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CED

development
digest

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This digest features important articles on development and social transformation in order to reach those working in the field and not having knowledge of these documents. It is aimed at promoting further reading of the originals, and generating public debate and action on public issues. The articles are compiled and edited for easy reading and comprehension of the concepts, and not so much to reproduce the academic accuracy of the original texts.

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Dear Reader,

Twenty five years ago, when we registered doccentre as Centre for Education and Documentation (CED), it was an assertion of an independent information institution on social issues in the public domain. Following our desire to have open systems, CED developed a cafeteria approach with a rich menu of non-academic information on social justice, development and change. Over the years, the range of materials from clippings, non-published papers, pamphlets, newsletters, journals, books, videos, to digital information, has made CED a unique hub to students, professionals and activists alike.

Like all gold mines, we are within physical reach of only those around Bombay, and around our relatively new (seven years old) archive at Bangalore. We therefore started DOCPOST (Documentation by Post). The Development Digest is our latest offering in this our 25th year. It is a special DOCPOST, where instead of offering you a menu to choose from, we are picking out the best of our material, processing it to make it more readable, usable and digestible.

The idea for such a digest evolved from the feedback we received from a wide range of activists, and development workers. We learnt that despite the glut of information, access to it is difficult for the bulk of NGOs in rural settings. Where there is access, making sense of it, and figuring out what to read or where to start, is a problem. Further, most of us are pre-occupied with our own projects and have little time for broader developments.

Many of you felt that while there is a lot of research and publications coming out from various institutions and NGOs, much of it is project related and locally oriented. There is a need to relate to macro-issues, to areas beyond the immediate social organization, economic programme, political issues, or cultural forms to areas that include technology and science; business and trade, media and communications, local events and global phenomena. These aspects without doubt impinge on our work.

So, in this monthly series the DEVELOPMENT DIGEST, CED wishes to reach out to the generalists and specialists, the learner and the learned, to people from all walks of life, from various classes, regions and continents. The articles are culled

from several newspapers, journals, reports, newsletters, books, magazines and the Net based on their relevance to development thinking and practice, the alternatives they provide in terms of structure and institutional form and the values of democracy, equity and social justice that they are rooted in. The emphasis is on communicating the basic concept, rather than making academically correct statements. Once you get the main idea, you might want to read more, so we provide you the reference to the full text as well as a CED reference number given in square brackets that you can get through our regular DOCPOST (Documentation by POST) system.

We do not claim to have exclusive access to the treasure of information. We are ordinary activists, information activists if you will. And like all good activists we rely on your contributions and suggestions. In fact your contribution is a must. So send in any material that you think should be included in this digest.

Now a disclaimer for the record! Most of the material in the digest is based on other published material, some of it is copyrighted. We don't claim any originality or authorship. The whole purpose of this Digest is to make the ideas available to you for your reference and study, as well as for the public good - the issues chosen are those of vital public importance.

Please also bear in mind that what you pay for is not the original material or contents. It is to cover a part of the expenses of documentation, processing and printing of these materials.

The Editors



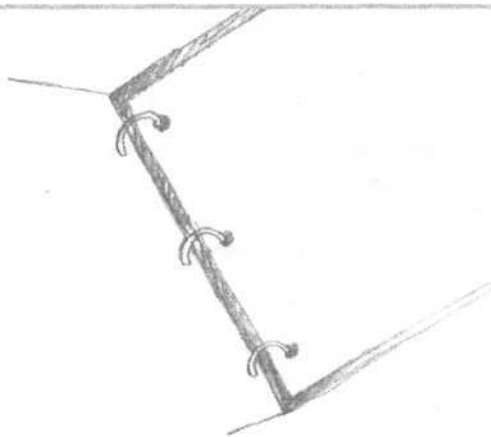
A note on the form... HOWTO USE AND REUSE THIS DIGEST!

Though we will be sending you monthly dispatches of around 40 pages, it is not a periodical, nor is the digest dated. However every issue has a Volume Number adjacent to the logo of the digest.

You will notice that the articles are only loosely bound and can be pulled out as single articles, and read at leisure. At the bottom of every *even (left side) page*, you will find the *broad subject category* (written in upper case in a shaded box) in which we think the article falls, and as a footer on every *odd (right side) page*, is the *key word title of the piece*. All pages have pre-punched holes to help you file the individual articles according to the subject categories proposed by us or by any other order of your choice. An old diary cover can be used to file your articles. We will also be making special folders soon.

Pre-punched blank sheets of paper are provided for your notes. After a few issues, we will send you page separators with bookmarks as well.

So hopefully within a short while you will have a documentation unit of your own, on your desk!




The Invention of UNDERdevelopment

'Development has become an amoeba-like concept', says Wolfgang Sachs, 'shapeless and ineradicable. It spreads everywhere because it connotes the best of intentions. The term is hailed by the IMF and the Vatican alike, by revolutionaries carrying their guns, as well as by field experts carrying their Samsonites. The concept allows any intervention to be sanctified in the name of a higher goal. Therefore even enemies feel united under the same banner. The term creates a common ground, a ground on which right and left, elites and grassroots fight their battles'.

The notion of development was highly contested at one stage. Marxists saw it as the process of developing into a classless society, through class struggle, whereas the liberals looked for growth or enlarging the cake rather than re-distributing it. There is also the trickle down effect! Among NGOs, several constructs have been considered synonymous with development: people's participation and empowerment are but two of them.

Today, 'development' by whatever name, seems to boil down to one thing: the market - produce, organise, sell, save, speculate ... anything. So long as it gives you that extra rupee, it is 'development'! Even leftist governments the world over seem to have resigned themselves to this fate.

It is in this context - and given recent events, with a sense of déjà vu, that we re-read the Development Dictionary, where the authors start with how Truman, in 1949, labelled the large parts of the world as 'underdeveloped', thereby setting the US and the Western capitalist model as the ideal or aim of 'development'.

The Development Dictionary—A Guide to Knowledge as Power by 
Wolfgang Sachs (Editor). Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1997. 408 pages
[B.Q12.S66]

The Development Dictionary

Wolfgang Sachs and Gustavo Esteva

Development's hidden agenda was nothing else than the Westernization of the world.

At the end of World War II, the United States was a formidable and incessant productive machine, unprecedented in history. All institutions created in those years recognized that fact; even the United Nations Charter echoed the United States' Constitution.

The Americans wanted to consolidate that hegemony and make it permanent and explicit. For this purpose, they conceived a political campaign on a global scale, and an appropriate emblem to identify the campaign.

And they launched both on January 20, 1949, the day President Truman took office. On that day a new era was opened for the world! The era of development! In his speech, Truman described a large part of the world as underdeveloped.

Thus on that day, two billion people became so. In a real sense, from that time on, they ceased being what they were, in all their diversity. They were turned into an inverted mirror of someone else's reality; a mirror that belittles them and sends them off to the end of the queue; a mirror that defines their identity in the terms of a homogenizing and narrow minority, when in reality they are a heterogeneous and diverse majority.

Since then, development has connoted at least one thing: to escape from the undignified condition called underdevelopment. Consequently, catching up was declared to be the historical task.



"Development has become a shapeless amoeba-like word. It cannot express anything because its outlines are blurred. But it remains ineradicable because it appears so benign. They who pronounce the word denote nothing but claim the best of intentions" SACHS (1997).

In order for someone to conceive the possibility of escaping from a particular condition, it is necessary first to feel that one has fallen into that condition. For those who make up two-thirds of the world's population today to think of development of any kind, requires first the perception of themselves as underdeveloped, with the whole burden of connotations that this carries.

Today, for these two-thirds of the peoples of the world, underdevelopment is a threat that has already been carried out - a life experience of subordination and of being led astray, of discrimination and subjugation. Given that precondition, the simple fact of associating with development tends to annul one's own intention, contradict it, and enslave oneself.

It impedes thinking of one's own objectives; it undermines confidence in oneself and one's own culture; it clamours for management from the top down; it converts participation into a manipulative trick to involve people in struggles for getting what the powerful want to impose on them.

The development discourse is made up of a web of key concepts. It is impossible to talk about development without referring to concepts such as poverty, production, the notion of the state, or equality. These concepts first rose to prominence during modern Western history and only then have they been projected on the rest of the world. Each of them crystallizes a set of tacit assumptions which reinforce the Occidental worldview. Development has to pervasively spread these assumptions so that people everywhere are caught up in a Western perception of reality.

The metaphor of development gave global hegemony to a purely Western genealogy of history, robbing peoples of different cultures of the opportunity to define the forms of their social life, the word development accumulating in it a whole variety of connotations. This overload of meanings ended up dissolving its precise significance.

Development has become outdated. The hopes and desires which made the idea fly, are now exhausted; development has grown obsolete.

Knowledge wields power by directing people's attention; it carves out and highlights a certain reality, casting into oblivion other ways of relating to the world around us. At a time when development has evidently failed as a socio-economic endeavour, it has become of paramount importance to liberate ourselves from its dominion over our minds.

The idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape. Delusion and disappointment, failures and crimes have been the steady companions of development and they tell a common story: it did not work.

Nevertheless, the ruin stands there and still dominates the scenery like a landmark. Though doubts are mounting and uneasiness is widely felt, development talk still pervades not only official declarations but even the language of grassroots movements. It is time to dismantle this mental structure.

The authors consciously bid farewell to the defunct idea in order to clear our minds for fresh discoveries. This book - and the Digest - is an invitation to re-view the developmental model of reality and to recognize that we **all** wear not merely tinted, but tainted glasses if we take part in the prevailing development discourse. ▶

Awesome Development ?

I am pleased to report that German technology remains the most awesome in the world.

At a petrol pump on an autobahn, I stare in disbelief at the toilet seat I've just vacated. It has whirred into a slow 360-degree rotation. A small round brush scrubs, soaps, lathers and buffs it, retracting into the wall when done. Automatically, the seat is clean and back into position.

Padma Rao-Sunderji, Outlook, July 21, 2003

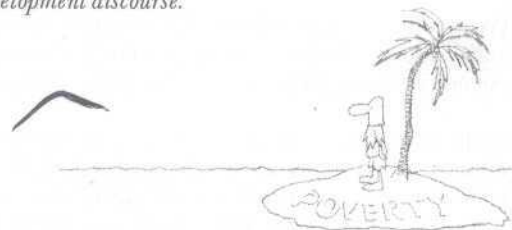
The See-saw Struggle against Poverty


"People don't just come out of poverty. People are continuously falling into poverty too. And the reasons they do so are worth finding out! They probably differ from place to place."

This is the centrepiece of this article by Anirudh Krishna based on a study of 12 villages in Rajasthan.

There is another message in the article. Quite often, we confuse the structural aspects of the persistence of poverty with the ground-level tasks of alleviating poverty. And most of us have tended to take sides in these matters, as if we had solved the puzzle of the chicken- and- the- egg. And further, if one side has taken a holier-than-thou attitude with pride in being holistic and even idealistic, the other side prides itself on being the more pragmatic, down-to-earth, and connected.

The greater temptation is to look at macro-level issues, and on that basis develop poverty alleviation or development programmes. This is not the failing only of governments and political parties. It is a common failing of bilateral and independent agencies too. And this is becoming more pronounced. It is a dangerous aspect of the structural adjustment era that well-meaning resource agencies are unwittingly falling prey to this approach. One does not realise that programmes conceived in rarefied resource-rich ambiances reinforce the top-down, trickle-down approach. Anirudh Krishna wonders at the disappearance of 'trickle-down' from development discourse.



Falling into Poverty: Other Side of Poverty Reduction by Anirudh Krishna. 
EPW Special Article February 8, 2003, 19p.[C.ELDOC6006670]

Falling into Poverty: Other Side of Poverty Reduction

Anirudh Krishna

The net change in poverty over any period of time is a result of two separate trends: some previously poor people escape from poverty, and some non-poor people become poor at the same time. The larger the number of people in the first set, the more pronounced is the reduction in poverty overall, but the larger the number of people in the second set, the lower is the overall achievement.

One local inquiry, undertaken in 12 Rajasthan villages in the districts of Rajsamand and Udaipur, helped produce the following findings:

Enormous variations in poverty are apparent even within this small group of villages located at the most 100 km or so from each other.

- In each village some households have escaped from poverty over the past 25 years and other households have fallen into poverty at the same time. These numbers vary quite significantly, however, from one village to the next.
- The percentage of households escaping poverty over the past 25 years varies from a low of 1.8 per cent to a high of 13.5 per cent, and the percentage of households falling into poverty over this period also varies - quite widely, from 2.4 per cent to 11.8 per cent.

The net decline in poverty numbers escaping from poverty minus numbers falling into poverty - is quite small as a result.

Overcoming Poverty and Falling into Poverty

We used distance from the market as a proxy variable for market integration, and found that neither escape from nor decline nor even the net change in poverty is significantly associated with this variable.

Caste composition is also not very useful for explaining inter-village differences in poverty, as revealed in this study. It is true that poverty is more enduring among households belonging to scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs). And indeed, overall, more SCs and STs are poor

compared with other caste groups. But poverty reduction over time has relatively little to do with the weight of SCs and STs in the village population.

SC and ST households have emerged out of poverty over the past 25 years, and, in fact, a slightly higher proportion of SCs have escaped from poverty, compared with all other caste groups. On the opposite side, however, a somewhat larger proportion of SCs have also fallen into poverty at the same time.

Escaping Poverty

Diversification of income sources is the single most important reason for escaping poverty in this region. More than 80 per cent of households that have escaped from poverty in the past 25 years have successfully diversified their income streams, and they are no longer reliant on agricultural incomes alone.

Employment in the formal sector has not constituted the principal (or even a very important) source of successful diversification. Rather, diversification has involved one or more household members taking up an additional occupation within the informal sector. Connections with a city have been important in a majority of these cases. Not all willing and able persons have been able, however, to gain even these quite pitiful income-earning opportunities. Contacts with a person in the city have been more critical for successful diversification. And no matter how educated or how hardworking a person, opportunities for developing such new income streams have not been available unless they have also at the same time possessed access to a connection in the city.

Next to diversification through a city-based connection, irrigation has proved to be the pathway most often taken out of poverty. Digging or energising a groundwater source successfully is associated with 18 per cent of all cases of households escaping poverty. In the absence of reliable technical information, however, investing in irrigation is a gamble for households in these rural regions, and many households have sunk further into poverty after undertaking similar investments. Unfruitful investment in irrigation facilities counts as a principal reason for nearly 10 per cent of households that have fallen into poverty.

Information is a key resource. Providing regular and reliable information about new opportunities, about water tables and extraction rates, and about

health and healthcare facilities, as we shall see presently, can go a long way towards controlling and reducing poverty in this region.

People need to be connected to growth, and it is in helping them make these connections that NGOs and government agencies can play a helpful role in this region.

Rather than funding the programmes that they operate at present, government agencies and NGOs can make a much more notable contribution, in my view, through providing households in this region with information of various kinds.

Programmes of direct assistance for poverty reduction have had at best only marginal impacts on poverty in these villages.

Becoming Poor

Falling into poverty in this region is associated not with any single cause but usually with a combination of causes, including poor health, large expenses on (poor quality) health care, social functions associated with deaths and with marriages, and high-interest loans taken out from private sources to meet these unaffordable and often crippling expenses. Dealing effectively with all three factors can make a considerable dent in poverty in this region. But even breaking the chain at any one of these links will have a very significant effect.

- ▶ Even households that were quite well to do 25 years ago, that is, which had achieved in the earlier period quite a high position on the stages of progress fell into dire poverty on account of healthcare-related expenses.
- ▶ High expenses on death feasts and marriages constituted the second principal reason for the decline into poverty.
- ▶ The third principal reason of decline - high-interest private - debt - helps to pave the way for the other two reasons.

Concluding Thoughts

A combination of policy interventions, including better information about new income-earning opportunities, accessible and reliable health care facilities, and credit on affordable terms will certainly help to reduce poverty in this region.

But this advice cannot be generalised easily and applied equally to deal with poverty reduction in other parts.

We have assumed, as it were, that the relevant unit of analysis is the country (or at best, a state), and we have pitched our policies at the aggregation of what causes poverty in these large and disparate units.

Comparisons over time are required to discern whether this is, in fact, the case in other parts of India and the developing world. One cannot really know what factors matter for poverty unless one is able to trace their interactions with households' strategies over time.

However, relatively few comparisons across time are available, and it takes considerable expense and a lot of lead time before such data can be reasonably assembled.

Applying scarce development resources more effectively will require investigating more closely what factors are associated with decline and what factors are associated with escape in any particular local context.

Unfortunately, however, we have approached poverty mostly in a top-down mode of analysis.

It is strange that few analysts of global poverty speak any more of '**trickle-down.**' It used to be that trickle-down was a bad idea. Used in the context of the state-led development policies of the 1960s and 1970s, trickle-down was a pejorative term connoting lack of attention to intermediate causal links. Even if high growth rates were, in fact, achieved, it was argued, how would the benefits of growth reach the poor? What were the mechanisms that helped transform growth into poverty reduction in any particular case? In addition to all the other arguments mounted against state-led development strategies, trickle-down was an important part of the lexicon of failure.

But trickle-down is not mentioned much any longer. For some reason, growth has reasserted itself as the prime mover of poverty, and discussions of poverty reduction are subsumed mostly under discussions of strategies for faster growth. ▶

The poor get richer?

Measuring poverty in India has always been a controversial task. The official estimates are based on a sample survey of household consumption expenditures. A large sample, which allows state-level estimates of poverty incidence, is carried out roughly once every five years. The last of these was done in 1999-2000. In the intervening years, a 'thin' sample survey, covering far fewer households is carried out.

The results of the 2000-01 thin sample have just been released. They indicate that poverty for the country as a whole has gone down from 26.2 per cent to 24.4 per cent in a year. The decline is not uniform, though. Rural poverty went down from 27.1 per cent to 24.4 per cent, while urban poverty went up from 23.6 per cent to 25.5 per cent.

Interpreting these changes can never sidestep the problems of sample size, methodology and other issues. Nevertheless, given the country's over-riding policy concern with poverty, it is neither possible nor advisable to ignore what may seem to be statistically insignificant changes. Even a single percentage point change amounts to 10 million people.

The report on the survey indicates that relative price changes largely account for the divergence between urban and rural patterns. Food prices went down in the villages, while they went up in the towns and cities. When viewed against the backdrop of the economy's performance in that year, however, this pattern seems counter-intuitive. In 2000-01, agricultural GDP declined by 0.2 per cent. Despite this, rural poverty went down. On the other hand, industrial GDP grew by a strong 6.3 per cent. Despite this, urban poverty increased. This second fact may partly be explained by services growth, which was uncharacteristically modest at 4 per cent. But even there, the reason services were sluggish was because of the performance of several large financial institutions. The services that typically employ lots of low-income people did reasonably well. If the macro aggregates don't gel with the poverty performance, it is probably because the story is in the regional variations, on which the thin sample does not provide much insight.

Agricultural decline may have hit the relatively more prosperous parts of the rural economy, limiting the number of people at the margin, who would be adversely affected. Similarly, the regional imbalance in industrial growth might not have created the number of jobs a more widespread process might have done. Within the limited scope of information provided by the survey, it is a matter of concern that flat prices of food commodities in the rural areas co-exist with rapidly rising prices in urban areas. Food logistics is an essential component of the anti-poverty programme. Surely the country should have got this right by now?

Finally, the inevitable question needs to be reiterated. Should the focus on nutrition as a measure of poverty not be displaced by broader measures of need fulfilment? By that token, most surveys, large or thin, will probably conclude that the poor are certainly not getting richer.

Business Standard - Opinion, February 5, 2003 [C.ELDOC1070713]
<http://www.business-standard.com/articles/2003/Feb/50050203.85.asp>

Sustaining Localisation

Throughout the world, agriculture is in crisis. Farmers are going bankrupt while international trade in food is booming. Every year, the distance between producers and consumers rises, to the point where the average American meal has now traveled more than 1,500 miles before it arrives on the dinner table. Is there an antidote to this spreading agri-sickness?

Globalisation of the food economy enriches a small number of agri-'businesses'.

In India we have the phenomenon where the state's granaries are spilling over, while at the same time there are starvation deaths! And as the WTO rules come into force the situation is getting worse...

These trends are directly linked to each other.

Helena Norberg-Hodge and Steven Gorelick give an overview of the political economy of localising food in their article - Bringing the Food Economy Home.

Today, roughly half the world's people, mostly in the South, still derive a large proportion of their needs from local economies. What can globalisation offer this majority, other than unrealistic promises? Localisation not only entails far less social and environmental upheaval, it is actually far less costly to implement. In fact, every step towards the local, whether at the policy level or in our communities, brings with it a whole cascade of benefits.



Bringing the Food Economy Home, by Helena Norberg-Hodge and Steven Gorelick. International Society for Ecology and Culture, UK, <http://www.isec.org.uk/articles/bringing.html>. [C.ELDOC6006689]

'Paryavarana Parasa', an invitation to Dharti Utsav, The Timbaktu Collective, June 2003 [C.ELDOC6007775]

'Community Grain Bank: An Alternative Public Distribution System' in Institutional Development in Social Interventions by Vijay Padaki and Manjulika Vaz. Sage, New Delhi, 2003. [B.Q80.P60]

Bringing the Food Economy Home

Hodge and Steven Gorelick

Localisation is essentially a process of de-centralisation - shifting economic activity into the hands of millions of small- and medium-sized businesses instead of concentrating it in fewer and fewer mega-corporations. Localisation doesn't mean that every community would be entirely self-reliant; it simply means striking a balance between trade and local production by diversifying economic activity and shortening the distance between producers and consumers wherever possible.

Where should the first steps towards localisation take place? Since food is something everyone, everywhere, needs every day, a shift from global food to local food would have the greatest impact of all.

What is 'global food'?

Global food is based on an economic theory which says that instead of producing a diverse range of food crops, every nation and region should specialise in one or two globally-traded commodities, which they can produce cheaply enough to compete with every other producer. The proceeds from exporting those commodities are then used to buy food for local consumption. According to this theory, everyone will benefit.

The theory, as it turns out, is wrong. Rather than providing universal benefits, the global food system has been a major cause of hunger and environmental destruction around the world.

The environment has been hit particularly hard. The global system demands centralised collection of tremendous quantities of single crops, leading to the creation of huge monocultures. Monocultures, in turn, require massive inputs of pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilisers. These practices systematically eliminate biodiversity from farmland, and lead to soil erosion, eutrophication of waterways, and the poisoning of surrounding ecosystems.

Since global food is destined for distant markets, food miles have gone up astronomically, making food transport a major contributor to fossil fuel use, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Social and economic costs

As farms have become larger and more mechanised, the number of farmers has steadily declined. Further, most of what we spend on food goes to the middlemen, not farmers. In the US, for example, distributors, marketers, and input suppliers take 91 cents out of every food dollar, while farmers keep only 9 cents. As global corporations take over food marketing, small shopkeepers are also being squeezed out.

In the South, the globalisation of food is driving literally millions of farming families from the land. Dolma Tsering, a farmer in Northern India, described what has happened in her village: "Whole families used to work on the land. We grew almost everything we needed. Now imported wheat is destroying our market. It's just not worth going to the trouble of producing food anymore, and the village is being emptied of people." Throughout the South, most of those displaced people will end up in urban slums - without community, without connection to the land, without a secure and healthy food supply.

The declining quality of food

Because of the global food system, people around the world are induced to eat largely the same foods. In this way, farm monocultures go hand in hand with a spreading human monoculture, in which people's tastes and habits are homogenised in part through advertising, which promotes foods suited to monocultural production, mechanised harvesting, long-distance transport and long-term storage. New additives and processes like UHT milk are continually developed to extend storage time.

For harried consumers, food corporations also provide 'convenience' foods that can be re-heated quickly in a microwave, and even items like 'macaroni and cheese on a stick', which can be eaten with one hand. Nutritional content? We're told not to worry, since some of the nutrients destroyed in processing can supposedly be reinserted. Flavour? Hundreds of additives are on hand to mimic the taste and texture of real food. Food quality? With producers in a competitive race to the bottom, it's not surprising that food

poisoning cases are steadily increasing, and new diseases like BSE have appeared.

Decades of government support for global trade have concentrated wealth and power in ever larger corporations, which increasingly dominate every aspect of the global food supply - from seed and feed to everything on supermarket shelves. Today just two companies, Cargill and Archer Daniels Midland, control 70 to 80 percent of the world's grain trade. One agribusiness, Philip Morris, gets ten cents out of every American food dollar - more than that earned by all US farmers combined.

Benefits of the local

Local food is, simply, food produced for local and regional consumption. For that reason, 'food miles' are relatively small, which greatly reduces fossil fuel use and pollution. There are other environmental benefits as well. While global markets demand monocultural production, local markets give farmers an incentive to diversify. Diversified farms cannot accommodate the heavy machinery used in monocultures. Diversification also lends itself to organic methods since crops are far less susceptible to pest infestations.

Local food systems have economic benefits. Most of the money spent on food goes to the farmer, not corporate middlemen. Juan Moreno, a farmer in the Andalusian region of Spain, told us, "When we used to sell our vegetables to supermarkets we got almost nothing for them. Now, through the local co-op, we're getting much more - three times as much for some vegetables."

Small diversified farms can help reinvigorate entire rural economies, since they employ far more people per acre than large monocultures. In the UK, farms under 100 acres provide five times more jobs per acre than those over 500 acres. Moreover, money paid as wages to farm workers benefit local economies far more than the money paid for heavy equipment and the fuel to run it.

Food quality

Local food is usually far fresher - and therefore more nutritious - than global food. It also needs fewer preservatives or other additives, and organic methods can eliminate pesticide residues. Farmers can grow varieties that are best suited to local climate and soils, allowing flavour and nutrition to take

precedence over transportability, shelf life and the whims of global markets. Animal husbandry can be integrated with crop production, providing healthier, more humane conditions for animals and a non-chemical source of fertility.

Even food security would increase if people depended more on local foods. Instead of being concentrated in a handful of corporations, control over food would be dispersed and decentralised.



More Food, Low Cost?

Many believe that the global food system is necessary because it produces more food and delivers it at a lower price. In reality, however, the global food system is neither more productive than local systems nor is it really cheaper. Studies carried out all over the world show that small-scale, diversified farms have a higher total output per unit of land than large-scale monocultures.

Global food is also very costly, though most of those costs do not show up in its supermarket price. Instead, a large portion of what we pay for global food comes out of our taxes - to fund research into pesticides and biotech, to subsidise the transport, communications and energy infrastructures the system requires, and to pay for the foreign aid that pulls Third World economies into the destructive global system. We pay in other ways for the environmental costs of global food, which are degrading the planet our children will inherit.

How do we go local?

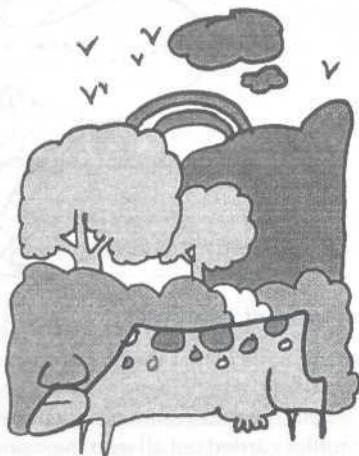
Local food systems have immense advantages, but most policymakers - in the belief that more trade is always better - systematically support the further globalisation of food. As a result, identical products are criss-crossing the globe, with no other purpose than enriching the corporate middlemen that control the global food supply.

An immediate first step would be to press for policy changes to insure that identical products are not being both imported and exported. If we eliminate needless trade in everything from wheat, milk and potatoes to apple juice and live animals, the reduction in transport alone would bring immediate benefits. What's more, if people around the world were allowed to eat their own bread and drink their own milk, giant corporations wouldn't profit every time we sit down to eat.

Such a step would require a rethinking of 'free trade' dogma. Trade treaties need to be rewritten, reestablishing the rights of citizens to protect their economies and resources from corporate predators.

At the same time, subsidies that now support the global food system need to be shifted towards more localised systems. Governments have spent tremendous sums of taxpayers' money to prop up a costly food system which pretends to provide 'cheap' food. If even a fraction of that sum were devoted to supporting local food systems instead, the cost of local food would decrease substantially, and its availability rapidly grow.

Shifts in energy policy - which now heavily subsidise the large-scale centralised energy systems needed for global trade and industrial 'development' of all kinds - are critically important. In the South, where the energy infrastructure is still being built up, a shift towards a decentralised renewable energy path could be easily implemented, at a fraction of the cost



in dollars and human upheaval that huge dams, nuclear power and fossil fuels entail.

We also need to recognise the importance of local knowledge to maintain existing local food systems, and to reclaim those that have been largely lost. Today, a one-size-fits-all educational model is being imposed worldwide, eliminating much of the knowledge and skills people need to live on their own resources, in their own places on the earth.

Changes in tax policy would also help to promote food localisation. Now, tax credits for capital- and energy-intensive technologies favour the largest and most global producers. Meanwhile the more labour-intensive methods of small-scale diversified producers are penalised through income taxes, payroll taxes and other taxes on labour.

Re-regulating Global Trade, Deregulating Local Trade

As we've seen, the steady deregulation of global trade and finance has led to the emergence of giant corporations whose activities are highly polluting and socially exploitative. This in turn has created a need for ever more social and environmental regulations, along with a massive bureaucracy to administer them. That bureaucracy is strangling smaller businesses with paperwork, inspections, fines, and the cost of mandated technologies. The regulatory burden is too great for the small to bear, while the big happily pay up and grow bigger as their smaller competitors die out. How many dairies have gone out of business because they had to have stainless steel sinks, when porcelain had served them well for generations?

Today, there is an urgent need to re-regulate global trade, by allowing national and regional governments to control the activities of TNCs. At the same time, there is an equally urgent need to de-regulate local trade, which by its nature is far less likely to damage human health and the environment.

Turning the tide

These policy and regulatory shifts would open up space for thousands of community-based initiatives - many of them already underway - to flourish. From CSAs and box schemes to farmers' markets, food co-ops, and buy-local campaigns, people have already begun the hands-on work needed to rebuild

their local food systems. But these efforts will fall short if government policies continue to tilt the playing field towards the large and global.

When government ministers blindly promote trade for the sake of trade while at the same time discussing reductions in CO2 emissions, the possibility of sensible policy shifts can seem remote. And so it is, unless activists and other citizens unite behind the anti-global and pro-local banners, and exert powerful pressure from below. Already, unprecedented alliances have been created. Environmentalists and labour unionists, farmers and deep ecologists, people from North and South - are all linking hands to say 'no' to an economic steamroller that destroys jobs as quickly as it destroys species, that threatens the livelihood of farmers while driving up the price of healthy food in the marketplace.

Still more work is needed, however, including education campaigns to reveal the connections between our many crises, to spell out the truth about trade and the way we measure progress, and to graphically describe the ecological, social, psychological and economic benefits of localising and decentralising our economies.

Shortening the links between farmers and consumers may be one of the most strategic and enjoyable ways to bring about fundamental change for the better. How satisfying it is to know that by taking a step which is so good for us and our families, we are also making a very real contribution to preserving diversity, protecting jobs and rural livelihoods and the environment, all over the world. ▶

In India, many groups have started reviving the notion among the community to grow local varieties, organically, and for local consumption, to beat this cycle. From the semi-arid deccan region, we have the examples of the Paryavaran Parsa, a celebration of local diversity and enduring tradition, and Community Grain Banks, an initiative among women and dalits. These are but two of the scores and hundreds of such initiatives that presage an essential step that will make another world possible.



Paryavarana Parasa (Environmental Festival)

(Adapted from an invitation to the Dharti Utsav facilitated each year by The Timbaktu Collective in the Rayalseema area of Andhra Pradesh)

This is a celebration of the commons and the common peoples of our land of Forest dwellers, Farmers, Fisher folk and Healers

This is a celebration of how two thirds of our population meet their survival needs and help the rest of the nation survive

This is a celebration of the commons and the rich and abundant biodiversity of Agriculture, Artisanry and Forests

This is a celebration of all the commons and the wisdoms on nurturing nature and nature of healing, growing, living and reciprocating.

This is an assertion of the rights which predate that very word!

The Timbaktu Collective has been striving to rejuvenate and regenerate the natural resources and the traditional genetic base of this area and to revitalise the Traditional Art forms – all three being in a state of degradation. The Collective along with a number of local Panchayats and peoples organisations celebrate every Environment day, as “Paryavarana Parasa” (Environment festival).

The intention is to provide understanding and inspiration to the common people to regain control over their natural resources and their traditional genetic base in order to combat drought and continue to live a sustainable agricultural lifestyle.

The Exhibition & Food stalls have

☞ Traditional seeds - both crops and indigenous tree and bush seeds are being collected from the local farmers and forests. Proper documentation is being done so that we will be able to display the history of all the seeds collected. Seeds will also be made available for sale. In an attached space, Mr. Narayan Reddy, a well-known organic farmer, will conduct four workshops through the two days for interested farmers;

- ☞ Traditional tools - tools used traditionally in household chores, agriculture, fishing and traditional hunting are being collected for display;
- ☞ Traditional herbal remedies - local mendicants have been contacted and they will display a number of herbs, roots, leaves and flowers, with charts explaining methods of preparing medicines and emphasizing certain diseases that are widely prevalent in the region. The mendicants will also be available for consultations.

To us this is another social forum, a bio-regional one. ▶

'Community Grain Banks : An Alternative Public Distribution System'

by Vijay Padaki and Manjulika Vaz

Zaheerabad in Medak District of Andhra Pradesh is a dry region in the Deccan. Traditionally, farmers in the region practiced rainfed agriculture and the main crop was jowar (sorghum) interspersed with some pulses and some greens. Recently, many of the rich landowners shifted to monocropping, preferring to grow cash crops. The poorer and smaller landowners as well as the landless were wage labourers on the large farms. They paid very little attention to their own few acres of land. They were highly dependent on the landlords for both wage earnings as well as food security. The shift to cash crops resulted in less employment, more land left fallow, degradation of cultivated land due to ecologically unsound practices, and threatened food security for the poor.

The Deccan Development Society (DDS) initiated programmes to develop the neglected land of the small / marginal farmers. The programme was initiated through village level organizations of women (*sangams*) from the marginalized communities. They carried out earthworks (such as bunding, water harvesting etc.) to break in this almost barren land. They also encouraged employment of people on their own land. Most important they revived traditional multi-cropping practices, which included legumes. This helped the refertilization of soil. The impact of all this was manifold:

- ▶ Regeneration of the land which led to a three-fold increase in its productivity.
- ▶ People regained confidence in the worth of their efforts.
- ▶ There were increased earnings per household.
- ▶ There was improved food security for every household.

This overall improved situation encouraged the sangam women to put more land under cultivation. In the late '80s they negotiated collective leasing of cultivable fallow lands from the larger, richer and mostly absentee landowners. DDS helped with a loan for the lease money. The crop-raising tasks were shared and managed by *sangam* women themselves. The programme led to changes in the social organization of farming, including the social status traditionally associated with farming. It was acknowledged that there was a shift - from men to women engaged in farming, from higher caste groups to dalits taking the lead.

A Setback

All this effort received a great setback in the early '90s from a statewide politically initiated programme introducing rice through the Public Distribution System at Rs.2 per kilogram. What was the need now for farmers to till their own lands, expend time, energy and resources when there was such an easy, cheap and attractive substitute? This step was hugely detrimental for the local region on many counts - agricultural, ecological, nutritional and cultural.

- ▶ Rice is produced in resource-rich irrigated belts at a distance from this region, thus supporting the big farmers, the transport lobbies and the nexus of middlemen.
- ▶ Rice is culturally alien, and not part of the daily diet. It is also a 'seductive' cereal, white, shiny, easy to cook, requiring no processing. The real problem, however, is that in comparison with the traditional staple diet of coarse grains rice is very low in nutritional value, if it is not complemented adequately with pulses, millets and beans.

A Return To Local Alternatives

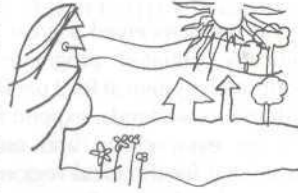
It took a few years for the women of Zaheerabad to see the damaging impact of rice on their lives. Among other things, their families felt weaker, they were getting anaemic, and were not strong enough to do their hard jobs. The *sangam* women deliberated over these issues during their meetings. DDS animators facilitated the thinking with information on the situation - almost 100,000 hectares of land had been left fallow as a direct result of the PDS rice scheme. About half a million woman-days of wages were being lost. Fodder for their cattle, fencing material for their field and roofing for their houses was reduced. There was quite some pressure to get the Rs.75 per month to purchase the PDS rations which would come to the village for only two days.

The women knew that they had to reclaim their fallows, work on regenerating it, and produce their traditional grains. This is when the idea of not only producing but also collectively storing and distributing the local produce was born.

It started off as an experimental project in one village in 1993. They needed finance of Rs.2500 per acre. No bank would offer them a loan for a dryland crop. They approached the Ministry of Rural Development through DDS with a project proposal for an alternative PDS through a Community Grain Fund. That was in 1994.

In each village the women identified 100 acres of fallow land belonging mostly to marginal farmers. The modalities of the project were worked out

with the farmers as project partners. The required money was advanced over a three year period to the farmers for ploughing, manuring, sowing and weeding in a timely manner. The money was to be repaid in the form of grain. Rates were fixed in advance for the grain to be repaid over the three years, thus avoiding the influence of market fluctuations.



Repayment schedules were worked out, and formal agreements were drawn up and signed. Committees of women were set up to look after all the activities of the project in each village. In turn they selected about 20 acres each, which they supervised personally. The women became the managers of the scheme, and handled complex management tasks.

Operations

The grain was collected by the village committees. This constituted the Village Grain Bank. The collection is done in a decentralized way. (Storage of sorghum in bulk is difficult.) Natural and indigenous storage and pest control methods were employed.

The next step in the system was a method of grain distribution. An innovative democratic process was followed to arrive at a wealth ranking within the community. The objective was for the grain bank to cater differentially to the needs of the poorer families. The criteria for assessing rural poverty were evolved in a participatory exercise by the villagers themselves. An assessment of every household in the village was done on a five-point scale. Each level of ranking was identified with a different colour. In the large village map drawn up, each house was marked in a specific colour after much deliberation. The households selected for grain distribution at the end of this open and transparent process received a sorghum card from the sangam with the colour coding for the ranking clearly indicated.

The card entitled the household to 25 kilograms of sorghum per month at a subsidized price of around Rs.2 per kilogram for six months starting from the rainy season. This is when wage earnings are low and food is scarce. The proceeds from the sale of the grain were deposited in a bank as the **Community Grain Fund**, which goes towards reclaiming more fallows, and extending the reach of the food security scheme. ▶

For more see : Food Security for Dryland Communities, By P V Satheesh, Director, Deccan Development Society. http://www.ddsindia.com/foodsec_dryland.htm [C.ELDOC6007488]

An Architect of Localisation

Joginder Singh outlines the facets of the work of Laurie Baker, an architect who settled down in Kerala, and identified himself with the locals through his work – building homes for people.

There is many a lesson to be learnt from Laurie Baker, not only for the architect and the mason, the student and the researcher, the ordinary citizen and the intellectual activist, but for all those who are committed to a value-based involvement in the political, cultural, economic, social, and ecological systems of life.

Laurie Baker himself may only look at these conceptions and critiques in guileless wonder.

If one asked Laurie Baker whether his work was a statement of his politics, he would look at you quizzically – neither in disbelief, nor with cynicism, but in just plain wonder. Is not everything political? Is life that is worth living, lived to the full, away from politics?

Laurie Baker of course does not say – nor does he imply – these things. He does not dabble in the ponderous rhetoric of 'appropriate technology, 'low-cost housing', or 'architecture for the people'. This is what we read into him and his work. He simply goes about doing his work. Why? It is his passion, being in the company of people – his 'clients' who do not see in his passion anything other than simple common sense that appeals to them, makes them comfortable in the homes that he has built and at the work places that he has created.



Architecture for the People

Joginder Singh Interviews Laurie Baker

After five decades of a very active and varied architectural practice, what has the term architecture come to mean for you?

Broadly speaking, it's just the design of buildings and what they look like - different buildings and of course different designs for different functions. The thing that has meant the most to me, living in India for the past fifty years, is that the architecture reflects the lives of the people who live in the buildings they build and the materials with which they build - materials which are underneath them and around them, the way they deal with the climate and so on. In a country the size of India, every 100 km or even less very often, the architecture has changed, so it tells you a lot about the people, it tells you a lot about the climate and it tells you a lot about the materials available and how man has made them usable for his own purposes.

The (modern) buildings I see and the few buildings I go into, to me they have nothing to do with the normal life of the Kerala individual or with the climate or with the materials available and they are a big curse in many ways. For one, they take absolutely no interest in protecting the people who are using them from our climatic conditions - they are bad for rain, they are very bad for the heat and then, in turn, that means introducing all those 'modern' devices like air-conditioning and big glass windows. The one contradicts the other - the big glass window lets in more heat as well as the light it does, but the heat is more. And then, of course, they have to have their curtains and air-conditioners and all the very expensive things, and use a continual amount of public energy, which isn't getting to the ordinary millions of people at all - so to me it's just bad! I don't see anything particularly beautiful about it. Sometimes they are quite interesting as patterns of squares and big holes but they don't convey anything to me in the way that the local architecture does, even the recent local architecture that still uses local materials and deals with local conditions.

You have been known for the incorporation of local craft and tradition in your buildings. Do you feel that modern architecture has anything to do with art and craft? Traditional crafts in the country have almost died - how can architecture be used as a medium to revive them?

Depends on what people mean when they use the word 'craft' - I imagine the dictionary probably explains it as the things that people make. Well, for one thing immediately, in modern architecture, hardly anything is done by local people, except those hired by the contractors and so on. They do not use local materials and they are wasting an enormous amount of the country's energy and therefore money. The economy of the country is very poor at the moment, and all because you have your fans on all the time, you have your lights on all the time, you have your air-conditioners on all the time, you import things like oil from the Gulf countries to burn limestone into cement. To me, for a country that is still struggling to cope with millions of homeless people and with slums and villages that don't have electricity and water, it seems silly to go on from the traditional to the modern, which is almost wholesale imported and not a good thing when it gets here.

As an example, I'm told that in Ernakulam there are a lot of these new modern flats, six to ten storeys high - 'modern' to look at. But I was told that more than half of them had been full but are now empty. For the reasons that I have mentioned already, people get tired of living up at the top and having to walk all the way up and down the stairs because the electricity isn't there, the power isn't there, the water can be a problem, and all that sort of thing. So to me, gradually, we will be taught a lesson and have no option but to learn from what we see.

Whatever individual houses you have done, you've always managed to strike a very personal rapport with your clients. Would you comment on your approach to designing residences?

My clients are very often families, or in the case of schools or hospitals, it's the people in charge or those who have caused it to happen. I prefer to go to the client to see how he performs, he or she, how they live, what they do, what they want, what sort of a family or an organisation it is. And then I want to see the site that they have, why did they have it, do they really think it is worth having or doing, or what a lovely site - don't spoil it, what do you want to do with it and so on.

I think the client comes to me because he has similar feelings and they know that no two buildings I have built have ever been the same and everybody gets the building that they want or hope for. It doesn't always work out. It's mostly getting to know them and asking about their family life and what they'll do when the children grow up and things like that, and very quickly

they either have to throw me out for being too inquisitive or become friends. And many of our friends are people that I have built for 30-50 years ago. One of the most satisfying things from my point of view is that 99.9 per cent of the people I build for remain our friends over these many years.

You have always worked as a one-man army - designing, building, supervising, almost like the earlier traditions of a master builder. In the initial years of your architectural practice you did take on apprentices but later refrained from doing that. Did you feel that your architecture was getting diluted in some way?

There is that, that dilution. One or two people were with me for a time and then went off on their own. They did get the ideas or some of the ideas and it is inevitable that one or two or three have made use of the name, which was beginning to get known because of the bigger projects. They have done many of the things that I don't like - putting bits of fancy chajjas (sunshades) or plaster all over the thing and using brickwork only as a decorative feature somewhere, things like that. I feel a bit peeved sometimes, but anyway there are people who want that.

I still think that the main thing that is not taught and is still missing is the personal rapport that must be developed between the client and the architect so that the client will get what he wants. And also there is the other side to it: if you come across a client, I mean one who wants everything that you don't believe in, then you can say that, really, you've come to the wrong person and I don't want to do it.

When you see all the old buildings, usually most of this that I am aiming at, as though it's something new, is already there. In the Himalayas where there is very little 'technology' available, they build together as a family. There will be one long building but every now and then there will be a personal touch.

I don't know whether you can say what is the Laurie Baker legacy. As I have already said, there is a revolt against everybody being in an identical flat ten storeys high, for very many reasons. So it is a very good thing that the revolt has come now. The thing is, will the people who build high storeys do anything about it? ▶

Civilising Dissent

*Civil Society is often posed as an alternative to the militant, often violent, means that were in vogue in the latter half of the 20th century on behalf of the oppressed, be they nations or local communities. The last decade of that same century has seen the **pacification of dissent.***

There is as a consequence a groping for an acceptable alternative that will give the proponents of change some self-respect, and yet which will not actually militate against the existing (international) order. Voila! Civil Society!

This stand is echoed by another well-known analyst of development, Jeremy Seabrook. The opponents of globalization have been, perhaps, too concerned with looking for a new paradigm to justify their challenge. Indeed, there has been something of an obsession with defining an 'alternative'

*The book, *The Conceits of Civil Society*, is a timely reminder that the last word on the subject has not yet been said. There is a fair way to travel before we can say we have understood what Civil Society is all about, if in fact there is such a thing as civil society.*

Debating Civil Society

Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya

The Conceits of Civil Society, Neera Chandhoke, Oxford University Press, 2003, p.278, Rs. 575

CIVIL SOCIETY has perhaps become the most widely discussed theme in contemporary political theory. Since the 1970s, when it became increasingly clear to the modernisation theories of both the Marxist and liberal dispensations that the state would not be able to deliver what is expected of it, civil society was looked upon as an alternative.

In the 1980s the national societies in Eastern Europe activated the associational forms of civil society to undermine a severely bureaucratised political order. In many parts of the 'developing' world this period also saw political mobilisation around issues that fell outside the traditional concerns of political parties. Experiences such as these made civil society embody two ideas at once, the idea of democracy and of autonomy from the state.

Neera Chandhoke deftly criticises both these ideas. She argues that there are problems in conceptualising civil society as a domain of unfettered freedom. Indeed, the associational forms that obtain in this sphere have produced conditions variously for a collective sympathy (Adam Smith), a rights bearing citizen (Hegel), the *unsentimental bourgeoisie* (Marx) as much as a space to counter the hegemony of the ruling bloc (Gramsci) and the disciplinary institutions of modernity (Foucault), but it will be wrong to see too much in these possibilities.

These concepts visualise a simultaneous 'taming' of civil society by a hidden hand, a set of universal principles, or by the rule of property, by the passive revolution of capital, or by the gears of disciplining the self. In the course of such contrary moves signifying a certain ambiguity, civil society became both an exclusive and exclusionary space, with no tolerance for the marginal and the radical, and operated in a hierarchical structure of power occasioned by the state.

It is impossible, Chandhoke tells us, to celebrate civil society either as a symmetric arena of civic association *a la* the theorists of deliberative democracy and social capital, or a domain largely autonomous of the state as

Civil Society is seen variously as a substitute, alternative or counterposed to State. Many NGOs and some peoples' organisations who take on the mantle of representing civil society take the moral high ground on the basis of their "links with the field". Some even engage in service delivery and claim to be superior to State because they deliver better. Thus they are not opposed to being nominated (co-opted?) into official positions. In fact some claim it to be their right – that their voice is not only heard but also followed. Almost all, whether ideologically determined or not, claim that they "know" what is good for people.

What they seem to miss is that by taking on this role, they become a State to themselves. And since their own financial sustenance and appointment comes from sources other than their constituency, any role within the larger State which borders on governance is illegitimate, save for the good intentions and good work of the current protagonists.

And if there are spoils of power to be distributed, these civil society organisations, especially NGOs become fair game for politicians. That is why we see so many NGOs infiltrated or patronised by local politicians and contractors. That is why we see so many struggles ending up in a political favour or in the courts! That is why we see so many Unions in the hands of anti-worker parties. Civil Society Organisations, specially NGOs are therefore digging their own graves, by seeking a more "formal" "legal" role in development, governance, etc.

There is a matrix-like relationship between party, government as its executive or bureaucracy, and people and civil society. What the party is to the government, the people are to civil society. It is people who elect a party to power, and a civil society which legitimises a bureaucracy or executive.

Therefore, when we say we want to strengthen civil society, we mean strengthening those institutions which can remain independent, which can take an independent stand based on the interests of the people they represent at different times on different issues. This role is political in nature, as it has to arbitrate between the formal representative system, and true non-vested representation.

John D'souza

the international donor agencies and the votaries of neo-liberalism would want us to believe.

Chandhoke's project, on the contrary, is to 'democratise' civil society by keeping the state well within reach. This she wants to do both by privileging certain 'accepted' democratic norms (as guards against subversion by communal elements) and turning civil society into a contested site for substantive democracy (so as to widen its entrance).

On reviewing the struggle of the tribal population in the Narmada valley and the informal workers in Chattisgarh she concludes: '*Whereas for most of us, civil society may both be accessible as well as responsive, the subalterns - the*

tribals, the poor, the lower castes, and women have to struggle to enter the sphere' (p.226).

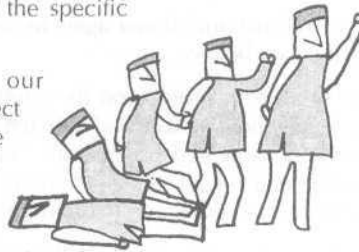
On the face of it Chandhoke's is an anti-elite project. The book has its heart in the right place; it makes sincere pleas to sensitise the public sphere and analyses in detail the problem of epistemic incommensurability that makes the voice of the poor and the marginal inaudible. Although rather thin in empirical evidence, she vigorously argues for understanding the problems of the displaced, the outcastes, the unrepresented and the underprivileged. She also laments the lack of a language for expressing the pain and the anguish of suffering of the subaltern.

"Can someone", she asks at this point, "who is not a subaltern represent a subaltern?" (p.202)

Imposing such moral preconditions, however, will demand that people write only autobiographies! That apart, since she addresses the issue of representation in civil society head on, one pauses to ask, *whose civil society is Chandhoke herself re-presenting?*

Does this work offer an analysis of how a civil society of the colonised obtained its institutional form in a period that was marked essentially by racial exclusion? Is there any attempt to theorise the sphere from which the "subaltern" is expected to make "entry" into the civil society (this is important because such entry demands a precondition of democratic mobilisation in the "outer" sphere)? Does this work, in this context, help us to think of democratic practices in defiance of and external to the norms and protocols of civil society? Are not the bulk of theoretical insights presented here culled out from stories of other societies, belonging to other times, and other continents? Can we discern here an eye to the richly sensitised and widely available storehouses of our vernacular literature? Do we, in short, find in this work an engagement with the specific history of *our* civil society?

Chandhoke has greatly enlarged our expectations with the vigour of her intellect and the sincerity of her conviction; we now truly long to see her overcoming our predicament of being monolingual metropolitan academics. ▶



The Bondage of the Irrational

Amartya Sen's book on freedom and rationality is a very timely work that can help bring some sanity back into our lives.

Fascism today claims the very freedoms it denies to others. And organised entities like large corporations, and even fundamentalist groups, claim for themselves unfettered freedom in their accumulation of power and speculative acquisitions.

The bankruptcy of such unfettered freedom is gradually unfolding. Income disparities and concentration of power to the detriment of many are leading to widespread anxiety, fear and resentment. Environmental degradation and global warming only fuel these anxieties.

The seeming resurgence of religious identity is a reaction - not an assertion - in the face of this bankruptcy of modern conventional constructs or the modern paradigm of growth and development. This paradigm has reached its limits, it is the modern God triumph over nature, science and technology, rationalism and nationalism - that has failed.

So we go back to the old gods that served us so well. It is a cry of anguish, despair, and low self-esteem.

"If freedom and rationality be your preoccupations, there's no better guide than Sen" says Pratap Bhanu Mehta, who reviews this book.

Some Choice Adjectives

By Pratap Bhanu Mehta

Rationality and Freedom
by Amartya Sen
Oxford University Press
Rs. 795; pp. 736

We all value freedom and rationality. But neither freedom nor rationality are self-evidently simple concepts. When we aspire to freedom, what are we aspiring to? Suppose that in the course of acting you had three choices, all of which you dislike. You have considerable choice, but does the fact that all your choices are unpalatable make you unfree? Take another case. Suppose that there was one very important thing you wanted to do; in fact this is the only thing you care about.

But this is the only thing you're allowed to do. You have no other choice. You don't mind this state of affairs much, because it allows your desire to be fulfilled. But if you take freedom to mean the fulfilment of desire, aren't you free? Most of us would think not. But then what is freedom? The mere availability of choices? The fulfilment of desire? The availability only of choices we have reason to value? Or is it the ability to actually be able to realise one's choices rather than their mere availability? If you are interested in such questions, there are few better guides than Sen to take you through them. In this book he restates and elaborates his conception of freedom. He cogently argues that the only defensible conception of freedom is a pluralistic one, sensitive to different aspects of what it means to be free. This conception is sensitive to both what he calls the "process" aspect of freedom and its "opportunity" aspect.

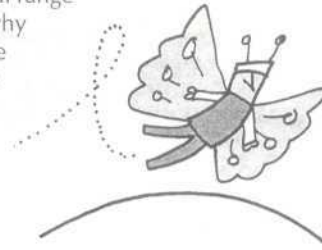
Rationality is even trickier. Is rationality simply internal consistency of choice? Obviously not, Sen replies. A person may very well be consistently moronic. Moreover, he argues, internal consistency is not even a necessary condition for rationality: when the reasoning involved in making choices is very complex, it is hard to even see what internal consistency would mean. Is rationality simply self-interest maximisation? No, for we can act on a variety of motives. It is question-begging to assume that self-interest is the only motive that is rational for us to have. Is rationality just pure and simple

maximisation? Again, Sen argues, it is foolish to think of maximisation independently of a discussion of what it is that we wish to maximise. Any attempt to derive a purely formal definition of rationality is doomed to failure. Like freedom, rationality, the discipline of subjecting one's choices to reasoned scrutiny, turns out to be a multi-faceted concept.

Rationality and freedom get even more complicated when you throw in the problem of social choice. How can the preferences each one of us has about how society should be run be reconciled with the preferences of others? Can we simply aggregate individual preferences to produce a social welfare function? Modern social choice theory, of which Sen is an undisputed master, labours under the shadow of Arrow's famous theorem that no social welfare function could simultaneously satisfy certain minimal conditions, each of which we might have an independent reason to value. One of its implications was taken to be that any aggregated social welfare function may be a violation of someone's freedom. To this, Sen adds that there might even be a tension between unlimited freedom of contract and the existence of a protected sphere of rights. How do you then reconcile freedom and social choice?

This volume has an astonishing range of arguments about freedom, rationality and social choice. Sen's critique of the narrowness of economics is characteristically thorough. But equally striking is his vast imaginative sympathy. While he never lets life's complexity be sacrificed to theoretical abstraction, he doesn't either make that complexity an excuse for not thinking rigorously.

This is very much an academic volume. The discussions are often dauntingly technical. But even for the technically-challenged, this volume might be a rewarding one. 'Rationality and Freedom' is a striking tribute to its author, eminently reasonable in its conclusions and driven by a passion for human freedom in its widest sense. The intellectual range and subtlety on display explains not only why Sen is the philosopher's favourite economist and the economist's favourite philosopher, but almost everyone's favourite intellectual. ▶



Although *Rationality and Freedom* is not bedside reading he would indeed be dull of soul if he could not find something interesting or challenging in its pages. Indeed anyone who claimed to agree with all of it or to take it as a social democratic bible, would show that he had gained little from it.

Unlike his earlier book, *Development as Freedom*, which I reviewed on January 31, 2000, this is a technical volume containing some of the papers for which he received his Nobel Prize. It is concerned with major issues of freedom, welfare and human achievements, but at the rarefied level where political and economic theory and formal philosophy all meet. **Yet unlike so many writers in this field**, who are mainly concerned with their reputation among academics, **Sen never forgets the more general reader looking over his shoulder.** It is not an accident that one can skip most of the equations. In many of the essays, they are deliberately segregated to smoothen the path of the reader more concerned with substance than technique.

The most intellectually radical aspect of Sen's multi-faceted book is his discussion of rationality. Logicians have concentrated mainly on deductive logic where statements are true or false by definition and have left the sphere of rationality in choice and action to economists and so-called "decision theorists". These have too often slipped into identifying rationality with the maximisation of self interest. When it is pointed out that many human actions, ranging from the activities of Mother Theresa to the individual act of voting which has a negligible effect on an election outcome, do not make sense on this basis, economists have tended to make their assertions true by definition: in which case it is difficult ever to say that a person has acted irrationally.

Samuel Brittan: Review of Rationality and Freedom by Amartya Sen, Harvard University Press, pp 752, £26.50, ISBN 0-674-009 in Blair's lack of "process", The Spectator, January 17, 2003
http://www.samuelbrittan.co.uk/text138_p.html

Another Globalisation IS possible

With the prospects of 'revolution' receding during the nineties, efforts towards various forms of solidarity and collective struggles received a serious setback.

The turn of the century, however, saw a resurgence at Seattle, and subsequently at various other meetings of international neo-con(servative) institutions like the World Bank and WTO, and at other gatherings like the World Economic Forum.

There has also been an impressive response in support of the World Social Forum processes that attempt to broadbase the opposition to the type of globalisation represented by 'neo-liberalism and domination of the world by capital'.

And recently the imperialist actions of the US in Iraq drew widespread protests on an unprecedented scale.

These protests have kindled a new hope among those who have 'kept the faith'.

Is this for real? Is there a real convergence?

Or are we seeing too much into these surges and waves of protest and affirmation?

Anti-War Upsurge

By Aijaz Ahmed

Millions of people poured into the streets of the world in protest against the United States' aggressive moves against Iraq, marking the convergence of the global movements against corporate globalisation and imperialist war. Close to a million people marched in Rome on February 15 to protest against their government's collusion with the United States on the question of the imperial blitzkrieg against Iraq; over a million marched in London on the same day, in the largest public demonstration in British history. In between, 90,000 protesters had gathered in Glasgow outside the hall where Blair was addressing a Labour Party conference. Meanwhile, a poll showed that 51 per cent of Britons considered him "Bush's poodle" and a staggering 90 per cent disapproved of his will to make war on Iraq.

Forty-one American Nobel laureates in science and economics issued a declaration on January 27 opposing a preventive war against Iraq without wide international support. These are, by no means, people who would otherwise be identified with a peace movement. Among them are Hans A. Bethe, an architect of the atom bomb; Walter Kohn, a former adviser to the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency at the Pentagon; Norman F. Ramsey, a Manhattan Project scientist who readied the Hiroshima bomb and later advised the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and others of their kind.

This outpouring of humanity against an imperial war, which has not even begun, on the scale at which it is being planned, is of course deeply connected with the anti-globalisation movements, which have also become global in scale over the years, doing their work in a thousand locales across continents and periodically holding the various Social Forums which then culminate in the World Social Forum. Indeed, it was at the time of the European Social Forum (ESF) in Florence, Italy, that the first of the really vast anti-war rallies had taken place; 40,000 attended the ESF but ten times that many marched against the war. This convergence of movements against

corporate globalisation with movements opposed to imperialist war may well prove to be the forerunner of an authentic anti-imperialist movement of the 21st century. A notable feature of these anti-war mobilisations, as in the anti-globalisation movement, is that these consist overwhelmingly of young people, or of older people who have never marched before in their lives. The other equally important feature is the sheer breadth of the anti-war sentiment. What may prove decisive in building a truly anti-imperialist movement is the massive unrest and dissidence within the working class.

... the protesting multitude of 15 million people who poured into the streets of the world in something of a global chain really was vast and unprecedented. It began in Auckland, on the southeastern tip of the empire and gave to New Zealand easily the largest anti-war demonstration in its history. Next was Melbourne with 200,000 in the streets, and the centre of gravity in this human wave kept shifting as the sun itself moved westward. The epicentre was in Western Europe, especially the three countries of 'Old Europe' – the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain – whose governments are identified with the U.S.; Barcelona had seen nothing like this since the fall of General Francisco Franco three decades ago. Fifteen thousand in Paris and close to half a million in Berlin were a fraction of what the multitudes would have been if their governments had not broken with Washington.

North America was in the next time zone and 400,000 gathered in New York even though the city government, backed by an extraordinary ruling by a Judge, had banned a march. This was synchronised with protest marches in roughly 300 small and medium-sized towns across the U.S. A hundred thousand people came out in Montreal and 80,000 in Toronto, in the largest peace demonstrations in the history of the two cities. What had begun in Auckland ended 48 hours later in neighbouring Australia, with a quarter million marching in Sydney. The sun had gone full circle, and it was dawn of another day. War against the planet had brought forth the first planetary rebellion against it.

This remarkable shift in the U.S. towards a fairly generalised anti-war sentiment in labour unions, city councils and the populace at large - not just in the larger and more cosmopolitan cities but deep into what Americans call 'middle America' - is taking place in the context of great scepticism among intellectuals, opinion makers and professionals of various kinds. ▶

Using the very tools and processes of communication and media management of the current dominant form of globalisation, these surges of dissent and of affirmation for the need of a different world, signify a turning point.

Are we developing newer forms of international processes and institutions? Are these appropriate for what we want to achieve?

There is something else that we in India need to look at.

The 'occidental developmental world-view' is lurking within us. How easily we consider the rallies and protests that took place only in the developed world to have taken place the 'world over'!

When these protests took place, India was quiet. There was the tired flailing of fists, and the odd hoarse shouting, most of it from the usual suspects- the organised, conventional left. Is it that we felt that anyway most of our country people felt as we did, the war was and is wrong? Will that explain that just a few of the converted, again mostly the conventional left, rallied in India at the time of all those protests and rallies of the last few years?

We were well represented at those events abroad, but where was the country-wide upsurge in support of our people there?

The upsurge that Aijaz talks about is confined to the West, and to some extent to Latin America.

There's a lot of ground to cover before Another Globalisation is Possible!



An ATTACK on the Financial Markets!

An editorial titled 'Disarming the Markets', which discussed the tyranny of financial markets, ended with the creation of a popular association: ATTAC - Association pour la Taxe Tobin pour l'Aide aux Citoyens. It was the birth of the campaign to fight international financial markets and privatisation. It also stood for something - the Tobin Tax, an idea that international finance must pay its dues as it moves from country to country.

Today the national organisation of ATTAC has some 30,000 members. In addition there are also more than 200 local committees all over France, constituted as legal bodies (ATTAC-Pays Basque, ATTAC-Touraine, ATTAC-Marseilles, and so on) in their own right, with democratic rules that are imposed on them, in exchange for use of the acronym. They sprang up spontaneously, and a bit chaotically.

The national leadership and the executive committee of ATTAC sets the political framework, issues statements, animates campaigns, etc. But if it decides to organize a day of demonstrations against the WTO, nothing will happen unless the local committees want it too. In that sense they are the backbone of the organisation.

Excerpts from an interview of James Brown with Bernard Cassen, the founder of this successful movement against neo-liberal globalisation, and an architect of the World Social Forum, give us the story.

Excerpts from an interview with

Bernard Cassen on the ATTAC

by James Brown

What are the origins of the movement that has developed so strongly in France against neo-liberal globalization?

In December 1997 Ignacio Ramonet, who edits *Le Monde Diplomatique*, published an editorial entitled 'Disarming the Markets', in which he discussed the tyranny of financial markets, and ended with an appeal for the creation of a popular association, ATTAC which would voluntarily implement Tobin's proposal for a tax on financial transactions.

When I asked Ignacio later why he had come up with ATTAC, he told me he had been thinking of one of Robert Aldrich's movies, called *Attack*. So he conceived the acronym before he knew what it would stand for, which is the best way round.

The appeal was launched like a bottle into the sea, without any idea of what the reaction might be. But no sooner had the article appeared than we were deluged with phone calls and letters... We were at a loss to know what to do. We had thrown out an idea, but it never occurred to us that it would be we ourselves who would create ATTAC. In the following issues we kept our readers informed and said we were making contacts, partly to gain time. But by March 1998 the pressure from them was so great we realized there was nothing to be done: we would have to take responsibility for setting up the association, since there was such wide demand.

As I had some organizational experience behind me, I was assigned the job of taking this in hand.

My first move was to bring together the organizations - not the individuals - **that had responded to our appeal.** This was a basic strategic choice: to build ATTAC out of existing structures, whether trade unions, civic associations, social movements or newspapers. We also drew in organizations that had not initially responded, such as the Peasant Confederation, with which I was on good terms, and other unions.

Institutionalising against takeovers

Although I was far from anticipating everything – indeed I didn't foresee the emergence of the committees themselves – I did sense that problems could arise here, and so I proposed national statutes that at first sight may seem undemocratic, but in my view are by no means so. There are 30 members of the national executive, of whom 18 are elected by the 70 founders of ATTAC, and 12 by the 30,000 membership at large. The reason for this structure is that the founders themselves were very diverse. They include the Peasant Confederation, civil-service, trade unions, social movements like Droits Devant!, and the unemployed. There is no movement in the streets that is not a founder member of ATTAC. We reckoned that if all these forces agreed on a line of action and a leadership, they would give balance and stability to ATTAC, thus creating a framework that allowed smaller movements at regional level to develop freely. In the localities, you may find the phenomenon of 'entryism' – organized political groups joining the local committees to try to take them over. So far, they have always failed. But with our national structure, power is not there to be taken; it is proof against raids.

Within six weeks of our first working session in March, the organizations concerned had agreed on the statutes, a political programme, and a provisional leadership. ATTAC was officially founded on 3 June 1998. Its founding members were essentially 'legal persons' that is, collective entities to whom a few individuals like René Dumont, Manu Chao or Gisèle Halimi were added for symbolic effect. I was astonished by the speed with which the different organizations decided to take part, including trade-union committees not usually quick off the mark, and by the financial commitment that accompanied it, allowing us to set up an office and equip a secretariat. The periodicals involved, besides *Le Monde Diplomatique*, included the Catholic weekly *Témoignage chrétien*, *Transversales*, *Charlie hebdo*, *Politis*, and a little later *Alternatives économiques*, a somewhat social-democratic monthly of good quality. So it was a slightly curious mosaic. But it was not conceived and has never operated as an organizational cartel, which would have finished it.

The result is a situation of dual power. The local committees are independent of us. Each has a president, a secretary, a treasurer. Likewise we are independent of them. A kind of dynamic tension exists between the two poles.

How do you define the aims of ATTAC?

I call ATTAC an 'action-oriented movement of popular education'.. Our work is in the first instance though not the last educational. On any given day, we have a dozen meetings, conferences and debates. To make sure this mission is properly carried out, we have a scientific committee that produces or checks the accuracy of the books or leaflets that ATTAC puts out. This is one of the reasons for the high level of credibility that ATTAC enjoys in the media and with politicians.

Informed Militancy

Essentially, militants must be well-informed and intellectually equipped for action. We don't want people turning out on demonstrations without really knowing why. So ATTAC members aren't activists in the French sense of the term, which differs from the English, since its connotation is action for action's sake.

You've given an idea of the scale and organization of ATTAC. How would you describe the social base of its membership?

.. grosso modo, you can say that we are an association recruited from the lower-middle classes upwards, mainly from the public services, with a significant proportion of students and teachers. Employees and executives of the private sector are also present. We also have a sprinkling of farmers and unemployed.

What we do not possess any more than anyone else are roots in the working class, or popular sectors more broadly. This is an acute general problem in France, just as, I imagine, it is in Britain. There is a terrible crisis of working-class representation in the political arena...

What about the age structure of the base of ATTAC?

That's our second weakness. The generational profile of ATTAC is not good. We don't have accurate figures yet – a proper study will be made in 2003, but I would guess that young people, that is, under 35, don't amount to more than perhaps 25-30 per cent of the total membership. Of course, parties and trade unions have the same problem: they fail to attract youth. People say the younger generation will only go to rock concerts, but the truth is more complicated. In principle ATTAC can attract these energies, which you could see in the big anti-Le Pen demonstrations last May. But this is a youth culture

that is difficult to capture in any organized form. *You see a generation that goes from one big demonstration to another – Genoa, Barcelona, Florence – without ever really engaging in day-to-day activities, in a kind of political zapping. Then in reaction against this channel-surfing sensibility, you get the super-politicization of small nuclei who often take the lead in the streets, as in Genoa or Florence. But a political generation is never formed overnight, so something more durable may arise out of this mixture.*

The World Social Forum is often thought to be a joint creation of ATTAC in France and the PT in Brazil. Is that so?

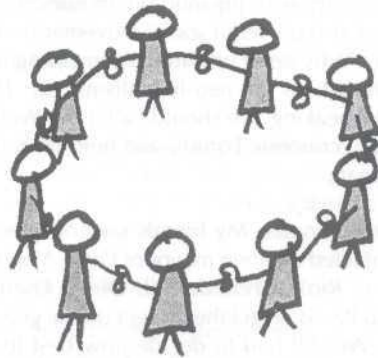
In February 2000 two Brazilian friends visited me in Paris. One, Oded Grajew, was a former entrepreneur. The other, Chico Whitaker, was the Secretary to the Commission on Justice and Peace of the Council of Brazilian Bishops. They said they had been to Davos, and they asked, 'Why don't Le Monde Diplomatique and ATTAC organize a counter-Davos?' I replied: 'That's already been tried, at Davos itself. But access to the place is tightly controlled, the Swiss police are murder, and to organize a counter-Davos in France doesn't make much sense.' Then an idea suddenly occurred to me, and I said: 'We need a symbolic rupture with everything Davos stands for. That has to come from the South. Brazil has the ideal conditions for doing so, as a Third World country with gigantic urban concentrations, a wretched rural population, but also powerful social movements and friendly political bases in many cities. Why don't we launch something in Porto Alegre, as a symbol of the alternatives to neo-liberalism?' ... Then I added with journalistic instinct, speaking 'we should call it the World Social Forum, to challenge the World Economic Forum, and hold it on the same day of the same month of the year'.

That took all of three minutes. My friends said: 'You're right. Let's do it in Brazil.' So they contacted the then mayor of Porto Alegre, Tarso Genro, and the then governor of Rio Grande do Sul, Olivio Dutra, as well as social organizations in São Paulo, to get the project off the ground. In May I joined them all in Brazil. We still had to decide how best to launch the project publicly. ATTAC alone could not do it. But in June there was the UN Social Summit in Geneva, at which dozens of non-governmental organizations were due to be present, offering an ideal opportunity. So in the closing session of the conference, Miguel Rossetto, then vice-governor of Rio Grande do Sul, launched an appeal for the World Social Forum which provoked an enthusiastic response. Six months later, miraculously, the Forum came into being.

How do you see the next phase of development for ATTAC and the World Social Forum?

The World Social Forum is not an entity, but a process – a snowballing momentum that is bringing together forces, which, though developing in the same direction, were without mutual contact and often completely unaware of each other. A global constellation is coming into being that is beginning to think along the same lines, to share its strategic concepts, to link common problems together, to forge the chains of a new solidarity. All this is now moving with astonishing speed.

What we are seeing today is a movement that, for the first time, is adopting the same perspectives, hitting at the same targets, and developing all over the world, linking local struggles to global objectives. History has accelerated so rapidly in the last ten or fifteen years that there is no reason to think it will stabilize now. I cannot help feeling that what we have achieved together so far will have some effect on what is to come. ▶



Organising Alternatives

In India we are being insidiously invaded with neo-colonial forms of globalisation. What collaborative endeavours are we forging to face this compelling force? What forms and levels of organisation do we see necessary for us to be effective? Does the ATTAC case reveal to us organisational processes that are worth emulating? Can we think of any comparable level of organisation in India apart from the formal, conventional political parties and their support organisations like the trade unions and student wings?

There are other questions that this interview raises - the place of non-party political processes and its impact on the polity. The early '90s saw an energetic series of attempts to get the various strands of peoples' movements and progressive elements from the voluntary sector to come together. This was a carry-over from the vigorous campaigns and coalitions that came into their own in the mid-eighties.

That momentum has faltered. Or is it only in the minds of the pusillanimous that this is so? Has the non-political stance left us on the high moral ground, even as the political spaces that do matter are filled by shallow and venal wo/men?

There are myriads of reports and letters, even books, on these struggles and movements. But critical analysis and reflection seem to be in short supply. We are hopeful that there are some books and reports hidden from our shallow gaze. We are sure that you will bring them to light for the Development Digest to showcase in forthcoming issues.

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