ‘defined our modern view of the universe’ when it found that light ‘always travels through space at the same speed, whatever direction it is heading in and whatever the motion of its source: there is no way to put the wind in light’s sails’.<sup>23</sup>

The experiment was designed to detect a postulated ‘ether’ which was thought to fill all of space and to constitute an absolute frame of reference relative to which the earth and other celestial bodies would have a velocity. If the ether existed, then there would be an ‘ether wind’ blowing past the earth as it rushed through space. Light heading into this wind would be slowed down.

Michelson and Morley set up an interferometer measuring the speed of two light beams travelling in perpendicular directions.

21 Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

22 Wynne, Brian, *Rationality and Ritual: The Windscale Inquiry and Nuclear Decisions in Britain*, History of Science Society, St. Giles Chalfont, 1982.

23 Chown, M., ‘Catching the Cosmic Wind’, *New Scientist*, 2 April 2005, p. 30.

Any motion of the earth relative to the ether would produce a difference in the speed of the light travelling in the two directions. When the light beams were recombined in an eyepiece, any speed difference would show up in a striped pattern of interference fringes. For confirmation, the apparatus would then be rotated 90 degrees to see if the fringes shifted position.

Given that the earth travels at 30 km per second around the sun, Michelson and Morley reckoned that the ‘ether wind’ would reduce the speed of light travelling in the same direction as earth by at least the same amount. Their experiment was sensitive enough to detect this effect, but it showed nothing. The two experimenters concluded that the ether did not exist. Einstein built his special theory of relativity on the result. If there were an ether, his theory would become a special case of a broader theory developed earlier by Hendrik Lorentz, who assumed an ether.

Textbooks written since 1887 have tended to ‘black-box’ Michelson and Morley’s now canonical finding, giving the impression that other interferometer experiments have all confirmed it. The reality is not so simple. Instead, succeeding experimenters who have found an ether wind have seen the reliability of their apparatus questioned on the ground that they have not come up with the ‘correct’ result. In 1902, for example, William Hicks reinterpreted the original experiment and found it showed an ether wind speed of 8 km per second. Another scientist, Dayton Miller, found the same and showed the result to Einstein. Einstein thought it ought to be explainable by temperature differences in the equipment. Miller then repeated the experiment in a cooler place and got the same result. Other experiments since have also shown a measurable ether wind. However, a recent high-tech German experiment using laser light bouncing back and forth in two vacuum cavities oriented at right angles to each other, and run for over a year, has confirmed that there is no ether. Now Maurizio Consoli of the Italian National Institute of Nuclear Physics wants to settle the matter by yet another experiment. Consoli notes that interferometers filled with air have yielded an 8 km per second result, those filled with helium a 3 km per second result, and those using a ‘soft’ vacuum a 1 km per second result. He believes, controversially, that any Michelson–Morley experiment will not show a result if conducted in a vacuum. Consoli plans an experiment using an apparatus similar to the German setup, but filled with a dense gas to slow down the light.

Consoli thinks his experiment is capable of settling, once and for all, the question of the ether's existence. Other scientists believe that question has already been decided, or, if not, that Consoli's experiment is not designed in a way that would do so. Whatever Consoli's result, however, it is fair to say both that it will make a contribution to the discussion and that it will not close the issue. As any such scientific story shows (and this one, from a recent issue of *New Scientist*, was chosen virtually at random), it can never be unequivocally clear that the result of any particular experiment requires a change in theory rather than a re-examination of the equipment or the researchers for possible deviations from other experimental setups. No 'factual' court of appeal exists that could settle the issue outside of the open-ended arguments and other practices of scientists themselves. Historian E. P. Thompson famously sought to rescue the 'obsolete' handloom weaver and the Luddite cropper from the 'enormous condescension of posterity',<sup>24</sup> and it will always be possible to do the same with a temporarily-eclipsed scientific theory or derided bit of laboratory apparatus.

Source: Marcus Chown, 'Catching the Cosmic Wind', *New Scientist*, 2 April 2005, pp. 30-34.

This 'flip-flop' model of scientific knowledge is the analogue, in Collins's analysis, of what Mitchell identifies as the dichotomous effect suggesting that progress is the application of ideas to objects, meaning to reality, agency to passive matter, or, in development jargon, the 'implementation' of 'objectives' or 'projects'. And it is a phenomenon visible elsewhere as well. Examinations of structural racism, for example, are routinely treated by the middle-class white public in countries such as the UK and the US as accusations of personal prejudice against this or that individual – a reaction which surely contributes, among blacks, to what bell hooks calls 'white people fatigue', or the need to have to explain structural racism to those who see it as a simple or non-existent problem. If the dualism gives scientists only two choices (you're either a 'bad scientist' or you never participate in 'the ideological' to arrive at a scientific fact), it does the same with citizens (you're either a bad guy or your actions never further racism). This reaction is as inhibiting to democratic inquiry, to inquiry into more democratic ways of doing things, and to political organising as

<sup>24</sup> Thompson, E. P., *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin, London, 1980, p. 12.



Collins's 'flip-flop' model or the beliefs about 'the economy' to which Mitchell points. This is one reason why it is so inconceivable that (say) World Bank or IMF documents, which are so deeply implicated in racism, could ever mention racism or conceive of any discussion of racism in financial, monetary or development policy: because to do so would be seen as throwing accusations at individuals or groups, undermining the cohesiveness of the authors' centralised professional communities and their social life with their professional peers. It is also why, within establishment walls, it is politically incorrect to excavate the racism in such documents, which, professionals insist, must be seen only in their proper genres, against an approved canon of orthodox economic theory. Racism talk, after all, is sociology, not economics, is it not? And is it not a challenge to the professional class interests and solidarity of practitioners of both disciplines to confuse the two? To read World Bank documents playfully, as sociology, or worse, as ghost stories, exotic travellers' tales, racing forms or manifestoes for conquest is forbidden, and not to be borne by serious men in suits sitting in clean, carpeted rooms. More often than not, activists obey this literary and bureaucratic etiquette, believing that treating a country economic report as if it were an old wives' tale told around a fire at night will see them banished from the table.



*No one can avoid respecting 'the economy' any more than they can avoid privileging scientific facts.*

For both Collins and Mitchell, these 'flip-flop' dichotomies are not simply illusions, but are entrenched throughout society, right down to institutions like fixed land rents and money. No one can avoid respecting 'the economy' any more than they can avoid privileging scientific facts. These phenomena, even if they fail to do what they say they do, are here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future. But this indispensability has been *made*, as has the characteristic drama powered by the chains of failures of the imagined plot of history that they engender: ever-renewed attempts to apply universal principles to a local, tangible material regarded as their other pole, or achievement of better and better representations of a non-discursive world through an ever more 'purified' science. And that fact ought to suggest innumerable possibilities for activism and for approaching the future in a different way.

### *Commons and commoners*

Whether the future can be approached in that way, however, as I've tried to stress throughout, depends not on coming up with a new 'theory' in any sense in which theory is viewed as different in kind from practice, but on forming working alliances that can engender complexes of new practices. It's here, I'd like to suggest, that a con-

nection can be made with the notion of commons (see Box, ‘The Postulation of “Resources”’).<sup>25</sup>

### *The postulation of ‘resources’*

In commons patterns, the right to survive tends to overshadow exclusive individual rights to possess, exchange, and accumulate. Communal use adapts land, water and work to local needs rather than transforming them for trade and accumulation. A commons imperative is to tap wages to meet fixed needs, defend local pricing, pressure the state into providing spaces for the vulnerable, fragment money itself into different types earmarked for different uses, even, where necessary, transform individually-titled land into non-saleable plots governed by the community. Commons patterns typically deny rights to outsiders and in the past have instituted separate spheres for men and women under patriarchal control in household and community.

The ‘resource’ theory which gains meaning by trying to oppose itself to commons, by contrast, tries to allow subsistence rights only to private property owners, not unemployed workers. Faced with common land, it calls for subsidies to fence off, mobilise and develop it for production, consumption and exchange, disregarding local adaptations if necessary. Trying to shape societies and bodies around centrally organised norms, it imagines work as a commodity activating capital and competition. Rather than earning enough for their needs, individuals are pictured as learning to have needs they can satisfy with the money they must earn. Under the influence of resource prac-

25 There’s no space here even to sketch the complexities connected with the contemporary politics of the commons and its relation to commodification, privatisation and so on. Some useful sources are Polanyi, *op. cit.*; Thompson, E. P. *Customs in Common*, *op. cit.*; Illich, Ivan, *Gender*, Pantheon, New York, 1983; Acheson, J., and McCay, B., *The Question of the Commons: The Culture and Ecology of Communal Resources*, University of Arizona Press, Tuscon, 1990; Fairlie, S., Hildyard, N., Lohmann, L., and Sexton, S., *Whose Common Future? Reclaiming the Commons*, Earthscan, London, 1993; Scott, James C., *Seeing Like a State*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1999; Blackwell, B., ‘Micropolitics and the Cooking-Pot Revolution in Argentina’, ZNet, 29 August 2002, [www.zmag.org/content/](http://www.zmag.org/content/). There is now even a large academic association called the International Association for the Study of Common Property, with many thousands of detailed scholarly articles in its bibliographies.

tices, women tend to suffer unequal wages or increased confinement to a domestic domain, while new forms of oppression and ethnic division and new ‘arm’s-length’ notions of responsibility that encourage humanitarianism and notions of universal human rights alike become possible.

Most of the people who contest the middle-class received wisdom that is the common target of Mitchell, Collins and other renegade intellectuals whose work I have used in this paper live in worlds far removed from their university milieu. I make no self-ironising intellectual’s apology for trying to connect the seemingly disparate issues I’ve mentioned, nor for trying to bring together the work of certain pointy heads with that of certain grassroots activists, because the image of these separations is part of the problem of power that is my subject, and I happen to be situated where I know some of the pointy heads. But in the sections on privatisation and contemporary science above I could perhaps as easily have cited the everyday battles of villagers and activists at the grassroots, especially in the South. It should be possible, for example, to recognise in the ubiquitous resistance to the pattern of application of one technical fix after another an attitude which knows from its own experience that there is no way out of the regress generated by the erection of a dichotomy between rules and forms of life.<sup>26</sup> Surely no one is more likely to contest the dualism of meaning and reality than the millions of the world’s people who owe their livelihoods to the commons and whose experience is devalued and whose interests are thwarted by the forms of centralisation that give rise to the illusions that nature was never human, that before Aswan there was no irrigation, and that no one used to live in the Serengeti. No one is more likely to reject the view of humans as active and other elements of ‘the economy’ as passive inputs than those who live with, rely on, fear and expect an active, mischievous world interacting with human communities. No one is more likely, either, to grasp the destructive, unforeseeable, unending outcomes of an approach which believes it can repress politics by replacing it with economic, natural-scientific or other techniques imagined to be situated on a higher plane than the embodied, improvisatory realities of commons regimes. No one is better equipped than those who have fought at the grassroots the currents of centralisation mentioned above to understand the destructiveness of the ever-repeating political drama of technical-fix application that tries again and again to repress the

<sup>26</sup> Wittgenstein, *op. cit.*

consequences of uncertainty, complexity, non-linearity, ignorance, indeterminacy and contextual uniqueness with a fantasy of engineering or management. And surely no one is better able than commoners to understand that ultimately, there can be no complete escape from commons into ‘resources’, or better mobilised to counter Western technocrats’ self-justifications that they are unsituated, interchangeable agents of disembodied forces and needs and are merely applying universally-valid techniques after political decisions have been made elsewhere. I would still hold, more or less, with what I wrote of Thai grassroots environmental politics more than ten years ago:

Viewing consultants as characters in detailed local narratives (as commoners tend to do) renders implausible their claims that their backgrounds, companies’ interests and personalities are irrelevant to their work, that as agents of impersonal forces they have the right to investigate others without being investigated themselves, that they are effective but not responsible, and that the information they hand out is ‘objective’. From this point of view, international agencies’ frequent claims that their past failures are not likely to be repeated sits uneasily with their continued reliance on unacknowledged local experience from outside the locality. In general, villagers’ sense of the indispensability of personalised relationships and oral, local orientation buttress what Richard Rorty calls a civility- or conversation-oriented rather than a putatively non-personalised, algorithm-oriented notion of rationality.<sup>27</sup>

The different perspectives I mention – which often lead to miscommunication, disagreements or conflict – are often replicated within NGO politics. Anybody who has spent any time in meetings convened to organise a global NGO campaign will remember times at which an enormous gap in strategic thinking suddenly becomes evident between two factions, one usually (but not always) from the North, the other usually (but not always) from the South, with each side suddenly staring at the other in bewilderment, each believing the other side not to be engaging with the realities of power, each wondering how to begin to explain why. To the Northerners, the Southerners’ intense focus on the broader picture of exploitation, together with their determination to draw lessons from the concrete details of past experience with particular institutions in particular

27 ‘No Rules of Engagement: Interest Groups, Centralization and the Creative Politics of “Environment” in Thailand’, in Rigg, Jonathan, ed., *Counting the Costs: Economic Growth and Environmental Change in Thailand*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1995, pp. 211–234; available at [www.thecornerhouse.org.uk](http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk).



*'Help companies formulate codes of conduct! Write new laws! Introduce paradigms! Certify commodities! Revise blueprints! Contribute to development plans! Become a "stakeholder"! Lobby officials! Make an appointment with the minister! Suggest utopias! Persuade presidents! Analyse the ethical implications! Get on TV!'*

localities, usually where commons are crucial to livelihood, appears uncomfortably 'political', 'rhetorical', 'uncompromising', even 'academic'. 'Say something positive!' the Northerners plead. 'Engage! Lay out your alternative! Say what your general position is! Give us a text! Promulgate standards! Help companies formulate codes of conduct! Write new laws! Introduce paradigms! Certify commodities! Revise blueprints! Contribute to development plans! Become a "stakeholder"! Lobby officials! Make an appointment with the minister! Suggest utopias! Persuade presidents! Analyse the ethical implications! Get on TV!' The Southerners, many of whose arms are muddy up to their rolled-up sleeves, and who often spend all day compromising out of brutal necessity, naturally resent being slotted into the category of the 'naïve', 'theoretical' and 'uncompromising', and throw back the charge with interest. 'The "texts" you demand', they point out, 'may often be useful or important, and we use texts as much as the next person, but texts are social practices like any other, and only one kind of social practice among many others. Let's not skip over the strategic question of what role these texts play among other practices in the larger game, and whose purposes they wind up serving. What are the long-term consequences for this or that community of introducing them in this or that particular set of institutions? What structures will they help reproduce and whose movements will they undermine? And aren't there also other institutions besides the would-be "programming" institutions you want us to engage with on their own terms? Look at our context and tell us who, in the end, is being "academic" and "theoretical" and "naïve" here.' ('Land rights? This is not the forum for discussing land rights', I was smoothly told by a fellow Northern NGO activist at the 1992 Earth Summit – who was, indeed, right in a literal sense, although that was to miss the strategic benefits that might accrue from purposely relocating the conference in a different framework.)

This byplay follows the same pattern that arguments between commoners and their middle-class opponents tend to follow in other fields as well. Northern environmentalists will often become frustrated, for example, with commoners' scathing attitude toward the idea that 'population' is the key threat to 'the environment'. 'You don't like the way I talk about overpopulation', a Northern activist may say, 'and you keep talking about the scarcity of land and water in your province being due to maldistribution, and about villagers' ways of thinking about births, and about villagers' battle against "population programmes", which of course I *agree* have had some unfortunate side effects. But what would *you* do about these bur-

geoning future numbers of people? Stop being so politically correct for a minute – isn't it time to face the fact of this potential future explosion?' Here the vision of 'future numbers', no matter how implausible, becomes an abstract 'frame' seen as different in kind from political analyses of current scarcities and actual popular responses. Similarly: 'If you don't like US policy, who would *you* put in place of Bush or Wolfowitz?' (assuming that everyone must share a picture of politics as propelled by an agency acting out of people's heads on an essentially passive world). Or: 'You keep talking about the needs and practices of the forest-dwellers you know, but people are wiping animals out. How would *you* save the world's vanishing wildlife?' Some Thai forest dwellers, with the help of a local NGO, once compiled a weighty 297-page volume documenting the biodiversity-preserving practices of three forest communities as a way of helping prevent themselves being evicted from protected areas in Chiang Dao, Samoeng and Mae Waang districts of Chiang Mai province. During an ensuing seminar, a Forest Department official was asked for his reaction. He replied that the book was very convincing. But, he said, what about the hundreds of mountain villages other than the three which were under study? Surely these three had to be rare case-study exceptions to the higher, permanent rule which dictated that humans and forests belonged in separate spheres.<sup>28</sup> Here, of course, are still further versions of the cut and thrust described so well by Mitchell. It is not so much that the challenge to commoners by officials and Northern activists in these examples assumes that the institutions they refer to are omnipotent, simply needing a new 'programming text'. It derives its real power from the prevalence of practices creating the effect of a disembodied, unphysical space out of which texts existing externally, at a higher order than ordinary practice, can speak without ambiguity or incompleteness. The officials or Northerners in the NGO meeting room almost always misidentify the dispute they have with commoners as one between practitioners and theoreticians, or between realists and idealists, or between reformers and revolutionaries, whereas in many cases their antagonists have long been calling these dualisms themselves into question.

Reflecting on the power of commons politics in a world of commodification, privatisation and expert power prompts many questions deserving further investigation. What role has the enclosure of commons played historically in the creation of an illusion of 'disembod-



*'If you don't like US policy, who would you put in place of Bush or Wolfowitz?'*

28 Lohmann, Larry, 'For Reasons of Nature: Ethnic Discrimination and Conservation in Thailand', paper presented at Cornell University Asian Studies conference, April 2000, available at [www.thecornerhouse.org.uk](http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk).

ded’, non-tangible global processes? What are the precise roles that the institutions that further this illusion play in the dramas propelled by chains of failures of technical fixes? In what ways are chains of failures of technical fixes historically connected to chains of attempts to escape the experimenter’s regress? But perhaps most important of all: what role might new ways of insisting on narrating and interfering in these chains from a commons standpoint play in a new politics of movement-building – one which both helps hasten along the breakdowns due to the ‘incompletenesses’ that Mitchell and others analyse and helps open new possibilities for decentralisation and democracy?




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# Civil Society: What Next?

Göran Hydén

## *Introduction*

In 1975, when the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation published its seminal report, *What Now: Another Development*,<sup>1</sup> development was in and civil society was out. At that time the state was viewed as the engine that would make a positive difference in the lives of people. Private and voluntary actors were confined to the margins of the development scene. The assumption was that states on their own were capable of ensuring the security and welfare of citizens; hence, such broad promises for the developing world as ‘health for all’ and ‘universal primary education’. Interestingly, trade unions and other groups were typically incorporated into the political establishment.

Thirty years later, it is the other way around: civil society is in, development out. The bubble of popular expectations about development that characterised the 1970s has since burst for reasons related both to changes in the world economy and insufficient state capacity on the ground. At the beginning of the 21st century, the market is increasingly replacing the state as the primary means of allocating resources. The state has been cut to size, not only in terms of executive capacity but also in terms of mandate and the scope of its activities. It finds itself in competition for influence and under growing scrutiny from actors in the market and civil society. The result is that development is no longer the bold attempts to improve the conditions of the poor that characterised the cutting-edge thinking of 30 years ago. In fact, because of the dominance of the neo-liberal paradigm, civil society organisations see themselves increasingly in opposition not just to the state but above all to corporate capital.

With civil society enjoying recognition as the voice of the poor, it can play an important role in shaping our future views of key issues that to date have been lumped together under the broader concept of development. It is the argument of this paper that the challenge

<sup>1</sup> ‘The 1975 Dag Hammarskjöld Report on Development and International Cooperation ‘What Now: Another Development’, Special Issue prepared on the occasion of the Seventh Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, *Development Dialogue* 1975:1/2.

facing civil society at the beginning of the 21st century is to help redress the imbalance that currently exists in the global economic system between rich and poor at the level of nations as well as citizens. How such a momentous task can be achieved is not easily defined in a paper like this, but some general reflections on the subject are offered in conclusion. In pursuing this argument, the paper begins by looking at what is wrong with development. It proceeds by examining what civil society is all about and the challenges facing it at the beginning of the 21st century. It concludes with some reflections on how civil society actors may want to proceed in the future.

### *What Went Wrong with Development?*

Development is inextricably associated with the enlightenment tradition in the Western world. It has come to reflect the assumption that humans are in control of their own destiny. They can make their own choices without awaiting the verdict of divine or supernatural powers. It is so much an integral part of Western thinking that we take it for granted. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the case of how the concept moved on to the international scene with the launching of the Marshall Plan by the United States Government in the late 1940s. A speechwriter for President Harry Truman coined the term as an indication of what was needed to bridge the gap between what he had already termed ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ countries.<sup>2</sup> It was by accident rather than design that it emerged from the subconscious to the conscious part of the Western mind and thus became part of a terminology that has dominated the international community for the past 50 years.

There are two major problems with the way the concept of development has been used ever since. The first is that it has been treated as a macro activity, with a special emphasis on economics. The other is that it has been appropriated by a relatively small group of elite actors. Development has been defined and put into practice in terms that reflect professional and managerial concerns rather than something that makes sense to the lay person.

Development is typically thought of and measured at country level. The World Bank issues its annual *World Development Report* containing data on key economic – and to a lesser extent – social indicators for each country. This exercise tends to reinforce not only the distinction between ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ (now typically



*The international community assumed that countries that were not yet developed could be turned around merely through the importing of capital and expertise from the outside.*

2 Personal communication, Professor Gilbert Rist, Graduate Institute of Development Studies, Geneva.

referred to in these circles as ‘developing’) countries, but also the idea that governments are the principal actors in development. The effort by the United Nations Development Programme to issue its own report with a greater emphasis on the human dimensions of development – the *Human Development Report* – operates on the same assumptions. Other key actors such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the various bilateral and multilateral funding agencies use the same approach.

Development, therefore, tends to be reduced to the setting of specific policy goals and adopting of mechanisms to achieve them. Over the years, different perspectives on what these goals and managerial mechanisms should be have changed. In the early days, beginning in the mid-1950s when the concept was applied not only to the reconstruction of Western Europe but increasingly also to the colonies in Africa and Asia that had just been given political independence – or were about to be given it – development was exclusively about imitating the achievements of the already developed countries. The term coined to capture this perspective is the ill-fated word ‘modernisation’. It is ill fated because, in the way the concept was used, the world overlooked the fact that development is fundamentally an expression of modernity, as I shall discuss further below. Instead, the international community assumed that countries that were not yet developed could be turned around merely through the importing of capital and expertise from the outside. Modernity could be brought about by these inputs from external sources. The state was deemed to be the engine of this process. Foreign aid began to emerge as a significant resource flow from the developed to the underdeveloped countries. No one really paid attention at that time to what we now call ‘civil society’, although the poorer countries often had a rich variety of voluntary associations. The result was that these private and voluntary organisations were ignored – in some cases, banned – in favour of a comprehensive development planning process focused on state institutions only.

By 1970 it was clear to the international development agencies that had begun funding projects and programmes in Africa, Asia and Latin America that modernisation was not bearing the expected fruits. Development was redefined with a greater emphasis on the poor and especially the idea that ‘developing people’ is important. As suggested above, this resulted in massive investments in primary health care and primary school education. Adult literacy was also included. The problem with this approach was that government politicians and administrators defined for the people what their needs were. There was no serious effort to involve the people and make

them conscious of what they might be able to do on their own. They were spoken to, but never listened to. The state continued to be the principal actor in development, although efforts were made in many countries to ‘bring the government closer to the people’. This idea was translated into various forms of deconcentration of authority to lower echelons in the government hierarchy. The 1970s represents the peak of state-directed planning and development. It became increasingly clear that the state alone could not cope with the increased demands for development.

The way in which development was redefined in the 1980s and 1990s must be understood against the background sketched above. The rise of neo-liberalism in the early 1980s has many sources, but in the development context it was justified by the international development agencies as a response to the failure of two decades of state-driven and state-managed efforts. This new perspective brought in first the market and later civil society. The idea that the market is a more effective – and efficient – mechanism for allocating resources than the state was most coherently and powerfully presented in the special report that the World Bank issued for sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>3</sup> This report, which in fact had been commissioned by Africa’s own representatives on the Bank’s Board of Directors, made a strong case for ‘rolling back’ the state in the interest of private and voluntary initiatives. It also pointed to the poor quality of public services, leading people to disengage from rather than engage with the state. It was not as if ordinary people in developing countries needed the World Bank to tell them about the deteriorating state of affairs of their public institutions. They knew it only too well from their own experience of interacting with government. Faced with deteriorating services, people had already begun to explore alternatives on their own. ‘Grass-roots’ organisations began to emerge in both rural and urban settings, focused on solving problems at the local level, which government institutions had failed to take care of. The informal sector ‘took off with a bang’ and resulted in a number of new organisations made up of self-employed persons from the shanties of the big cities. In the countryside, government dispensaries and hospitals had ceased to offer reliable services and in many countries there was a return to traditional healers and other customary practices such as traditional birth attendance. Much of what Schumacher had articulated in the 1970s as ‘small is beautiful’ came to fruition in the subsequent decade. What happened in the 1980s was a gradual rise of associations and groups that constitute the foundation on which civil society could emerge. The



*The 1970s represents the peak of state-directed planning and development. It became increasingly clear that the state alone could not cope with the increased demands for development.*

3 *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa*, World Bank, Washington D.C., 1981.

concept of civil society itself, however, was still not a mainstream notion. Its rise to prominence came in the 1990s.

The last ten years or so has seen yet another shift in perspective on development. Less dramatic than those that took place earlier, this nonetheless should be registered as an important one. While the emphasis in the 1980s had been on economic reform in the name of financial stabilisation and structural adjustment, the efforts of the international development agencies in the 1990s focused on issues of governance. It was no longer just a matter of ‘getting prices right’ but also of ‘getting politics right’. The new perspective called for respect for institutional diversity and a recognition that while small may be beautiful, it is also vulnerable. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were identified as appropriate intermediaries between the grassroots and the summit, between micro-level efforts to make progress, on the one hand, and government development policy, on the other. Over the years, a bewildering range of NGOs competing for attention and resources has filled this space. Some are purely secular, but many others are faith-based or associated with some of the major Christian denominations including. Most importantly, however, a range of new social movements, all of which challenge the benefits that economists associate with globalisation, have emerged. This growing institutional pluralism poses a challenge to many national governments in developing countries, which continue to believe that they alone should be responsible for improving the living conditions of their citizens. The role that civil society should play, therefore, is being increasingly contested both at national and international levels.

The increasing political engagement by certain NGOs stems largely from the fact that development keeps increasing the gap between the rich and the poor. Neo-liberal economic policies in the past two decades have opened up new opportunities for many actors, but the underlying structures of the global economy have become more and more skewed in favour of those who are already rich. The fact that control of the resource flows is now in the hands of private corporations rather than public agencies has exacerbated the sense of frustration among civil society actors who find the poor and vulnerable groups in society abandoned by public bodies. According to some analysts, even the emergence and use of ‘sustainable development’ in the international development discourse has largely had the effect of blocking out the real contradictions in the present global economic order.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Chatterjee, P., and Finger, M., *The Earth Brokers: Power, Politics and World Development*, Routledge, London, 1994.

This takes us to the second problem with development – its appropriation by a professional and managerial elite. In the Western world, development is a highly specialised articulation of the basic assumptions underlying the human engineering of change. Each profession has become an increasingly specialised domain, with little or no interaction with other professional groups. This is especially true of economists. They have become an increasingly closed guild relying largely on abstract concepts and econometric equations to define and measure development. The result is that development is not for the ordinary lay person. It is conceived and discussed among experts who treat it as an object rather than something that touches them subjectively. This is the criticism that Robert Chambers makes of the ‘normal professionals’ who cannot empathise with the people for whom they prescribe developmental recipes.<sup>5</sup> The professionalisation of development, in conjunction with its preoccupation with macro issues, has kept the concept from being translated into something meaningful to citizens at large. An increasing number of civil society organisations, including the new social movements, find themselves challenging the current mainstream perspective on how to improve the conditions of the poor.

It is definitely not just a matter of providing market incentives, nor is it the prerogative of the expert. At the same time, there is reason for civil society organisations and movements to ask the hard question of how they can best help emancipate the poor in the South when the injustices of the global economic order calls for immediate action. It is one thing to speak on behalf of the poor, another to emancipate them so that they can become actors capable of taking charge of their own destiny. It is hard to see how the latter can be done without also bringing the poor in the South into a mind-frame that reflects, at least in a fundamental sense, the instrumentalist orientation associated with the Enlightenment tradition.<sup>6</sup> Whether one speaks of redressing poverty or social injustices, the poor, regardless of category, can hardly become independent actors contributing to the realisation of these objectives without acquiring the same set of modernist qualities that leaders of civil society organisations and movements already have but rarely acknowledge as the reason why they are capable of challenging establishment institutions. In other words, while there is little doubt in the current economic and political circumstances that

5 Chambers, R., *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*, Longman, London, 1983.

6 For a discussion of the relationship between modernity and development, see Giddens, Anthony, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Stanford University Press, 1991.

civil society has the potential of serving as the engine for change in the same way as the state did some 30 years ago, critiquing corporate capital, the World Economic Forum and other similar global establishment institutions is only one aspect of that role. In fact, it is the easier one. It is much more difficult to make the poor part of a solidarity movement, in which they are not just pawns but autonomous actors capable of treating time and space in the same universalist way as elites do, whether they are in government or civil society organisations.

### *What is Civil Society?*

This may sound like a superfluous question, but the truth is that most people find it hard to agree on what the concept really stands for. It is worthwhile, therefore, making an effort to define the concept and discuss its meaning.



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Although civil society is a relative newcomer to the international development lexicon – it was not even mentioned once in the *What Now* report – it is, of course, a concept that has been around for a long time. In fact, it has a very prestigious pedigree. Its rise coincides with the rise of capitalism and the evolution of the modern state in the Weberian sense of rational-legal structures of governance. Steeped in the Western philosophical tradition, civil society has four distinct roots.

One is associated with John Locke – and by extension with Hobbes – which emphasises the need for a state to restrain conflict between individuals in society. Locke's most important contribution is his emphasis on the need to limit the sovereignty of the state in order to preserve individual freedoms derived from natural law. Thus, there must be a social contract between rulers and ruled that respects the natural rights of individuals but also allows the state to protect society from destructive conflict.

Another root is associated with Thomas Paine and the Scottish Enlightenment. He and his colleagues argued that society becomes civil as commerce and manufacturing expands through the division of labour. As the state expands to provide order and reduce conflict, it may threaten the very liberties that make civil society flourish. In their libertarian perspective, a civil society develops only when individuals are able freely to exercise their natural rights. It is the market rather than the state that provides the best opportunity for the growth of civil society, because the limits on the personal capacity to satisfy individual desires can only be transcended by commercial exchanges.

The third root is linked to Alexis de Tocqueville. He was alarmed not only by the prospect of a powerful state but also by the prospect of the tyranny of the majority. He treated associations as the most effective bulwark against this double threat to individual citizens. He saw self-governing associations as being able to mediate the popular will and thereby provide the basis for stable self-governance. Such a civil society also educates the citizenry and scrutinises state actions. It facilitates distribution of power and provides mechanisms for direct citizen participation in public affairs.

The fourth link is with Georg Hegel and, by extension, with Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci. Hegel broke with the tradition of viewing civil society as a natural phenomenon. Instead, he regards it as a product of specific historical processes. He recognises that division of labour creates stratification in society and that it increases conflict between strata. Civil society, in his view, is made up of the various associations, corporations and estates that exist among the strata. The form and nature of the state is the result of the way civil society is represented. The latter, therefore, stands between citizens and a legislature, which mediates their interests with the state. The conflicts that these processes engender within civil society will lead to its destruction in the absence of a strong state. In Hegel's 'organic' perspective, the state exists to protect common interests, as it defines them, by intervening in the activities of civil society.

Marx picks up on this idea when suggesting that in capitalist systems civil society is associated with the bourgeoisie. Marx assumed that civil society, therefore, was a captive of prevailing economic structures and could not by itself change these. A revolution that transcended the civic boundaries of civil society was required for such a project. Gramsci, the most prominent Marxist analyst of civil society, bypasses the economic determinism of his intellectual mentor by arguing that associations are the mechanisms for exercising control in society. They are independent actors and should not be overlooked as mechanisms for changing the conditions of workers and peasants in society. The power that the dominant class has over others can be overturned through the development of counter-hegemonic associations that represent alternative norms for how to develop society.

The point that I am trying to make with this quick review of the philosophical contributions to the definitions of civil society is that they all reflect the simultaneous growth of state, market and society and how relations among them should be organised. Using the terminology referred to in the context of *What Now*, the Prince, Merchant



and Citizen engaged each other in those days in social and political struggles to define the nature of modern society and, by extension, development as we think of it today.<sup>7</sup> Gramsci, as much as any of the other thinkers, saw civil society in a modernist perspective.



*The Prince, Merchant and Citizen engaged each other in those days in social and political struggles to define the nature of modern society and, by extension, development as we think of it today.*

This brief overview of the Western roots of the civil society concept is enough to show why there may be difficulties once we wish to extend its use to societies where this tradition is absent or fledgling. Is it something other than a ‘black box’ in which all organisations – and movements – that are non-governmental belong? If so, how far should a civil society be a reflection of the values with which it is associated in the Western tradition? These are important questions because they bear on how the objectives of both good governance and halting the process of globalisation are perceived.

Beginning with the more conventional perspective on civil society, one significant debate has centred on the role of social capital. Some analysts may dislike this concept because of its affiliation with economic thought, but the point is that social capital has become current in the ongoing development discourse and like other popular concepts it must be subject to critical analysis.

Social capital generally refers to the generation and nurturing of trust and reciprocity. There is reasonably broad agreement about this basic definition. The common assumption associated with the concept is that it produces positive outcomes for society. The prescription, therefore, tends to be: the more the better! Social capital, however, comes in different forms and currencies. Some of it is short term, some long term. Some of it is inclusive, some exclusive. Putnam has taken a first step towards identifying variations within the concept when he makes the distinction between ‘bridging’ and ‘bonding’ forms of social capital.<sup>8</sup> The former is usually treated as the ‘ideal type’ because it fosters civic virtues by cutting across the boundaries of primary social organisation such as family, clan, tribe or race. By being crosscutting, it also helps integrate groups into society and enables them to turn conflicts into positive-sum games. Bonding refers to social capital formed in groups where personal ties are strong and there is a sense of community based on ‘us’ sharing the same background. In other words, this is social capital that

7 *Development Dialogue* 1975:1/2, *op. cit.* See also Burbidge, J. (ed.), *Beyond Prince and Merchant: Citizen Participation and the Rise of Civil Society*, Pact Publications, New York, 1997.

8 Putnam, R., *Bowling Alone: The Decline of Social Capital in America*, W.W. Norton, New York, 2001.

is generated within primary forms of social organisation, as those listed above.

I believe that Putnam's categories of social capital are too broad and overlook other types that are equally important. One other type I label 'blinding' because it tends to be exclusivist; it is not about people wanting to be together because they share the same family, clan or ethnic background, but about people sharing a common principle and refusing to budge from it. This form of social capital arises within groups as they encounter others in the public arena. Such groups typically do not care what others think of them. Examples would be anti-abortion and militia groups in the United States and terrorist networks operating in various parts of the world. There is always a danger that a group, in its ambition to make a difference, becomes so confident in its own role that it ignores self-reflection and self-examination; hence, the existence of blinding social capital.

Another type of social capital is 'binding'. This is an expedient and short-term form that is needed to bring groups and individuals together because the challenge they face is beyond what they can do on their own. Examples would be coalitions or alliances among groups to solve a problem or fight a common enemy or threat. This type of cooperation generates a form of social capital that may be tactical in nature. It is important in civil society contexts where there is such a multitude of different organisations and where effectiveness therefore often necessitates tactical thinking.

This repertoire of social capital is important to bear in mind because it reminds us that social capital comes in several different forms. The dominant usage of the concept in international development agencies refers to the creation of civic values reflecting the civil society definition of John Locke and Alexis de Tocqueville. There is an increasing number of actors in the global arena, however, who feel constrained by this mainstream usage of the concept of civil society and the indicators adopted to measure it, such as those used in the Freedom House Index. These critics recognise that activism may sometimes involve breaking the law to make a point of protest. In many global as well as national contexts, incremental approaches to change are no longer perceived as enough because of the deepening sense of frustration with the way the global economic system produces negative outcomes for the majority of the world's population. The world looks too unjust to merit a 'business-as-usual' approach to change. Only a more radical solution is meaningful to these actors. The 'system' needs to be overhauled. This section of civil society often expresses



*It is not about people wanting to be together because they share the same family, clan or ethnic background, but about people sharing a common principle and refusing to budge from it.*

a stubborn opposition to globalisation. It is no exaggeration to claim that civil society is being radicalised today and we can expect it to be that way as long as the neo-liberal dogma enjoys hegemonic status. Gramsci's notion of the need to create a counter-hegemony to the dominant neo-liberal paradigm provides a more transformative perspective of what civil society may want to contemplate as its next set of challenges.

### *Challenges Facing Civil Society*

This set of challenges cannot easily be defined for each individual organisation or movement. They will know what circumstances call for in their particular instance. Yet, it might be helpful to identify a few common issues that organisations and movements in civil society are likely to encounter. I believe that the following five issues are sufficiently general that they will form part of any actor's thinking about the future: (a) established versus new sites of action, (b) reactive versus proactive approaches, (c) global versus local action, (d) foundational versus fundamentalist thinking, and (e) single versus multiple voices.

#### *(a) Established versus new sites of action*

Civil society actors typically have two general objectives in mind. One is to influence policy and to that effect it is often necessary to lobby elected officials and government ministers who are likely to be the ultimate arbiters of what is being decided on a given issue. A second objective is to work towards changing the existing power structure in ways that enable groups that have hitherto been marginal to exert a greater influence on what is happening in society. This typically means challenging structures and institutions that are established. It is a more radical agenda that is pursued outside the parliamentary arena.

This issue is important for civil society actors at both the global and national level. For instance, there is an ongoing debate in those circles whether the international forums provided under the auspices of the United Nations are meaningful sites for pursuing the objectives of peace, social justice and environmental conservation. Too many organisations that have participated in such events in recent years are frustrated by the way in which key recommendations for effective action have been watered down by government and UN officials. Many now see the World Social Forum, initiated a few years ago by activists in Brazil, as an alternative and more hospitable site for reaching agreement on what civil society actors need to do. While this forum may have the potential to generate solidarity in the ranks of civil society, there are also costs associated with such a strategy that must be contemplated. The first is that civil society may lose leverage by dis-

associating itself from the mainstream. The second is that an expanded World Social Forum may lead to potential complications that generate antagonism instead of solidarity. The answer in each individual case may be that the organisation or movement needs to pursue a strategy for both established and new sites. Nonetheless, civil society actors will be increasingly faced with the task of agreeing on a *modus operandi* in relation to this issue.

### (b) Reactive versus proactive approaches

In an increasingly globalised world dominated by powerful private corporations that operate in many different countries and a unipolar political setting where the United States can act unilaterally, as it did in the case of Iraq, civil society must constantly be on its guard. It has to monitor scientific and technological advances, many of which may have adverse consequences not only for individual categories of vulnerable people but also for the existing power structures at large. The work of the ETC Group in Canada illustrates how a small group of activists with good information and smart thinking can make a difference in various international contexts where scientific and technological advances are being assessed for policy.<sup>9</sup> Greenpeace is another organisation that has proved effective in calling into question the effects of science and technology on public spaces or on the lives of marginalised groups of people. Keck and Sikkink have shown that advocacy networks of NGOs can overcome the deliberate suppression of information sustaining abuses of power. Reactions to initiatives taken by corporate or government actors, therefore, can reframe international and domestic debate, change the terms, sites, and configurations of participants and lead to new ideas, norms and identities.<sup>10</sup> Monitoring and auditing what happens at the frontiers of science is not easy but should be a priority for civil society given that so much power is already in the hands of a few gigantic actors.

At the same time, civil society must not forget its own roots among poor and vulnerable people. As suggested above, no other type of actors will be able to take on the challenges of emancipating the poor and the vulnerable in ways that enable them to stand on their own feet in the future. This is a proactive task that calls for an empathetic



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9 Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration (formerly Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI)); see especially the contribution by Pat Mooney in *Development Dialogue*, 1999:1-2, entitled 'The ETC Century: Erosion, Technological Transformation and Corporate Concentration in the 21st Century'.

10 Keck, M. E., and Sikkink, K., *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1998.

approach that goes beyond organising protests. It involves making the poor and vulnerable capable of reflecting on their own circumstances in ways that liberate them from dependency on the ideas of others, including sometimes those of their own ‘liberators’. This is perhaps the greatest challenge facing many civil society actors, not least those who are most anxious to see a new world order. The reactive concerns can easily overwhelm the proactive ones. It is easy for the elites in civil society to choose the route or participation in global forums rather than dirtying their fingers at the grassroots.

### (c) Global versus local action

In spite of the growing importance that global issues play in the minds of civil society actors today, much of what NGOs have done in recent years reflects the motto: ‘Think globally, act locally’. The idea of strategising on a global level in order to be more effective in specific local contexts has been important in spreading action against locally harmful interventions by other actors, be they governments or corporations. It has also allowed organisations to disseminate the same kind of methodology to different outlying areas of the periphery. This approach, however, also has its own downsides. In some respects, it is similar to the top-down approaches of yesteryear, when thinking and doing, planning and implementation were treated as separate. It has also reinforced the dominance of elitist thinking in the ranks of progressive organisations referred to above.

There is good reason, therefore, to think of the reverse: ‘Think locally, act globally’. Much of what needs to be done requires sensitivity to context. Local know-how and local institutions are often more effective in getting things done. Thinking locally, therefore, implies two important things. The first is the incorporation of local insights into the problem-solving process. The idea of a science of sustainability, promoted by an increasing number of scientists interested in conservation and development issues, is an illustration of what can be done. Sustainability scientists emphasise the need for an integrated science that brings different disciplines together as well as drawing on local knowledge that relates to scientifically defined problems. This strategy is also compatible with the idea that local experience needs to be not just scaled ‘up’ or ‘out’, as the terminology goes these days. It is not just a matter of borrowing ‘best practices’ from different local contexts and integrating them in new programmes or projects elsewhere. Thinking locally and acting globally also involves empowerment of local actors so that they can perform in contexts outside their local community. Empowerment here means not just, for example, bringing more women into legislative bodies or other public

forums, but the enabling of people who do not yet reap the benefits of modernity to do so. It is this kind of approach that broadens the base for collective action focusing on solving local problems but also making a contribution at the national – or global – level.

#### (d) Foundational versus fundamentalist thinking

Globalisation has brought peoples and countries closer together in economic but not necessarily cultural terms. Closer interaction in the marketplace tends to exacerbate cultural differences. It is no coincidence that there has been an upsurge in fundamentalist thinking as a result of the closer integration of the world, for which neo-liberal economics and advanced information technology have been responsible. The question that inevitably arises is whether we have enough in common to communicate effectively with each other. Are we about to lose the foundation on which development has rested in former generations?

This is a pertinent question at this point in time and is particularly important for civil society. Globalisation, including the rapid technological advances that we witness today, makes life less rather than more certain. We may reduce some risks, but we are creating others, often greater ones. This process inevitably raises fundamental issues that some groups immediately turn into fundamentalist causes. At the root of the Al-Qaeda phenomenon is the reaction that there is something fundamentally wrong with Western values. This is the problem with the ‘blinding’ form of social capital, discussed above. Instead of building bridges or even networks and alliances, these groups operate on their own, or only cooperate with other like-minded fundamentalist groups.

Civil society cannot completely rid itself of such organisations. They will always be there. But those organisations that believe in a common foundation – however the actors define it – have an important role to play in ensuring that the divisions that fundamentalism brings to society do not prevail. I believe that there are three ingredients in foundational thinking that are important to safeguard. The first is the idea that an alternative vision from the currently prevailing one is inevitably associated with a return to core values that have been marginalised in the period of neo-liberal economics. The pendulum has swung away from the concern with social and economic rights that was outlined in the *What Now* report of 1975. The time has come to bring them back in. The second ingredient is that what divides us is at bottom material things, not culture. By focusing on political economy rather than political culture, there is a possibility of resolving cleavages and differences in a ‘win-win’ manner. The third is the assumption that instrumental



*An alternative vision from the currently prevailing one is inevitably associated with a return to core values that have been marginalised in the period of neo-liberal economics.*

rationality counts. The idea that everything can be disaggregated into combinations of ends and means provides the basis for reasoned dialogue and debate. With these factors in place, it seems that foundational thinking can prevail over fundamentalism.

#### (e) Single versus multiple voices

Civil society is far from being a monolithic entity. It is a bewildering mix of organisations that vary in at least two important respects: their normative and sectoral orientation. Thus, it is no surprise that civil society is divided along such lines. In fact, some observers consider this to be an advantage, even a source of strength. Diversity and pluralism foster not only competition but also a stronger focus on specific policy issues.

There are two types of circumstances when a united voice seems particularly justified. One is when the standards of justice and fairness are so grossly violated that civil society actors have a moral responsibility to speak with one voice. The war in Iraq has come closest in recent years to constituting such an event. It was suggested in the *New York Times* in that context that world public opinion constitutes a ‘second superpower’.<sup>11</sup> The second circumstance when a single voice is warranted concerns the way in which civil society as a collective entity works. The more organisations within civil society agree on a code of conduct, the more difficult it is for other actors to criticise them. The more that civil society can govern itself, the greater the likelihood that it will be taken seriously by others.

With regard to specific policy issues and the relationship to other actors, there is bound to be great variety, and organisations cannot – nor should they – be expected to speak with one voice. Although there is strength in numbers, the problems that society faces and that organisations tackle are sufficiently specific for flexibility and multiple voices to be a source of strength rather than weakness. Civil society organisations represent different constituencies and interests and they cannot ignore their relations of accountability to either members or the public at large. What might be expected is that different sectoral groups and organisations keep each other abreast about what they are doing so that no one comes across – intentionally or not – as trying to control the agenda at the expense of others. Unfortunately, that happens all too often at both national and global levels and is a major reason why civil society gets bogged down in internal strife rather than standing up to giant corporations or powerful governments. Leaving ideology and sectoral interests aside is sometimes necessary, at least

<sup>11</sup> Tyler, P., ‘A New Power In the Streets’, *New York Times*, 17 February 2003.

from a tactical perspective, to avoid misunderstandings and conflict within civil society itself.

### *Civil Society: How Next?*

As suggested above, one of the ultimate objectives of civil society is to shift power relations in favour of the poor and vulnerable. This means that it must get ready to play an even greater role in the future. How it would play this role cannot easily be summarised in a single overview paper such as this. What I am attempting here is more modest, yet still ambitious: the provision of a ‘map’ for how to think about enhancing the collective strength of civil society. It is not written in stone. Its purpose is primarily that of encouraging debate among civil society actors on how to go about their business in the future.

The conceptual inspiration for my mapping of a comprehensive way of looking at the ‘how’ question is Albert Hirschman’s discussion of ‘exit’, ‘voice’, and ‘loyalty’.<sup>12</sup> According to Hirschman, each of these describes the way that we behave in the marketplace. This can also be applied to how we behave in the public or political arena. ‘Voice’ refers to the expression of opinion in the public through various methods, be it informing people, lobbying or advocacy. ‘Exit’ refers to the withdrawal of support, something that may be necessary if there is no agreement, if one actor ignores the opinion of others, or there is moral outrage over actions taken by a government or a



*Leaving ideology and sectoral interests aside is sometimes necessary, at least from a tactical perspective, to avoid misunderstandings and conflict within civil society itself.*

12 Hirschman, A., *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1970.



corporation. ‘Loyalty’ refers to the strengthening of cooperation in a situation where this is necessary to defend a cause or a group of people, or to pursue a course of action on which there is fundamental agreement. It suggests that there is strength in numbers and that broad coalitions or alliances sometimes pay off.

Table 1. An overview of how to proceed next

	Voice	Exit	Loyalty
Local	<p><b>Mobilise</b></p> <p>Make people aware of their own power to bring about change</p>	<p><b>Differentiate</b></p> <p>Select people ready to act in support of the poor and vulnerable</p>	<p><b>Induce</b></p> <p>Strengthen material and moral means for collective action to support local causes</p>
National	<p><b>Lobby</b></p> <p>Exercise influence on elected officials and government leaders</p>	<p><b>Oppose</b></p> <p>Manifest criticism more intensively to gain visibility</p>	<p><b>Organise</b></p> <p>Take advantage of public awareness to create membership organisations</p>
Global	<p><b>Advocate</b></p> <p>Speak on behalf of the poor in forums where they cannot be heard</p>	<p><b>Withdraw</b></p> <p>Embarrass powerful actors by withdrawing support on key issues</p>	<p><b>Network</b></p> <p>Lay foundation for strong global action by sharing information with others</p>

There is much more that could be said in each box above, but the purpose is to indicate, based on experience to date, what seem to be the key concerns at each level. The table stresses the importance of keeping in touch and collaborating on issues that affect the strength of civil society as a collective entity. It also suggests that civil society actors must be strategic in the way that they think about their own activities. For instance, when using their ‘voice’, it is important that they do so in ways that are credible, reflecting good preparation or ‘homework’, and based on a sense of comparative advantage; they may then have a powerful effect on the minds of those to whom their action matters. Similarly, it is important that the ‘exit’ option is used sparingly and only in situations where it is clear that such an approach makes a difference. This means that the approach is likely to be useful only when civil society or its individual actors has some clout. Finally, when playing the ‘loyalty’ card, actors must be sure that there is a good chance of success in upholding support for a particular cause

or winning new converts to it. Failing to hold an alliance together or being unsuccessful in recruiting wider support can be costly for individual actors as well as civil society at large.

It may be helpful to conclude this paper with suggestions of relevance to both actors and analysts of civil society. Experience to date seems to indicate that the following three propositions are potential guides for both future action and future research:

1. The higher the level of action, the louder the voice must be.

The assumption here is that work at the local level can be conducted very much outside the limelight of public media. Working with villagers, for instance, is aimed at their minds. It is a very quiet activity. At national – and even more so at global – level, however, much more attention needs to be paid to how the media can highlight and vocalise the opinion of civil society and its actors. Therefore, the higher the level of action, the more a media strategy becomes crucial.

2. The higher the level, the more spectacular the action must be.

The premise is that being able to attract attention at the local level is typically not an issue. People are likely to be curious and often ready to welcome representatives of civil society. At higher levels, however, there is much more competition for attention. Any activity must catch the eye of others, especially those for whom the activity matters. That is why it is always important to identify comparative advantage and choose a delivery strategy that makes an impact on the minds of people.

3. The higher the level, the greater the tolerance of others.

The assumption is that each organisation may find it quite easy to pursue its own work at the local level without having to worry much about others. At higher levels, however, it is necessary to acknowledge the presence of others and their opinions. Without it, civil society will remain divided, and its influence and power will accordingly be diminished.



*Civil society has every reason to continue to be a critical voice on the global policy stage, but its legitimacy will remain strong only as long as it is also self-critical and ready to deal with its own weaknesses as they arise.*

## Conclusions

Civil society occupies a position on the global policy stage that it has never had before. There is no reason to assume that it will lose its influence in the years to come. This is especially true if it can nurture its own internal growth. The challenges to this growth lie in the relations with other actors – corporate and governmental – as well as in the relations to the masses of people who rely on the ability of civil society actors to make their life and circumstances better. Civil society has every reason to continue to be a critical voice on the global policy stage, but its legitimacy will remain strong only as long as it is also self-critical and ready to deal with its own weaknesses as they arise. This may not sound like a big issue, but it often is, because members of civil society are typically better at activism than analysis. They rarely give themselves time to reflect on their own experiences. The best organisations in civil society are precisely those that build analysis into their work; that take time to learn from past experiences. If organisations don't have the expertise themselves to conduct exercises concerned with reflection and self-analysis, they should hire such expertise and use it on a regular basis. Compared to governments and corporations, it is in this very area that civil society is weak. If it wants to compete more effectively, it is clear that its member organisations must acquire and nurture analytical expertise.




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# Stop the ‘Stockholm Syndrome’!

## Lessons learned from 30 years of UN summits

*Pat Mooney*

*As a kind of culmination to 30 years of international summitry, a series of global meetings in the first years of this century were supposed to restore development assistance, eradicate hunger and allow us all to grow sustainably. When 2003 rolled around, no one was cracking open the champagne. Predictably, the Monterrey Summit on Financing Development, the World Food Summit, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development met everyone’s expectations – and no one’s aspirations. When governments and UN agencies fail, we in civil society should scrap our boring rhetoric about ‘paradigm shifts’ and get on with ‘regime change’. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social movements that were embroiled in the summits must end the ‘Stockholm Syndrome’ – the pitiful pageant of pep rallies that have pacified civil society organisations (CSOs) since 1972 – and develop a tough love strategy for our intergovernmental work.*

*Summits plummet:* By any standards, 2002 was a turning-point year. Three gala international fora were held that should have changed our lives and our environment:

- › The Monterrey Summit on Financing Development should have re-established the old Pearson formula (0.7 per cent of gross domestic product, GDP) as official development assistance and confirmed a ‘rights-based’ agenda for development funding.
- › The Rome World Food Summit – Five Years (*and getting*) Later – should have acknowledged that governments were falling well below the targets they set in 1996 and should have adopted the Food Sovereignty agenda laid out by Via Campesina (the international social movement of peasant organisations) and others; and have tackled the politically thorny but critical issues of worldwide genetically modified (GM) seed contamination and agricultural trade wars.
- › The Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development should have made progress on each chapter of Agenda 21. Instead it declared victory simply because it kept the USA at bay on trade, human rights and biotech.

What we had variously called Rio+10, Earth Summit III, or Stockholm+30 became ‘Johannesburg minus Action’. Jo’burg brought to an end a year of bum-numbing ‘diplomania’ and, hopefully, an end also to three decades of slavish CSO marching to the beat of intergovernmental drums.

### *Origins of the Stockholm Syndrome*

In 1972, the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment became the first global environmental ‘happening’. The conference’s main structural innovation was to facilitate the active participation of civil society – what was later defined by Marc Nerfin (of the conference secretariat) as the ‘Third System’. As Nerfin described it, the First System was the Prince (government), the Second System was the Merchant (business), and the Third System was the Citizen (the people). Thirty-four years ago, the people’s system was invited into the hollow halls of the UN System.

It was an auspicious beginning for the Third System. Stockholm was a triumph. It inspired a swarm of new national cabinet portfolios (ministers of environment) who, in turn, needed somewhere appropriately important where they could ponder (hence the United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP, was born) which, in turn, required a new crowd of ozone-depleting national and international bureaucrats (since dubbed ‘biocrats’).

### *What is the Stockholm Syndrome?*

Shortly after the conference, a bank robbery and hostage-taking incident in Stockholm grabbed world headlines – not because hostages were taken, but because once rescued, they didn’t want to leave their captors. Two of the four victims were eventually betrothed to their bandit heroes. Psychiatrists called this behavioral phenomenon the ‘Stockholm Syndrome’. The theory goes that given sufficient duration, desperation, and dependency, captives may instinctively bind their fate to their captors in the hope of reciprocal loyalty.

But, the Stockholm Syndrome also has geo-political dimensions. By opening up intergovernmental fora to civil society, the 1972 Stockholm Conference launched an era of intergovernmental (mostly UN) theme park jamborees running from women to water, to food, habitat, and population, but always achieving its highest political perfection during environmental blockbusters for which Johannesburg was the most prominent of UN conferences. Southern governments have tended to shackle themselves together with advocacy CSOs in the



*There is always an exhausting preparatory process during which government and civil society combatants gather under an uneasy flag of truce to sort out the agenda and, thereby, sidestep the solutions.*

hope that some day, somewhere, they will find – if not true love – at least sanctuary.

### *‘Talksonomy’ of an extinctable species*

As a species, the Stockholm (Conference) Syndrome has distinct markings. First, all sub-species within the species must have a mandate to ‘solve’ an earth-shaking (or, at least profound) issue. For this purpose, there is always an exhausting preparatory process during which government and civil society combatants gather under an uneasy flag of truce to sort out the agenda and, thereby, sidestep the solutions. (It generally takes so long to agree on the agenda that there is no time to negotiate a programme of work.) Second, every conference of the genus must teeter on the brink of disaster for as long as biocrats can hold their bladders (and/or blood pressure) in order to keep the media interested and in order to convince the South that even if nothing is accomplished, at least great losses were heroically averted. Third, summit or otherwise (the World Trade Organization’s ministerials trump any summit), there have to be rumours of impending Greats. Without the Pope, Castro, or a retired US President, delegate and media attention drifts. (This is getting tricky. After 30 years, the Pope is something of a ‘cheap date’ and ex-Presidents are a dime a dozen. Only Castro has kept his lustre. Of late, however, U2’s Bono has pulled off some impressive diplomatic gigs.) Fourth, there has to be a clarion call to arms – some ringing testament to international resolve to do better (or at least to stop doing so badly). Finally, but vitally, there must be a walk-by cast of thousands of passionate placard-waving CSOs convinced that the sky really will fall, if the conference does not pull up its socks.

One might have thought that after three decades some natural Darwinian survival mechanism – or genetic engineering – might have kicked in with a beneficial mutation, if for no other reason than to relieve the meeting monotony. Only one bland adjustment has emerged – the creation of Major Groups: the Multi-Stakeholder Forum – an admittedly eye-catching photo-op during which multinational corporations (represented invariably by the most visibly-marginalised Ivy Leaguer that money can buy), T-shirted trade unionists, and pinstriped CSOs (with cell phones slung low on their hips) stare earnestly across tables of endangered wood at one another while some hopeful-looking UN officials intone *bon mots*, assuring one and all that we ‘are all on the same side’, while Greenpeace climbs something high and decorous in the background.

If the species has not changed much, the cast for a *bona fide* Stockholm Syndrome drama has devolved somewhat over the years. When Marc Nerfin first postulated the Three Systems, the captors were the Princes of the First System (Northern governments). The captives were the Princelings of Southern governments. The (Keystone) cops<sup>1</sup> were played by UN secretariats that could never quite catch their mandate. The characters in the tragi-comedy related to each other symbiotically. The South came to these events in the hope of new money or resources. The North came to maintain the illusion of momentum. Civil Society came because we got to act like biocrats and – in the absence of anything else happening – we had a reasonable shot at presenting our posters, if not our opinions, on CNN.



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1 Keystone cops were early silent cinema comedies in the USA.



Now, the roles are changing. The First System is now industry and they are the captors. Governments (North and South) have been pushed (unknowingly) into the Second System. The cops (UN secretariats) are increasingly protecting industry and policing governments rather than the other way around. The People are still the Third System but many of us have been taken hostage. On stage, the pompous strutting and posturing remains as ever. Behind the scenes, the world's largest corporations have commandeered the tele-prompters.

But, the role changes have caused problems. In the good old days, when the North was captor and the South was captive, it was easy to tell who was on which side. With industry as captor and governments as captive, the scenes are getting muddled. Cell phone civil society has come to play a more visible role in Stockholm-grade performances. Consider: if the UN throws a party and civil society does not respond to an RSVP, there is no party. A thousand suits dragging their sorry briefs into a conference hall are a media 'flat line' unless somebody clammers onto the roof.

On the roof or inside the hall, we (civil society) have joined the South as victims of the Stockholm Syndrome.

### *Syndrome sundown: time for 'regime change'?*

It is time to break free of our captors and try tough love with the UN. 'Tough love', of course, can mean anything from ratcheting up the rhetoric (by denouncing the UN's Global Compact with multinationals, for example – a good idea any time!), to withdrawing from the UN rat pack of party-goers (and spending our saved time and energies at the grassroots), to actively restructuring or dismantling the UN System.

Since any linkage between rhetoric and action is usually coincidental, CSOs shouldn't equate shouting with finding a solution. There are exceptions to this. In contrast to the UN, meetings of the G8 countries, WTO ministerials, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank jamborees – closed-door events where civil society is distinctly unwelcome – need all the parades, protests and other popular actions we can muster. Seattle and Cancun are examples of successful mass movement.

The second option – withdrawing from the global UN scene – obviously warrants serious consideration. Dismantling the UN System would be marvellously cathartic – but we will have to hurry to beat the United States to the punch. The *New York Times* called civil society 'the

other superpower'. If true, we should at least try to be on the 'other' side. Restructuring the UN – agency by agency – is not the stuff that makes a CSO's heart go pitter-patter but it is a defensible option.

### *Premature withdrawal?*

As weak and miserable as the United Nations is, it remains the only credible countervailing possibility to the US trade and military juggernaut. If there had not been a United Nations, there would be no debate over the new US doctrine of 'the right to preemptive strike'. All nations would have to assume this right in the absence of any forum, such as the General Assembly or Security Council, able to decide collectively on whether war is necessary. Were it not for the existence of the UN, the failure of the USA and UK to prove the existence of Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq would not have been obvious. Had it not been for the Security Council, it would not have been obvious that the majority of its members would not support a second US/UK resolution. That the United Nations failed to prevent war in Iraq does not mean that it serves no purpose in preventing future wars or in focusing international attention on gross violations of the UN Charter of Human Rights. Most of civil society would agree that the world does need, at the global level, a forum for health (WHO)<sup>2</sup>, an arena for food issues (FAO)<sup>3</sup>, a forum on labour (ILO)<sup>4</sup> and similar opportunities to debate environmental, educational and scientific issues (UNEP<sup>5</sup> and UNESCO<sup>6</sup>), etc. To abandon these admittedly weak-kneed institutions today would be to clear the way for multinational corporate hegemony.

Still, the overthrow of governments by industry has created a 'wild West' environment at the United Nations. The titles no longer fit the roles. NGOs are generally looked upon as 'nongovernable organisations' while governments are increasingly seen as little more than NGOs with GUNS (Government and the UN System). Wild West or not, while it can easily be argued that more of civil society's resources should be focused at the national and regional levels, the abandonment of the last century of cumulative international law and standards to the mercy of one superpower is unthinkable.



*We each need to evaluate our own history with the UN System and sort out for ourselves whether we have 'used' or 'been used'.*

2 World Health Organization.

3 Food and Agriculture Organization.

4 International Labour Organization.

5 United Nations Environment Programme.

6 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

This does not mean business as usual. It does mean that those of us working at different levels must be more strategic.

CSOs should work together at the next World Social Forum to announce an embargo on future summits. Instead, we should lay down precise agendas and timetables for an intergovernmental action on specific global issues. If substantive measurable progress is not achieved, then CSOs should meet and announce a specific strategy to influence the elections of UN agency directors-general and key chair positions. We should also be prepared to announce a programme to restructure the budget of specific intergovernmental organisations through direct lobbying at the parliamentary level among member countries of the agency involved. The intention would not necessarily be to ‘cut’ budgets but to refocus the budgets to achieve civil society’s agenda.

The challenge for CSOs will be both to construct a vision of where we believe the world should move in the decade or so ahead and to fashion a credible sequence of achievable goals along the way. Truth be known, we share the ‘diplo’s’ penchant for pontification. Are we capable of seeing the horizon and charting a course that takes us there? We think ‘yes’.

Constituency-based social movements and others in civil society with a specialised focus must continue to pursue their mandates and concentrate on the issues vital to their peoples. Perhaps, however, it will be possible for many of us to adjust our focus or to work together on issues of good governance – nationally and internationally – and for the Third System to make the First System institutionally, financially and publicly more accountable.

What do we do if we consider cancelling the UN’s party? A lot...

- › First, we each need to evaluate our own history with the UN System and sort out for ourselves whether we have ‘used’ or ‘been used’.
- › Then, national, regional and global advocacy partners need to talk to one another about what needs doing and what – if any – role is relevant for intergovernmental bodies in their (non-conference) programme of work.
- › Third, we need to evaluate our communications (including technologies) and cooperation approaches to better democratise dialogue and information flow so that national and regional

initiatives are strengthened by global initiatives. We also need to ensure that global information and actions are informed by – and more specifically are in the service of – national and community concerns.

We won't pretend to describe specific national strategies, although we hope that international actions will mutually enhance strategies and actions at local and regional levels. Internationally, however, we can see the post-Stockholm world operating on a number of interesting levels.

**Early-listening systems:** We need to strengthen the flow of strategic information between and among social movements and advocacy NGOs to ensure that the Third System retains an overview of new developments and trends. We all tend to be a little single-minded. In the last few years, for example, many of us have focused heavily on biotech, intellectual property/biopiracy and/or trade issues. Without doubt, these are critical concerns that must not be overlooked. Nevertheless, corporate strategies and technologies keep changing.

**Social audits:** If we are concerned that an intergovernmental organisation may be performing poorly and is not responding to minimal expectations, a consortium of CSOs could agree to carry out an external programme and management/financial audit of the agency. The audit – conducted by an independent but knowledgeable team – would consult extensively with governments, programme beneficiaries, and past and present employees in order to prepare an authoritative report and offer member states specific action recommendations. Such audits might take six months to one year and should bear in mind the organisation's leadership selection timetable and processes.

**How to tickle your Member:** Policy-makers at the international level have a secret erogenous zone that lies in the dark spaces between senior bureaucrats back at the capital and junior parliamentarians on budgeting and oversight subcommittees. Most parliamentarians approve UN budgets and programmes without any knowledge or awareness of the organisations their country is funding. Most couldn't care less. These parliamentarians relate to a handful of senior government bureaucrats who are generally too important to leave the capital and attend the actual UN negotiations. But budgets and programmes that are irrelevant in the national parliament can be vital to developing countries and UN secretariats. By cooperating closely, international advocacy organisations and social movements operating at the national level can effectively influence the national politicians and



*Policy-makers at the international level have a secret erogenous zone that lies in the dark spaces between senior bureaucrats back at the capital and junior parliamentarians on budgeting and oversight subcommittees.*

bureaucrats to move budgets and advance or deter specific agency programmes. It is also at this level that social movements can influence national governments' votes on the elections of new chair positions or new directors-general. If the Third System can focus on this erogenous zone at the national level and link its work to issues critical to social movements both nationally and globally, we can break free of the Stockholm Syndrome and take captors captive.

**Critical paths:** One area that initially seemed to make progress was in the changing of the structural relationship between civil society and FAO in 2002, as a result of the World Food Summit. Along with an extensive list of substantial issues and demands, the NGO/CSO Forum at the Food Summit produced an equally extensive list of technical and institutional proposals intended to strengthen the participation of social movements in intergovernmental committees and to create new spaces for national organisations and marginalised peoples to interact with the FAO Secretariat and governments. Many of the proposed changes seem incredibly modest. Collectively, however, they amounted to a major structural adjustment to the way in which a UN agency relates to civil society.

Moving beyond platitudes, for example, a call for a new initiative on land reform or sustainable agriculture, to be effective, has to be accompanied by specific proposals for CSO–Agency liaison teams; identification of the exact intergovernmental committees and secretariat working groups that would develop the initiative; listing of background papers and conference documents needed to support the agenda; mapping of the timeline to be followed inside the House and intergovernmentally; and development of lists of potential resource persons for the process. If documents are not developed or items fall off agendas, CSOs should be able to know this immediately and respond accordingly through contact with the secretariat and with governments. Considering the global dimensions of the work, some of these steps may seem small, but they are practical.

This is not much of an adrenalin rush. Basically, we must create covenants of cooperation between advocacy CSOs and social movements that allow groups to set aside some of our less endearing postures of political correctness and/or opportunism. We must recognise that we have different roles and natures, which are complementary and enrich our vision. And we need to take advantage of the agility we have achieved in communications technologies to pack a sustained political punch both with national policy and opinion makers, and international negotiations. We need to mess with the operational nuts and

bolts of organisation, financial decision-making, and national and international leadership. If a UN agency secretariat does not undertake the internal steps they should, we go after the agency's funding and its electoral processes.

**Civil society not civil servants:** We also see a need and an opportunity to direct intergovernmental funding to People's Organisations and other CSOs, and for the creation of new partnerships and programmes involving governments and UN agencies with CSOs. But we do not believe that a useful option is to turn CSOs into new UN bureaucracies. We should make the global institutions that already exist work properly, or we should eliminate them and work with governments to create more effective bodies. But this does not mean creating a feeding-frenzy for hungry NGOs – or turning civil society into civil servants. As people's organisations are painfully aware, we NGOs have an enormous chameleon capacity, turning ourselves into anything that can attract funding. Our propensity for infighting, backbiting and bureaucracy is legendary. There is no reason to believe that we would do any better than the sorry creatures we dislodge. A major shift of funding to CSOs would quickly destroy the effectiveness of civil society in global governance.

**Influence the election of UN leadership:** The possibilities and ways that CSOs can influence the election of the UN leadership have been an area of increasing attention in recent years. Some attempts have been made in the election processes at FAO, as a result of the agency's restricted relations with CSOs, and also at WHO. A list of suggestions for possible action is offered below which may be useful in relation to the whole UN family of Agencies, Funds and Programmes:

1. Create a three-language election website in which information and news is posted.
2. Prepare and post a 'job description' for the Director-General based on advice from social movements, retired staff and diplomats and unions.
3. Encourage nominations from all quarters.
4. Prepare and post biographical sketches of every candidate.
5. Post interviews with each candidate – on programmes and policies.
6. Convene 'All-Candidates' meetings so that staff and governments as well as the media can form opinions.

7. Organise a pre-election ‘exit poll’ (confidential by mail-in ballot) for staff and publish the results.
8. Give the election a high media and political profile as a test of the UN’s governance capacity.
9. Monitor and post information about staff postings and project decisions, and track negotiations that might influence the process.
10. Monitor the actual ballot process.
11. Publish a report on the completed process – including an evaluation of the performance of staff, candidates and governments – with recommendations for future elections.

Meanwhile, of course, national CSOs can be talking with their parliaments about the FAO programme of work and budget.

**Third System revisited:** The shift of 34 years ago actually holds up pretty well over time. The original dream born in the Stockholm Conference in 1972 continues to have reason and value. We need to realise that industry has taken global governance hostage and we need to free governments – and ourselves – from corporate captivity. We need to use the considerable political acumen and muscle of the Third System to make tangible change. We should begin now.




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# Summary of Contributions in this Volume

## Setting the Context

The development debate thirty years after *What Now*  
*Sheila Coronel and Kunda Dixit*

The first article in this volume delineates the broad social and political backdrop to the *What Next* project by surveying some major contemporary problems and challenges and by tracing the development debate over the last thirty years. Coronel and Dixit start from a snapshot from the Philippine island Siargao that dramatises both global disparities and the utterly bleak conditions under which many people live today. With no other way to survive, some farmers and fisherfolk on Siargao are driven to sell their kidneys to rich buyers, exemplifying current trends toward commodification, whether of nature, the human body or genetic material. Cases such as that of Siargao, Coronel and Dixit write, are part of a wider movement of marketisation, privatisation and neoliberal globalisation, now being promoted as a 'single formula for all'. The world at the outset of the 21st century, they state, is marked by a paradox: 'despite increasing levels of global wealth and giant leaps in technological development, global poverty and inequity are at higher levels now than 30 years ago'. Moving back to the 1970s, when the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation's report *What Now: Another Development* (1975) was published, the article also describes how the development debate was then framed. Development was seen by many as a fairly straightforward process through which Southern countries should strive to replicate the economic structures of the North. Yet at the same time, Coronel and Dixit note, this conception was being questioned. Among the early attempts to envision another view of development was the *What Now* report, which stressed the need for pluralism, self-reliance and holism as well as ecological concern. With the benefit of thirty years of hindsight, Coronel and Dixit's article revisits the principles of *What Now* and weighs them against the development thinking of today, epitomised by the UN Millennium Development Goals.

From *What Now* to *What Next*  
Reflections on three decades of  
international politics and development

*Praful Bidwai*

In the second article, Praful Bidwai provides a bird's-eye view of major political and social changes during the past three decades or so, in part developing and expanding on the analysis in the first article. Like Coronel and Dixit, Bidwai sees a world fraught with contradiction and ambiguity. On the positive side are decolonisation, increases in living standards in some countries, decreasing inter-state conflicts and, importantly, the end of the Cold War. Yet such developments have been partly eclipsed by chronic and growing poverty in many parts of the world, persistent and increasing inequalities among and within nations, worsening ethnic tensions, and unceasing environmental destruction, with climate change as a new and potentially disastrous threat. Bidwai further sees recent decades as the period that brought about the rise of neoliberalism as a dominant ideology and the consolidation of the elitist or middle-class belief in the supposedly limitless benefits of 'the free market'. The consequences of these trends are many and profound and include a 'rolling back' of state capacities, growth in corporate power, exacerbation of the 'commodification' and degradation of nature, and marginalisation of other economic paradigms. Neoliberalism and free-market tenets, he holds, have also had a fundamental impact on international relations and the direction that principal multilateral economic organisations, such as the WTO, have taken. Yet these damaging developments have been closely accompanied by creative popular opposition. The extensive protests organised nowadays whenever major international political or economic meetings take place, is but one example. This resistance, Bidwai argues, is a significant source of hope for a better world.

Before Thinking about *What Next*  
Prerequisites for alternatives

*Gilbert Rist*

The third contribution, Gilbert Rist's 'Before thinking about *What Next*: Prerequisites for alternatives', intertwines self-critical reflection on the premises of 'transformative' undertakings such as the *What Next* project with an interrogation of the notion of development. Both of these elements, Rist argues, are critical prerequisites for attempts to envision alternative futures. The deep-rooted belief in development, characteristic of modern society, he maintains, is a key reason why so many prevailing social, economic and environmental

problems are not tackled successfully. For ‘development’ has become inexorably bound up with processes of ever-increasing ‘commodification of nature and social relations’, marketisation and economic growth, and, ultimately, a westernisation of the world. As such, it should not be seen as the solution to global problems, as the dominant discourse has it, but, in fact, as the very source of many of them. It is therefore urgent that we rid ourselves of the naïve belief in the blessings of ‘development’, he states. But this may be a tall order, since development is one of the grand narratives of our age, an irrefutable ‘good’ transcending ideological divisions and deeply rooted in the Western psyche. The task requires deconstructing the assumptions and tacit epistemological preconditions which give rise to ‘development thinking’ in the first place, many of which have their roots in economic theory. If such ‘deconstruction’ is neglected, efforts like the *What Next* project, he writes, run the risk of reproducing ‘the usual Western hegemonic programme’ cloaked in the name of ‘universalism’. In order to evade the ethnocentrism with which initiatives in the field of development have been historically associated it is imperative, as we aspire to tackle the current problems and envision a better future, that non-Western voices be placed at the core.

### Enough!

#### Global challenges and responsible lifestyles

*Göran Bäckstrand and Lars Ingelstam*

The subsequent article, ‘Enough! Global challenges and responsible lifestyles’, written by Göran Bäckstrand and Lars Ingelstam, is a follow-up, thirty years later, to their 1975 paper entitled ‘How Much is Enough? – Another Sweden’. That paper, which was written as a part of *What Now*, gave rise to an intense national debate. It proposed a number of reductions in Swedish consumption patterns in light of the need to share resources among the world’s countries more equitably. And it offered a blueprint of what an alternative development pattern for a rich industrialised country like Sweden should be like from the point of view of international equity. Bäckstrand and Ingelstam’s contribution to the present issue of *Development Dialogue* asks: How does the 1975 vision stand today? Focusing chiefly on the issue of economic equity, the 1975 blueprint for ‘another Sweden’, they conclude, gave insufficient attention to ecological constraints, human security, and the diversity of actors on the international political scene. However, they contend, the basic proposal – that a more equitable world requires lifestyle changes in rich countries – remains valid today. Curbing consumption in the rich countries is necessary not only to foster equity but also to improve the rich world’s own quality

of life. Beyond a certain income and consumption level, which rich countries as a whole have already passed, individuals and societies do not experience improvements in quality of life. For Bäckstrand and Ingelstam the conclusion is clear: if the goal of economic growth is increased human well-being, the rich world ought to lessen its aspiration for rising levels of growth, consumption and wealth. Indicators that assess human well-being and quality of life, instead of the limited GDP measure, ought to be a central pillar in future politics.

### Activism, Expertise, Commons

*Larry Lohmann*

The issue of what development is and how it is commonly conceived, is also dealt with in the fifth article of this volume, 'Activism, Expertise, Commons' by Larry Lohmann. For many policymakers and activists, social and political reality is imagined to be divided into two parts: what Lohmann terms 'disembodied, potent, transcendental, "global" entities' such as 'globalization' and their alleged counterpart in the 'local' and 'particular'. Through such dualisms emerges, among other things, a view of development as being a process of planning, taming, organising and rationalising undeveloped, natural, irrational or unmapped domains. However, these dualisms, through which much politics – tacitly or overtly – tends to operate, are, he says, subject to incessant collapse. Using three different examples – dams/development, commodification/'the economy' and science – Lohmann describes the processes by which the dichotomies are built up and disintegrated. Every development 'master plan' and its implementation, he points out, evolves through an endless chain of revisions, additions, restructurings and other redistributions of power in offices, corners of farmers' fields and elsewhere. Similarly, the politically-contested frontier between 'the market' and what is imagined to be 'outside the market' constantly shifts as the institutions of 'economics' work at the unfinishable job of creating an 'economy'. A more determined awareness of the processes through which dualisms between intention and world, theory and practice and 'inside' and 'outside' are set up, Lohmann suggests, could help middle-class activism better achieve its goals. Rather than buying into a dichotomous metaphysics by attempting to improve theories that are seen as different in kind from practice, he argues, middle-class activists might become more effective by becoming more self-conscious about the primacy of forming closer working alliances with what he calls 'commoners', whom he sees as being often less prone to imagine political action in terms of such dichotomies.

## Civil Society: What Next?

*Göran Hydén*

The sixth article, ‘Civil Society: What Next?’ by Göran Hydén, deals with the increasingly important role of civil society in today’s world, with particular reference to the field of development. In the wake of the structural political transformations of the past two or three decades – notably, the ‘rolling back’ of state capacities and the reinforcement of corporate power – civil society has emerged into a position of central importance. In the area of development, civil society initiatives have been given prominence as alternatives to, what has been perceived as, a failed development agenda largely driven by top-down state-planning and, later, free-market policy. To help clear up the conceptual confusion surrounding the term civil society, Hydén first traces its historical-political roots. In the face of the increasing influence of neo-liberal economic policies and the skewed nature of the global economic system, he writes, many civil society organisations (CSOs) ‘see themselves increasingly in opposition ... above all to corporate capital’. In their endeavour to redress the imbalances of the global order and move beyond mere critique, ‘global justice’ organisations face a number of challenges: to seek to exert influence in established and new sites of action, to pursue reactive and proactive work, and to grapple simultaneously with local, national as well as global political contexts. Perhaps the most demanding task facing CSOs, in Hydén’s view, is ‘to make the poor part of a solidarity movement, in which they are not just pawns but autonomous actors’. To do this, he says, CSOs must increasingly engage in integrating activist work with continuous self-reflection and analysis regarding methods, tactics and possibilities for increasing civil society cooperation.

## Stop the ‘Stockholm Syndrome’

### Lessons from 30 years of UN summits

*Pat Mooney*

Such self-reflection lies at the core of the final article collected here, Pat Mooney’s ‘Stop the “Stockholm Syndrome”! Lessons learned from 30 years of UN summits’. An activist for more than thirty years and a participant in numerous international conferences in the field of environment and development, Mooney sets out by taking stock of the achievements of the summits and major conferences held at the international level over the past three decades. His view is plain: they have yielded meagre results, if any at all. In addition to accomplishing very little politically, these international high-level meetings have also had a detrimental impact on the work of civil society, Mooney argues. They serve to exhaust the energy of CSOs through, for ex-

ample, long and complicated preparatory processes, and to divert attention away from work that could otherwise have been carried out. Civil society groups should therefore, he contends, consider to boycott future ‘gala international fora’. But such a tactic may be difficult to achieve, as many CSOs suffer from the ‘Stockholm Syndrome’: that is, they have been ‘taken hostage’ by the logic and appeal of international summitry. Mooney sketches two possible treatments for the ‘Stockholm Syndrome’. One is for civil society to devote more of its time to influencing and restructuring the UN and its agencies as well as other international organisations. The other is to engage in an intensified dialogue among civil society organisations themselves in order to strengthen information flows and probe strategic possibilities for increased cooperation. Mooney’s article is a revised and updated version of a paper previously published by the ETC Group.

## Appendix I

### *The What Next project (2002–2006)*

The *What Next* project has been organised and implemented by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation. The undertaking has received directions, guidance and advice from several groups, meetings and seminars. In addition to the participants listed below, approximately 50 persons have contributed to the process as authors of *What Next* papers or in informal consultations.

The *Core Group* met three times in the course of the project work. The meetings were held 26–30 May, 2002, 3–6 December 2003, and 8–12 June 2004. A majority of the Core Group came for all three meetings, while some could only participate in one or two. Participants in the Core Group included:

Phyllis Bennis (USA), Praful Bidwai (India), Ben Cashdan (South Africa), Sheila Coronel (Philippines), Kunda Dixit (Nepal), Michael Dorsey (USA), Susan George (France), Göran Hydén (Sweden/USA), Adetoun Ilumoka (Nigeria), Danny Kennedy (Australia), Joanna Kerr (Canada), Larry Lohmann (UK), Kamil Mahdi (Iraq/UK), Pat Mooney (Canada), Sumati Nair (India/Netherlands), Bernardo Reyes (Chile), Gilbert Rist (Switzerland).

A *Drafting Group* was formed with some members of the Core Group with the mandate to prepare the *What Next* Report. This group met twice, 13–16 June 2004 and 17–19 September 2004. It included the following people:

Phyllis Bennis (USA), Praful Bidwai (India), Sheila Coronel (The Philippines), Kunda Dixit (Nepal), Michael Dorsey (USA) and Pat Mooney (Canada).

Soon after the first Core Group meeting, a group including a *younger generation* of activists and scholars met 19–21 June, 2002, to discuss the concept of the project. Some members of this group have later participated in seminars and workshops organised within the framework of the project. The members of the initial group were:

Premesh Chandran (Malaysia), Jill Clements (UK), Danny Kennedy (Australia), Cesar Marchesino (Argentina), Graciela Melitsko (Argentina/UK), Anuradha Mittal (India), Wagaki

Mwangi (Kenya), Theodore Oben (Cameroon), Linn Persson (Sweden), Klas Rönnbäck (Sweden), Johanna Sandahl (Sweden), Helen Tilley (USA), Shigeo Watanabe (Japan), Zonny Woods (Canada) and Miya Yoshitani (USA/Australia).

A seminar on *How Next: the Future Role of Civil Society* was organised with the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology in Dehra Dun, India, on 23–27 February 2003. Participants included:

Praful Bidwai (India), Michael Dorsey (USA), Anwar Fazal (Malaysia), Anita Ghai (India), Adetoun Ilumoka (Nigeria), Pat Mooney (Canada), Ricardo Navarro (El Salvador), Claire Pentecost (USA), Sanja Sarnavka (Croatia), Mira Shiva (India), Vandana Shiva (India), S.P. Shukla (India) and Zonny Woods (Canada).

A seminar on *What Next in Economics* was organised on 6–10 November 2004 in Saint Augustine, Florida, USA. Participants were:

Tariq Banuri (Pakistan/Thailand), Patrick Bond (South Africa), Frank Bracho (Venezuela), Robin Broad (USA), Nicola Bullard (Australia/Thailand), Edgar Cahn (USA), Thais Corral (Brazil), Michael Dorsey (USA), Riane Eisler (USA), Sven Giegold (Germany), Hazel Henderson (USA), Judy Henderson (Australia), Steve Keen (Australia), Larry Lohmann (UK), Gilles Raveaud (France), Elisabeth Sahtouris (USA), Simran Sethi (USA/India) and Mariama Williams (Jamaica/USA).

Furthermore, a meeting on the first draft of the *What Next Report* was held on 16–18 January 2006 in Ottawa, Canada. The participants included:

Tariq Banuri (Pakistan/Thailand), Phyllis Bennis (USA), Praful Bidwai (India), Terry Boehm (Canada), Sue Cass (Canada), Joanna Kerr (Canada), Pat Mooney (Canada), Brian K. Murphy (Canada), Alejandro Nadal (Mexico), Anita Nayar (India/USA/UK), Arturo Quizhpe Peralta (Equador), Gilles Raveaud (France), Colleen Ross (Canada), Zenebeworke Tadesse Marco (Ethiopia), Jim Thomas (UK), José Utrera (Guatemala/Netherlands), Mariama Williams (Jamaica/USA) and Gregor Wolbring (Germany/Canada).



At the **Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation** the *What Next* project has been an ongoing, inspiring endeavour for several years. The staff has tackled the tasks and challenges as a team, but have also had particular roles and responsibilities. Thus, Niclas Hällström and Olle Nordberg have served as project directors. Robert Österbergh has mastered the extensive editorial work with assistance from Gerd Ericson, and Mattias Lasson has designed and laid out the volumes. Kajsa Övergaard, Kerstin Kvist and Matilda Hald have administered the meetings and organised the distribution of the publications, while Lotta Elfström and Amy Yngve have kept a firm grip on the finances. Wendy Davies and Daphne Thuvesson, who are not on the permanent staff of the Foundation, have devoted a lot of time to edit and prepare the manuscripts and make them ready for printing.

