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The Sen difference

*John M. Alexander
in Louvain, Belgium, Cambridge, England and Pavia, Italy*

Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen's economic and philosophical insights are now making a breakthrough across the world to influence governments, international institutions, policymakers, researchers, activists and the general public.

SEN'S idea of entitlement, born out of his analysis of the causes of famines, is a conceptual forerunner to what is today more popularly known as the capability approach. While most traditional economic theories narrowly associate development with growth in gross national product, a rise in personal incomes, or rapid industrialisation and technological advancement, Sen's



message is fairly simple and profound:

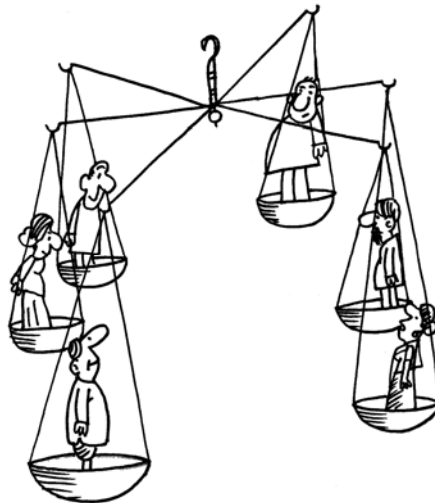
The Sen difference, John M. Alexander, Frontline, Volume 22 - Issue 04, Feb. 12 - 25, 2005. [C.ELDOC.]

there is more to development than just economic growth; development, in fact, should focus on the expansion of people's capabilities to achieve different valuable human functionings. Sen's capability approach, in other words, claims to raise more pertinent questions overlooked by conventional theories: how well is the income and wealth of a society distributed among its different sections (class, race, caste, gender, and so on)? What are the social and economic opportunities available to citizens in leading a life of their choice? What are the personal and social conditions that facilitate or hinder the individual's ability to transform resources into different functionings? Answering these questions re-orient the way we think about a wide range of issues: the quality of life, living standards, poverty, inequality, development and gender issues.

Sen's intention of introducing the criterion of 'capabilities' as a target for public policies is to capture two interrelated aspects. The first one is the enhancement of capacities or powers of people as human beings; these could range from the most fundamental ones required to fulfill nutritional and health needs to more complex ones required for social and political participation.

Income and wealth cannot be a straightforward indication of a person's quality of life; they are but a means to achieve different human functionings, a life of social, economic and political freedoms.

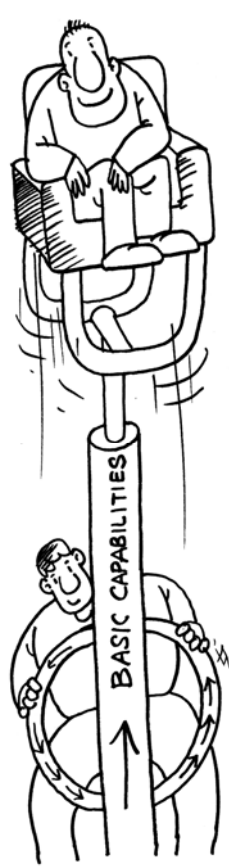
The second one refers to the opportunities that



people have to nurture and to exercise their capacities; people's capacities could indeed be enhanced or hampered depending on the opportunities they face in their family and society. A female child growing up in a Dalit family in rural India, for instance, is likely to face fewer opportunities for education, employment and social life than most of her counterparts; a citizen of some of the European countries receives more support from the state social security system in times of illness and unemployment than someone in the United States; a child born in Ethiopia has a much lower life expectancy and facilities for health care at birth than a child born, say, in any of the Scandinavian countries.

Sen is not a believer in overarching universal values that every country and culture in the world could endorse and implement in the same way. He upholds cultural sensitivity and has deep faith in the value of public discussion and participation at all levels: it is ultimately each society through democratic deliberation that should decide on what capabilities should merit public policy attention. Nevertheless, Sen has repeatedly referred to a number of basic capabilities that no society and the world community can afford to ignore: nutrition, health, literacy, self-respect and political participation. Paying attention to these basic capabilities of people and promoting them through coherent public policies, for him, is a matter of justice.

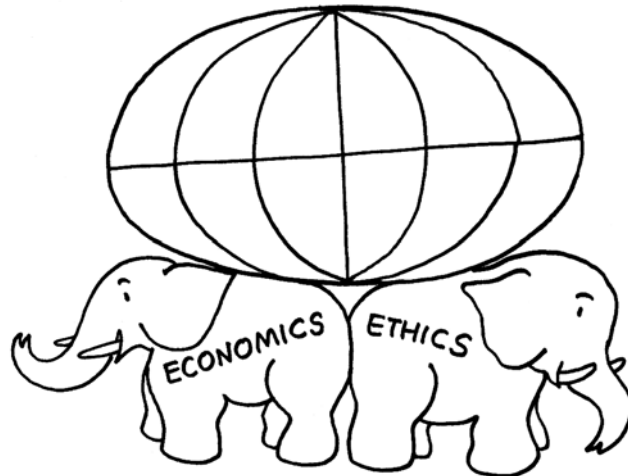
Today, the capability approach seems to have captured the imagination of a wide network of thinkers and practitioners from both developed and developing countries. While an intellectual community of



economists, social scientists and philosophers tries to examine critically and extend further the theoretical underpinnings of Sen's capability approach, a group of policymakers, researchers and activists tries to apply them to areas varying from poverty analysis to gender equality to sustainable development.

Beginning in the year 2001, already four international conferences have been organised to carry forward the theoretical advantages of the capability approach and to provide a forum for exchanging ideas, expertise and experience of over 500 academicians and practitioners representing more than 35 countries across the world.

PHILOSOPHICAL insights do not normally have instant success. They take at least a generation to gain wider acceptance. But in the case of Sen, it seems somewhat different. Sen is not only celebrated as a leading economist and a godfather of development thinking and practice. He is also regarded as a philosopher *par excellence* on two important fronts.



First, against a growing tendency to treat economics and ethics as two separate worlds, Sen has illustrated that there could indeed be rewarding dialogue and mutually beneficial influence between the two. Much of mainstream economics begins with the idea that human beings are uncompromisingly selfish. Economists and business professionals alike are hence highly sceptical of integrating ethical values into their economic analysis and business strategies. Sen has shown that such scepticism is unfounded. His contention is that human beings are not "rational fools" to be motivated only by self-interest in their economic activities of production and exchange; they could be moved equally by other-regarding values of justice, fairness, trust, honouring of contracts and civic duty. "Basic ideas of justice," says Sen, "are not alien to social beings... space does not have to be artificially created in the human mind for the idea of justice or fairness."

Consequently, according to Sen, even to see the success of capitalism, particularly market mechanism, exclusively in terms of greedy behaviour would be to miss an important point. Business ethics that govern promises and contracts, legal norms and social institutions that ensure a climate of mutual trust and confidence for economic activities are as much important for the vital functioning of market mechanism.

Sen was able to build bridges between economics and ethics largely because of his expertise and versatility in both disciplines. He is a moral philosopher among economists and an economist in the company of philosophers. In 1989, on the occasion of the awarding of an honorary doctorate at the University of Louvain, philosopher Philip Van Parijs noted: "Professor Sen is one of the very few people who are able to convey to economists, in a language they find congenial, those philosophical insights they would be naive to ignore in discussing even the most concrete policy questions. He is also one of the very few people who are able to explain to philosophers, in a language they can

understand, those elements of economic culture which they would be foolish to neglect even at the level of abstraction they enjoy keeping to." Sen's innovative contributions in this area were acknowledged not only by his unique and joint appointment to Harvard's Economics and Philosophy departments in 1988 but also by the opening up of new avenues for interdisciplinary research in economics and philosophy.

Human beings differ from one another in a number of ways. There are, first and foremost, differences in personal characteristics such as health, age, sex and genetic endowments. Human beings also vary from one another in the types of external environment and social conditions they live in. These different elements of human diversity crucially affect the ways in



which resources such as income and wealth are transformed into relevant capabilities. A physically handicapped person, for example, might be in need of more resources to be mobile than an able-bodied person. Or, improving girls' literacy level in most poor countries might require much more than just spreading some resources around; it might, among other things, require changing the mindset of parents and social customs. Or, increasing the social and political participation of traditionally

oppressed groups would demand efforts more than just providing access to resources; it might require tackling some entrenched social, economic and political practices and structures. Since Rawls' theory works with the assumption of a liberal society with citizens having more or less equal capacities, Sen points out, inequalities and disadvantages arising from human diversities are either postponed to be settled by legislative or judicial procedures or at the most relegated as issues falling in the domain of charity.

On December 22, 1921, in his lecture to a group of economists, Mahatma Gandhi said: "In a well-ordered society, the securing of one's livelihood should be and is found to be the easiest thing in the world. Indeed, the test of orderliness in a country is not the number of millionaires it owns, but the absence of starvation among its masses." He, however, also reminded the economists that "material advancement does not necessarily mean moral progress". Sen seems to have rightly addressed Gandhi's twin concerns. His economic analysis of famines, poverty and the problems of development have indeed provided fresh insights to tackle them with determination and concerted effort. Simultaneously, Sen's wisdom has also shown that solutions to even the simplest economic problem require undivided attention to ethical inquiry and philosophical richness. ▶

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Beyond Liberalism?

Toon Vandevelde

In this sense, economic liberalism is somewhat misleading. Often it pretends to favour *laissez-faire* and tolerate only a minimal state. Here, Sen objects strongly. An interventionist state is indispensable for obtaining social justice, but this does not mean that markets have to be eliminated. On the contrary, markets need government in order to function properly. Moreover, governmental action cannot and should not be neutral.

In this context, Sen's rejection of the notion of economic man plays an important role. Human beings have complex motivations. They have various preference orderings. Some of them may be very myopic or excessively selfish. Others are more sensible or even altruistic. Mostly it depends on circumstances what preferences will prevail. In situations of distrust - civil war could be taken as an extreme example - narrow self-interest will dominate. In a more secure environment, people tend to trust one another and to behave in a trustworthy way. Now government has a considerable influence in creating the appropriate context for human action. It can enhance or destroy intersubjective trust. It can devise social structures and institutions that can stimulate the best of our preferences and



discourage the worst of them. For instance, we prefer

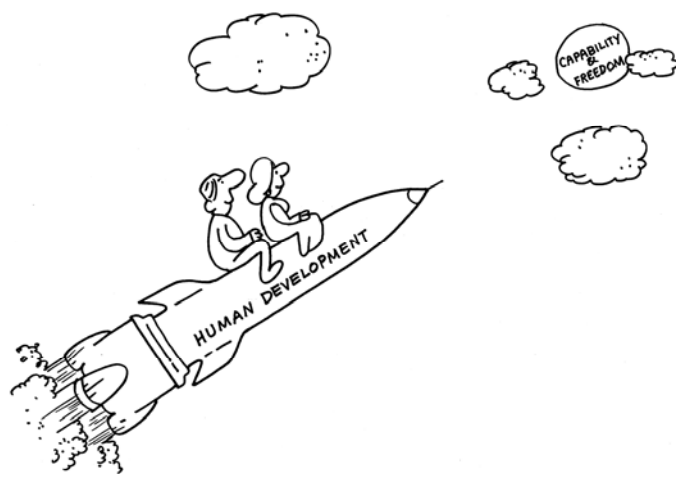
Beyond Liberalism?, *Toon Vandevelde Frontline, Volume 22 - Issue 04, Feb. 12 - 25, 2005.* [C.ELDOC.]

that nobody throws garbage on the streets, but if nobody else complies with this rule, we tend to join the majority of free riders. If government on the contrary succeeds in imposing its rules on most citizens, generally they will be happy to comply - although the free rider option still remains attractive to some of them.

More than most liberals, Sen wants to change the world. However, he is too much imbued with economics to be a utopian thinker. First, in his work on social choice, he strongly insists that one should not try to make people happy against their will. People's preferences should be taken seriously, although not just the consumer preferences that can be derived from their market behaviour, but also the opinions they state in public debates.

Measuring Human Development

John M. Alexander, Koen Decancq



The much-awaited Human Development Report (HDR) published annually since 1990 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was the brainchild of the late Pakistani economist Mahbub-ul-Haq. Amartya Sen, however, has right from its birth provided intellectual insights and refinement by thinking of human development as an expansion of human capabilities and human freedoms and by contributing to develop a Human Development Index (HDI) that measures human well-being along three dimensions of life expectancy, educational attainment and command over resources required for a decent living.

Measuring human development, *John M. Alexander, Koen Decancq,*

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As an alternative to the orthodox approach, the Sen-inspired human development approach focuses on the expansion of people's capabilities and freedoms. It is not that in the human development framework, rising incomes and outputs are underestimated but rather they are seen as the "means" and not the "ends" of development.

So far, poverty has been one of the foremost concerns of HDRs. Just as development cannot be identified exclusively with income expansion, so too, poverty cannot be reduced solely to low income. In the human development perspective, as pointed out in *HDR 1997*, poverty means "the denial of choices and opportunities for a tolerable life". While in less developed countries this is often manifested in the forms of ill health, illiteracy, malnutrition and so on, in developed nations it assumes such forms as social ostracism, insecurity and unemployment.

In a rather unprecedented conceptual shift, *HDR 2004* argues that cultural liberties (such as freedom to speak one's language and practice one's religion and lifestyles) are also an important component of human development. "Cultural liberty is", affirms the report, "a vital part of human development because being able to choose one's identity - who one is - without losing respect for others or being excluded from other choices is important in leading a full life".

The most attractive as well as controversial aspect of the human development approach is the measuring tool, the HDI. It is attractive because the three basic human capabilities (longevity, education and standard of living), which were mostly earlier either overlooked or considered unnecessary to measure, receive a prominent attention in the human development paradigm. The computation of the HDI and ranking of countries on that basis has indeed become a popular and practical way of appraising

governments of their performances as well as reminding them of their public policy priorities and obligations for the future.

The HDI, of course, is not without limitations and controversies. Besides the obvious difficulties of collection, comparability and reliability of empirical data for the construction of a coherent index, there is also the problem of aggregating the components of human life. Besides, the HDI tries to capture only a few of people's choices and leaves out other important ones that people value, the critics point out.

Sweden vs England

Sweden proves the neo-liberals wrong about how to slash poverty

George Monbiot

"Does not already the response to the massive tidal wave in south east Asia," Gordon Brown asked on Thursday, "*show just how closely and irrevocably bound together ... are the fortunes of the richest persons in the richest country to the fate of the poorest persons in the poorest country?*"(1)

The answer is no. It is true that the very rich might feel sorry for the very poor, and that some of them have responded generously to the latest catastrophe. But it is hard to imagine how the fate and fortunes of the richest and poorest could be further removed. The ten richest people on earth have a combined net worth of \$255bn - roughly 60% of the income of sub-Saharan Africa.(2) The world's 500 richest people have more money than the total annual earnings of the poorest three billion.(3)



This issue - of global inequality - was not mentioned in either Brown's speech or Tony Blair's simultaneous

Sweden vs England: Sweden proves the neo-liberals wrong about how to slash poverty, *George Monbiot, Znet, Jan 11, 2005*,

<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=13&ItemID=7002>

press conference. Indeed I have so far failed to find a reference to it in the recent speeches of any leader of a G8 nation. I believe that the concern evinced by Blair and Brown for the



summit in early. The problem is that their concern for the poor ends where their concern for the rich begins.



There is, at the moment, a furious debate among economists about whether global inequality is rising or falling. No one disputes that there is a staggering gulf between rich and poor, which has survived decades of global economic growth. But what the neo-liberals - who promote unregulated global capitalism - tell us is that there is no conflict between the whims of the wealthy and the needs of the wretched. The Economist magazine, for example, argues that the more freedom you give the rich, the better off the poor will be. Without restraints, the rich have a

more powerful incentive to generate global growth, and this growth becomes "the rising tide that lifts all boats". Countries which intervene in the market with "punitive taxes, grandiose programmes of public spending, and all the other apparatus of applied economic justice" condemn their people to remain poor. A zeal for justice does "nothing but harm".(4)

Now it may be true that global growth, however poorly distributed, is slowly lifting everyone off the mud. Unfortunately we have no way of telling, as the only current set of comprehensive figures on global poverty is - as researchers at Columbia University have shown - so methodologically flawed as to be useless.(5)

But there is another means of testing the neo-liberals' hypothesis, which is to compare the performance of nations which have taken different routes to development. The neo-liberals dismiss the problems faced by developing countries as "growing pains", so let's look at the closest thing we have to a final result. Let's take two countries which have gone all the way through the development process and arrived in the promised land of prosperity. Let's compare the United Kingdom - a pioneer of neo-liberalism - and Sweden: one of the last outposts of distributionism. And let's make use of a set of statistics the Economist is unlikely to dispute: those contained within its own publication, the 2005 World in Figures.(6)

The first surprise, for anyone who has swallowed the stories about our unrivalled economic dynamism, is that, in terms of gross domestic product, Sweden has done as well as we have. In 2002 its GDP per capita was \$27,310, and the UK's was \$26,240. This is no blip. In only seven years between 1960 and 2001 did Sweden's per capita GDP fall behind the United Kingdom's.(7)

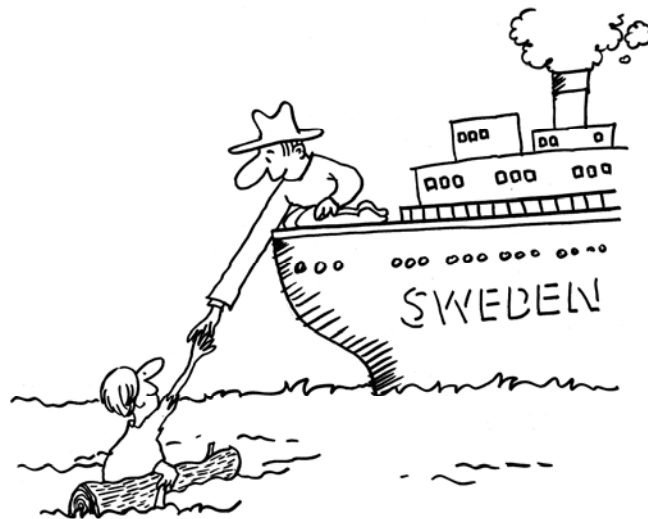
More surprisingly still, Sweden has a current account surplus of \$10bn and the UK a deficit of \$26bn. Even by the neo-liberals'

favourite measures, Sweden wins: it has a lower inflation rate than ours, higher "global competitiveness" and a higher ranking for "business creativity and research".

In terms of human welfare, there is no competition. According to the quality of life measure published by the Economist (the "human development index") Sweden ranks third in the world, the UK 11th. Sweden has the world's third highest life expectancy, the UK the 29th. In Sweden, there are 74 telephone lines and 62 computers per hundred people; in the UK just 59 and 41.

The contrast between the averaged figures is stark enough, but it's far greater for the people at the bottom of the social heap. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Economist does not publish this data, but the United Nations does. Its Human Development Report for 2004 shows that in Sweden 6.3% of the population lives below the absolute poverty line for developed nations (\$11 a day).(8) In the United Kingdom the figure is 15.7%. Seven and a half per cent of Swedish adults are functionally illiterate - just over one third of the UK's figure of 21.8%.

In the United Kingdom, according to a separate study, you are over three times as likely to stay in the economic class into which you were born than you are in Sweden.(9) So much for the deregulated market creating opportunity.



The reason for these differences is straightforward. Over most of the 20th century, Sweden has pursued, in the words of a recent pamphlet published by the Catalyst Forum, "policies designed to narrow the inequality of condition between social classes".(10) These include what the Economist calls "punitive taxes" and "grandiose programmes of public spending", which, remember, do "nothing but harm". These policies in fact appear to have enhanced the country's economic competitiveness, while ensuring that the poor obtain a higher proportion of total national income. In Sweden, according to the UN, the richest 10% earn 6.2 times as much money as the poorest 10%. In the UK the ratio is 13.8.(11)

So for countries hoping to reach the promised land, there is a choice. They could seek to replicate the Swedish model of development - in which the benefits of growth are widely distributed - or the United Kingdom's, in which they are concentrated in the hands of the rich. That's the theory. In

practice they have no choice. Through the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation, the G8 governments force them to follow a model closer to the UK's, but even harsher and less distributive. Of the two kinds of capitalism, Blair, Brown and the other G8 leaders have chosen for developing countries the one less likely to help the poor.

Unless this changes, their "Marshall plan for the developing world" is useless. Brown fulminates about the fact that, five years after "almost every single country" signed up to new pledges on eliminating global poverty, scarcely any progress has been made.⁽¹²⁾ But the very policies he implements as a governor of the IMF make this progress impossible. Despite everything we have been told over the past 25 years, it is still true that helping the poor means restraining the rich.

About the Author:

The sources for this and all George Monbiot's recent columns can be found at www.monbiot.com.

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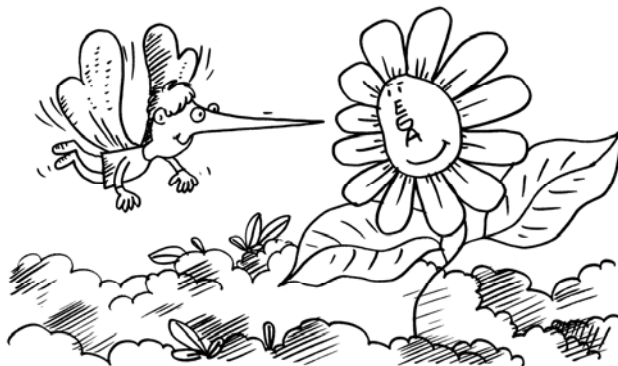
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Employment as a social responsibility

Jean Drèze

An Employment Guarantee Act places an enforceable obligation on the state and gives bargaining power to the labourers. It creates accountability.

The draft National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has recently entered national policy debates like a wet dog at a glamorous party. The demand for an Employment Guarantee Act is not new, but a series of unlikely events has catapulted it from obscurity to the top of the political agenda.



The proposed Act gives a legal guarantee of employment in rural areas to anyone who is willing to do casual manual labour at the statutory minimum wage. Any adult who applies for work under the Act is entitled to being employed on public works within 15 days. Failing that, an

Employment as a social responsibility, *Jean Dreze, The Hindu, Nov 22, 2004*, <http://www.hindu.com/2004/11/22/stories/2004112205071000.ht>
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unemployment allowance has to be paid. In the draft Act prepared by the National Advisory Council, guaranteed



The need for an Act has been questioned. Why is it not enough to initiate massive employment schemes? The main answer is that an Act places an enforceable obligation on the state, and gives bargaining power to the labourers. It creates accountability. By contrast, a scheme leaves labourers at the mercy of government officials.

There is another major difference between a scheme and an Act. Schemes come and go, but laws are more durable. A scheme can be trimmed or even cancelled by a bureaucrat, whereas changing a law requires an amendment in Parliament. If an Employment Guarantee Act (EGA) is passed, labourers will have durable legal entitlements. Over time, they are likely to become

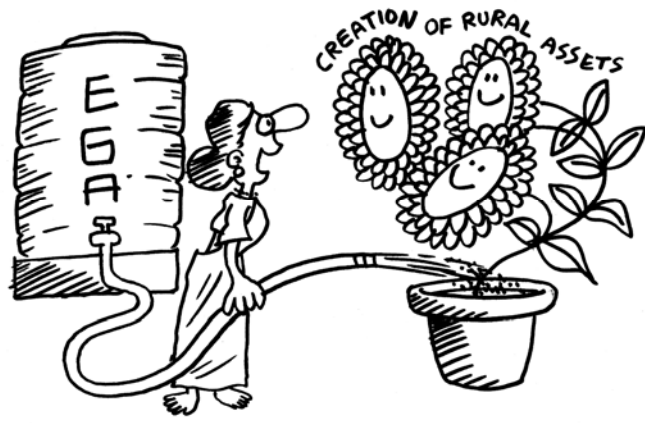


aware of their rights and learn how to defend them.

Opposition to an EGA often arises from a failure to appreciate its far-reaching economic, social and political significance. To start with, an EGA would go a long way towards protecting rural households from poverty and hunger. In fact, a full-fledged EGA would enable most poor households in rural India to cross the poverty line.

Secondly, it would lead to a dramatic reduction of rural-urban migration: if work is available in the village, many rural families will stop heading for the cities during the slack season.

Thirdly, guaranteed employment would be a major source of empowerment for women. A large proportion of labourers employed under an EGA are likely to be women, and guaranteed employment will give them some economic independence. Fourthly, an EGA is an opportunity to create useful assets in rural areas. In particular, there is a massive potential for labour-intensive public works in the field of environmental protection: watershed development, land regeneration, prevention of soil erosion, restoration of tanks, protection of forests, and related



activities.

Fifthly, guaranteed employment is likely to change power equations in the rural society, and to foster a more equitable social order. Finally, an EGA is a unique opportunity to activate and empower the panchayati raj institutions, including gram panchayats and gram sabhas. It will give them a new purpose, backed with substantial financial resources.

Having said this, an EGA would not come cheap. Even those who are otherwise sympathetic to the idea often wonder whether it is affordable. It is interesting that similar concerns have seldom



been raised with respect to the "interlinking of rivers" project. The cost of this project is far greater, and its benefits (if any) far more speculative, than those of an EGA.

Yet the project easily mustered support from some of the country's most prestigious institutions and personalities, based on the flimsiest possible arguments. It would be surprising if this had nothing to do with the fact that the interlinking project is a potential bonanza for the corporate sector.

Be that as it may, the economic viability of employment guarantee needs to be examined in its own terms, and not by comparison with extravagant projects.

In the note on this issue prepared by the National Advisory Council, the cost of employment guarantee is anticipated to rise from 0.5 per cent of GDP in 2005-06 to 1 per cent of GDP in 2008-09. This is based on the assumption that the scheme is gradually extended to the whole of India within four years, starting with the 150 poorest districts.

The anticipated cost of 1 per cent of GDP is a financial cost. It is arguable that the "real" cost would be much lower. For instance, the financial cost of employing a labourer on public works is the statutory minimum wage, but the economic cost (the real resources foregone) may not be so high, if the labourer is otherwise unemployed. However, even if the real cost of employment guarantee is as high as 1 per cent of GDP, there is no cause for panic.

The challenge of financing employment guarantee has to be seen in the light of the fact that India's tax-GDP is very low in international perspective: about 15 per cent (for the Centre and the States combined) compared with, say, 37 per cent in OECD countries. Further, India's tax-GDP ratio has declined in recent years. For instance, the ratio of Central taxes to GDP was only 9.3 per cent in 2003-04, compared with 10.6 per cent in 1987-8. These are some indications, among others, that there is much scope for raising India's tax-GDP ratio to finance employment guarantee and related social programmes.

On the nuts and bolts of enhancing tax revenue, there are useful hints in the recent "*Kelkar 2*" report submitted to the Ministry of Finance. Some aspects of this report are questionable, including its fixation with uniform taxes and its touching faith in the scope for raising revenue by lowering tax rates.

Nevertheless, the report also suggests many sensible ways of raising the tax-GDP ratio, such as introducing value-added taxes, extending taxation to most services, using information technology to broaden the tax net, eliminating arbitrary exemptions, and (last

but not least) fighting tax evasion. If these opportunities are well utilised, Plan expenditure can be raised by much more than one per cent of India's GDP.

Further, there is no need to stop at "Kelkar 2". Many other financing options can be considered. For instance, a recent World Bank study estimates that lifting the anachronistic cap on the Professions Tax would enable State Governments to collect additional tax revenue to the tune of 0.9 per cent of GDP.

Similarly, much revenue could be generated from "green taxes" on environmentally harmful consumption, or more generally, on anti-social activities. There is also much scope for pruning unnecessary public expenditure, starting with military expenditure and subsidies for the rich – there are many. In short, the fundamental ability of the Indian economy to sustain employment guarantee is not in doubt. What is required is imagination and commitment in tapping that potential.

Some of these proposals are likely to be opposed by those who stand to gain from the *status quo*, as happened with the introduction of VAT as well as with the "capital transactions" tax. One way around it is to link tax reforms more clearly with positive initiatives such as the EGA. Instead of piecemeal reforms, often derailed by vested interests, the need of the hour is for a comprehensive "new deal", involving a higher tax-GDP ratio but also better use of tax revenue. A package of this kind has a greater chance of success than piecemeal reform.

"Tax the rich" would be a useful guiding principle for this package. During the last 20 years or so, the so-called "middle class" (read the top five per cent of the income scale) has become rich beyond its wildest dreams. It has literally transplanted itself to the first world without even applying for a



visa. The time to share is long overdue.

The onset of cold weather in the capital is a good time to ponder over these matters. This year again thousands of people are going to die in agony because they do not possess as much as a blanket to cover their emaciated bodies at night. The slaughter will be attributed to a "cold wave" but the real issue is the dreadful poverty in which people have been allowed to live decade after decade.

This is not just a tragedy for the victims, but also a deep scar on the national fabric. It affects everything – from the self-respect of the nation to the quality of democracy.

To put it differently, there are two ways of thinking about the proposed EGA. One is to see it as a pitched battle between the working class and the privileged classes. Another is to regard it as a national endeavour – a visionary initiative in which most citizens have a stake in one way or another. There is some truth in both perceptions, but so far the first one has dominated public debates. Better recognition of the wide-ranging social benefits of an EGA is likely to put the issue in a different light.

Rural Assets for Employment

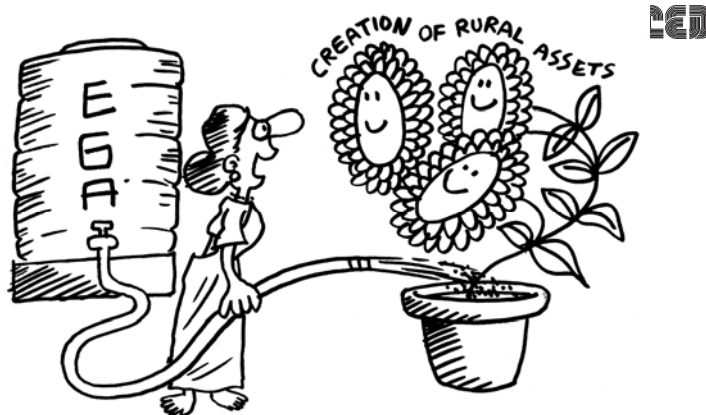
Sunita Narain

The employment bill was introduced in Parliament in December 2004, after much bickering over the money to be spent on providing rights of employment to millions of poor in the country. Finally, a "watered down" bill was drafted; it guarantees at least 100-day wage employment in every financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The government maintains that restricting this guarantee to the poorest 150 districts would cost the exchequer Rs 9,000 crore annually.

The bill's critics rile this as expenditure that will lead to nothing. But that's only one possibility. **The other possibility is that the bill could actually change the economic future of millions of Indians. But to do this, we will have to focus, not on the quantum of money, but on what it is spent and how it is spent.** In other words, the employment programme has to be integrated into the country's developmental programme. But even the votaries of the bill see it primarily as welfare: doling out work to the poor in return for which they get money and can buy food to tide over another drought. But this bill can be the answer to drought and economic destitution: it can provide not just drought relief, but relief against drought.

To make jobs work for development we must focus on much more than the mechanics of spending money. **We must understand that the biggest employment opportunity in the country exists in creating and maintaining rural assets: trees, grazing lands, water harvesting structures, roads and other infrastructure.** These rural assets require investment of labour. The question we need to ask is **why are assets that get built in one season, lost in another? What can we do to ensure that the labour invested in rural regeneration leads to durable and productive assets?** That's the challenge of the new generation of employment programme.

Rural Assets for Employment, *Sunita Narain*, The Editorial, CSE Newsletter, 25 May 2005,
http://www.downtoearth.org.in/cover_nl.asp?mode=2 [C.ELDOC.6009650]



Currently, the programme is designed for unproductive employment generation: digging holes to fill them with earth and

then digging them again. The road constructed one year, using the labour of the poor, will be washed away the next season. The check-dam built one year will be gone by the next. The sapling, planted one year, will wither away the next. It is precisely this hole that must be plugged. But for this, the employment programme has to become the basis of village-level developmental activity. The labour of the poor should be used to build the natural capital; but asset building is not merely about jobs. **Assets require clarity of ownership and stake in management.** Currently, the programme is designed to create employment for building public (actually governmental) assets: roads, schools and ponds. *The problem is that these governmental assets are nobody's assets.* Moreover, government agencies at the village level are fractured and so, implementation of their programmes gets distorted as well.

Take water structures. A pond requires a catchment. But even as the employment programme uses labour to dig the pond, its catchment is controlled by government departments: say, the forest department or the revenue department. The pond probably belongs to the panchayat (if it is small) or the irrigation department (if it is large). Anyhow, the pond remains what it is not meant to be, a hole in the ground: it has no water and can't charge the groundwater - a typical example of unproductive employment.

The question then is, who can best create durable assets? Fractured bureaucracies will provide fractured answers. And, efforts to consolidate all programmes will lead to time-consuming

turf wars between departments. **The answer then is to find the owners of the asset and provide them legal rights to manage these resources. To do this we will need to integrate employment generation with decentralisation and put jobs in the domain of the panchayats. We will also need the different land and water bureaucracies of the state to function as line agencies of the panchayat so that the assets created are planned, owned and operated by communities, not faceless agencies.** With innovation in systems of governance - strengthening the accountability of panchayats through gram sabhas (village assemblies), putting the transfer of money in the public domain - the money can actually reach those it's meant for. And then, be made to work.

The bill is critical. Not only because it will provide employment. But because, **if it is operationalised correctly, it could root out the very corruption that BJP is apparently so agitated about.** Let's be clear that in the hierarchy of corruption, high-level corruption, however despicable, is less destructive than the low-level corruption that pervades the daily lives of Indians and makes delivery of governmental programmes a complete farce. The answer to this malaise - made famous by former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's statement, that only 15 paise of each rupee spent reaches the poor - is to have transparent and accountable systems. It is time we counted real change.

Fresh challenges for micro-finance

Keya Sarkar

It was bound to happen. Just like the institutions and the banks before them, the micro-finance institutions, or NGOs working in the micro finance sector, have to learn new tricks. No longer are donor agencies or banks willing to sustain and support unconditionally.

The new buzzwords are *depth of management* and *accountability*. And like others before them, the micro-finance sector is realising that beyond the committed visionaries and leaders who started their organisations, there is almost no trained second line that can provide the depth of management needed to ensure an efficient, sincere working of the organisations.



Fresh Challenges for Microfinance, Keya Sarkar, *Business Standard*,
Aug 27, 2004,

<http://www.business-standard.com/search/storypagenew.php?leftnm=lmnu5&leftidx=5&lselet=1&autono=165302> [C.ELDOC.1075270]

Herein lies the demand for training in this sector. And the good news is that a host of organisations have geared up for capacity building in the microfinance sector. Since most of these have been spawned by organisations that have been pioneers in the field of micro-finance, there is certainly going to be a big change in the way training is imparted.

Sewa Bank and Friends of Women's World Banking (FWWB), Basix, the *Dhan* Foundation, and Micro-save have either started or are in the process of setting up schools that will teach NGOs and micro-finance institutions (MFIs) to cope with the winds of change. Each of these organisations has carved out a niche for itself, but all are firmly rooted in getting practitioners to teach, and learn from research.

A lot of thinking is going into how training can be customised to suit the smaller non-government MFIs and how grassroots practitioners can be taught in their own languages.

And in their efforts at pioneering rigorous training for capacity building, there is a lot of interaction between the training institutes. Hopefully, this will remain, because there is so much to be done that a feeling of competition would be unnecessary.

But building good training institutes requires money. Especially so, because it is for a sector in which those who need it the most cannot pay for it. So the training institute has not only to raise funds to set up office and attract competent faculty



members, but also arrange for students' scholarships.

Almost all those who have raised or tried to raise funds in the recent past (except for the *Tata Dhan* Academy, which is now well established) have had very encouraging responses from both the public and private sector banks. Because, with banks becoming more and more aware of their bottom lines in a situation where the RBI still insists on priority sector lending, they are also realising how important it is for the micro-finance sector to be more accountable.

But whether it is Sankar Datta of the Indian School of Livelihoods Promotion, or Vijayalakshmi Das of the Indian School of Micro-finance for Women, or *Graham Wright* of Micro-save, the experience has been that the banks are looking at sponsoring specific courses, research, or pilot projects. But a training organisation cannot start shop without being assured of funding for a period of at least five years.

With the exception of the Indian School for Micro-finance for Women, which is sponsored by *Sewa* and FWWB, and which has a commitment of core funding from the Citigroup, almost all others have been more successful in convincing international donor agencies like the CGAP, Ford Foundation, and Indian private trusts (like the Sir Ratan Tata Trust or the Dorabji Trust), than domestic financial institutions.

Of course not all the funding is signed and sealed as yet. Like in all funding exercises, there are a host of queries raised by funders. But there does not seem to be any disagreements between funders and the fund raisers regarding the demand-supply gap in capacity building.

What these institution builders are lamenting, however, is that the government or government-owned institutions like *NABARD* or

SIDBI do not seem to be particularly worried about the lack of capacity in the sector to absorb increasing funding.

While these organisations are willing to fund specific research projects or even pay for scholarships for their borrower organisations to attend training programmes, they are unwilling to look at core funding.

And while international donor agencies or private trusts may be willing to bridge the gap for now, soon they will begin to question what domestic organisations set up specifically for the sector are doing about capacity building.

Capacity-building work has just begun; a lot needs to be done. Good brains need to be attracted to these training institutes, syllabi must be made relevant to Indian conditions and suitable for imparting training in different regional languages, and then small NGOs and MFIs have to be convinced to create training budgets.

It is not enough to say in the Budget speech that the micro-finance sector needs a push. A lot of expensive digging has to create a foundation. ▶

About the Author

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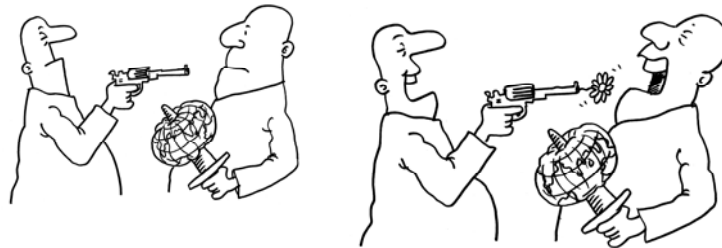
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Have Green Campaigners Changed Their Colour?

Alison Maitland

Have pressure groups gone soft on business? Activists who once resorted to open confrontation to make their point now talk to companies behind the scenes or take their money to set up joint projects to tackle social and environmental problems.

Even Greenpeace, the environmental campaign group that went down in history for its assault on Royal Dutch Shell over the planned sinking of the Brent Spar oil platform nearly a decade ago, speaks a more conciliatory language about business today. The old view of companies as uniformly bad was "a big missed opportunity", says Stephen Tindale, executive director of Greenpeace UK.



The group has entered several alliances in the past few years with companies including Unilever, the consumer goods multinational, and N-Power, one of the UK's biggest electricity suppliers.

Have Green Campaigners Changed Their Colour?, *Alison Maitland*,
Financial Times, December 26 2004, [C.ELDOC.6009651]

"We think [alliances] are essential to unlocking progress," says Mr. Tindale. "The more unusual the alliance, the more effective it is likely to be. Greenpeace is interested in who has the power to make change, rather than simply being an outside group and protesting."

Greenpeace is in good company. Oxfam's UK arm recently joined forces with Starbucks, the global coffee retail chain, on a project to encourage sustainable coffee production in Ethiopia. Chiquita, the US banana giant once criticised for poor environmental and labour practices, has changed the way it does business with help from conservationists at Rainforest Alliance.

"It's amazing how rapidly these partnerships have become accepted on all sides," says John Elkington, who chairs SustainAbility, an international consultancy, and has worked in this area for 30 years. Meanwhile, a host of other alliances have been formed by charities and development agencies that have traditionally been less averse to working with the private sector. Save the Children, for example, has developed global partnerships with American Express, Procter & Gamble, Reckitt Benckiser and Ikea.

Behind the rapprochement between business and campaigners lie both realism and necessity. The rationale for companies is clear. Under pressure to restore public trust, they see partnerships as a way to gain credibility and demonstrate transparency. Harnessing the local



expertise of development agencies is also useful to them in understanding new market opportunities in developing countries. From the agencies' perspective, companies offer money, technology and influence on a scale that many feel they could not achieve on their own or with governments. "The intergovernmental system is not delivering through regulatory approaches. NGOs are now turning to market forces as a catalyst for change," writes Claude Martin, Executive Director of WWF, in "A Business Guide to Development Actors", a report by the International Business Leaders Forum and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

Another factor oiling the wheels of partnerships is the movement of people with campaign or research backgrounds into the private sector. Francis Sullivan, Director of conservation at WWF-UK, joined HSBC this year on secondment as an adviser, with a brief that includes furthering links with "environmentally interested parties".

Scott Keillor, head of corporate social responsibility and communications at Starbucks UK, started out as a research ecologist. Charlotte Grezo, Director of corporate responsibility at Vodafone, is an environmental biologist who formed links with campaign groups while working on climate change and biodiversity at BP.

Is the growth in partnerships unequivocally positive? Deborah Doane, who chairs the core coalition of campaigners pressing for mandatory corporate reporting on environmental and social performance, thinks not. She says there is a danger that alliances can give a misleading impression of progress. International partnerships to tackle supply chain standards, for example, do not address the underlying problem of low prices. She argues that companies always have the upper hand. "NGOs have felt that over the last few years in some of the broader partnerships their names have been used for PR purposes."



Mr. Elkington says there are other risks for campaign groups entering alliances. They may find that, once their expertise has been used, they are gradually squeezed out by others, including companies themselves and social entrepreneurs, who can operate without the constraints of having a large number of donors or members to please. "Others will learn to do the NGO thing, not necessarily in the NGO format," he says.

But companies also run risks in working with non-profit groups that can gain an insight into their weak points and use this to sharpen their

campaigns.

To prove durable, alliances need to produce their intended benefits. "We need some dramatically successful partnerships," says Mr. Elkington. He cites as positive examples Anglo American's work with loveLife, the South African HIV/Aids prevention programme for young people, and the UK government's Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, backed by some big investors, campaigners and companies, that encourages producer countries to disclose how they use revenues from oil, gas and mining.

Without successes, partnerships will create cynicism on both sides. There are usually other campaigners willing to use more

radical and aggressive tactics. A case was the hoaxer who pretended in a live interview on BBC World this month to be a spokesman for Dow Chemical announcing a \$12bn (£6.3bn) compensation fund for the victims of the Bhopal disaster in India.

Mr. Elkington believes that partnerships are not suitable for every campaign organisation. "I'd be horrified if we got to the point where every NGO was in bed with one or more companies. There's no question that it dilutes their capacity really to drive change through the media or the public mind. They become civilised and domesticated to some degree."

Christian Aid, a church-backed agency, avoids alliances with big



international companies, although it has a partnership with the UK's Co-operative Bank, which has carved a niche as an ethical financial institution.

Partnerships with multinationals are too risky, says Andrew Pendleton, head of trade policy at the charity, which published a scathing report about corporate social responsibility this year. "We don't want to do anything which is going to limit our ability to be critical," he says. "There's nothing wrong with the

adversarial approach when it's necessary, and it sometimes is some of the corporate responsibility agenda is disingenuous." Mr. Pendleton says many of Christian Aid's supporters distrust big business. Greenpeace, on the other hand, says a survey of its supporters showed that they generally wanted more co-operation with business, even though some have opposed its corporate alliances. Mr. Tindale of Greenpeace believes non-profit groups will in future be divided between those that take corporate donations and those that co-operate with companies but eschew any financial relationship.

He says Greenpeace's key to retaining independence lies in refusing corporate funding, receiving no profits from joint ventures such as its renewable energy initiative with NPower and working with companies on single projects rather than endorsing all they do.

"The big players have access to capital and can do things quicker and on a bigger scale," he says, explaining the choice of Unilever and NPower as partners. "We use the judo-throw analogy: you use the weight of your opponent to achieve your objective."

Read other articles in this series at www.ft.com/ngoalliances

The Medium Really is the Message

Jean K. Min

The Internet generation, free of print-based thought, has many kinds of expression at its disposal.

It's been nearly four years since I started writing in cyberspace. There are people who like what I write and there are those who are less satisfied. There are lots of people who have asked how they could write like I do. In fact, a certain publishing house asked me to write a book on writing for working people. Having given it thought, I answered that this issue wasn't simply of writing, but one of communication.

I don't think I have much talent other than conveying my thoughts through text, but in fact, my area of interest is all places of communication. Of the countless means of communication that exist in this world, be it in cyberspace or "real" space, I chose writing, within that sphere, I chose cyberspace, which agreed with me.

To follow an adage by Marshall McLuhan, whom I admire as my spiritual teacher, *"the medium is the message."* No matter what I write, or what message I produce, I can't escape from the cyberspace medium I have chosen.

Not so long ago, a certain daily paper offered to run my column. After considering it, I turned the paper down. This was because it would have been entirely inappropriate to adjust my writing style, which had become

The Medium Really is the Message, *Jean K. Min*, Ohmy News, Nov 10, 2004.

http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?no=195948&rel_no=1 [C.ELDOC.60009591], Nov 26, 2004.

http://eng.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?menu=c10400&no=198527&rel_no=1&back_url= [C.ELDOC.6009654]

accustomed to cyberspace, to the demands made by the printed page. It's like one of my favorite phrases, "*You are what you read.*" The medium you chose defines your existential identity.

Besides writing, another medium I've grown accustomed to is "PowerPoint." There are scholars who point out the harmful effects of PowerPoint, but the latest version of PowerPoint allows for colorful forms of expression that surpass Flash animation.

If I were to choose PowerPoint, of the countless words I would like to use, I would work hard to choose only those messages that are appropriate to the PowerPoint medium.

The main point of what I'd like to convey to you today is medium. I'll have to start writing to know, but in fact, this doesn't look like something I could convey in a day. It might require dozens of installments, or perhaps just a few pieces. Because my writing method, or to go even further, that which has exerted a tremendous influence on forming the point of view I use to look at the world is media theory, and I have waited a long time for the chance to share my thoughts with readers.

My first reason for bringing up this topic out of countless topics of conversation in this world is that I'm confident in this area, and the second one is the phenomenon of media as a core topic in understanding the 21st century global village, and the Internet Age in particular. In the last Korean presidential election, we witnessed just how dramatic a result could be called by the two candidates' choices of media.

Moreover, it would be too narrow a viewpoint to reduce "media" to newspapers, broadcasts and the Internet. Computer operating systems, mobile phone screens, department store windows, the electronic advertising screen at *Gwanghwamun* (in Seoul), movie advertisements in the subway stations, the signs on the bathrooms doors reading "men" and "women," traffic signs, ATM

screens, university classrooms... media encompasses all spaces where meaning and communication takes place. In my column, I once called this space where meaning is exchanged "media space." I shall get another chance to explain about this media space.



Well, perhaps I should begin this article; one I don't know when I'll complete.

The Medium is the Message

Let's first try to remember the following inequality

Book > font > type > letter > language > thought > meme > ?

The book is the most familiar medium to modern man, regardless of age or gender. Of the countless forms of communication, a book is a dignified one that even if the Internet were to swallow the world whole, it would stubbornly resist, having withstood the test of thousands of years. This is the story of the book.

The book is an expression of thought. The book is also a medium. If one closely examines just one simple volume, you can see it's a complex medium that contains layer after layer

of other media, much like an onion. A book contains type, which has been decorated by font. Type is the medium that contains letters. Letters are the medium that contains language. Language is the medium that contains the brain's thoughts. Thought is the medium that contains memes. Are you with me? How about we put it this way -- memes are the content of the medium known as thought. Language is the medium of the content called thought. Letters are the medium containing the content known as language. Type and font are the media containing the content known as letters. Books are the medium containing the contents known as type and font. Oh my! Perhaps I've confused you more.

Let's try to think of a couple of examples. People who have written on the Internet and agonized over which font to use would understand. With 11-point text, should I use this font or that font... it's the same piece of writing, but you must have had a different feeling depending on which font it was written in.

For a love letter, unless you're an unfeeling stone, you'll probably avoid using Gothic type. You can see that within the medium of font, there are already particular intentions; to wit, messages contained inside. Purely through the varicolored choice of font, one can convey countless messages.

The medium I have chosen to convey media theory to you is text. I could draw comics, use Flash animation or PowerPoint, or I could even call you together and directly lecture you on the subject, but I have chosen text. This is because for the message I would like to convey, I judged the medium of text as the most appropriate. Of course, my judgments could also be wrong.

In Marshall McLuhan's book *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, a great vice of print culture was pointed out. That would be the lamentable way in which printing type has drastically condensed man's freedom of thought. McLuhan pointed out that despite the fact

that expressions of thought could use innumerable and diverse media like pictures, music and dance, man has almost grown addicted to print culture, drawn by the bait of efficiency and productivity.

Like McLuhan pointed out, if we accepted the thesis that the medium is the message, the moment we chose the medium of print, we became shut off from the possibility of countless other messages.

If we rethink the problem from this point of view, we can conclude that things we take as common sense -- like campaigns to purify the Korean language, criticism of the jargon used on the Internet, and complaints made by adults about today's children who don't read books and are absorbed in online chatting and computer games - are nothing more than the groundless ravings of a generation that has grown addicted to printed culture.

This is because the Internet generation - compared to an older generation that has lived slave to print and books and hence were limited in scope of thought right from the start - are experimenting with many more possibilities of expression.

Umberto Eco once compared Protestantism to MS-DOS and Catholicism to the Macintosh. In the age when printing technology was humble and bibles were the exclusive property of the clergy, the methods employed by the Catholic Church to convey its teachings to its believers were the sacred images that filled up the walls of churches - icons - and holy paintings. Splendid Catholic cathedrals were the best-suited medium of an age without printing technology.

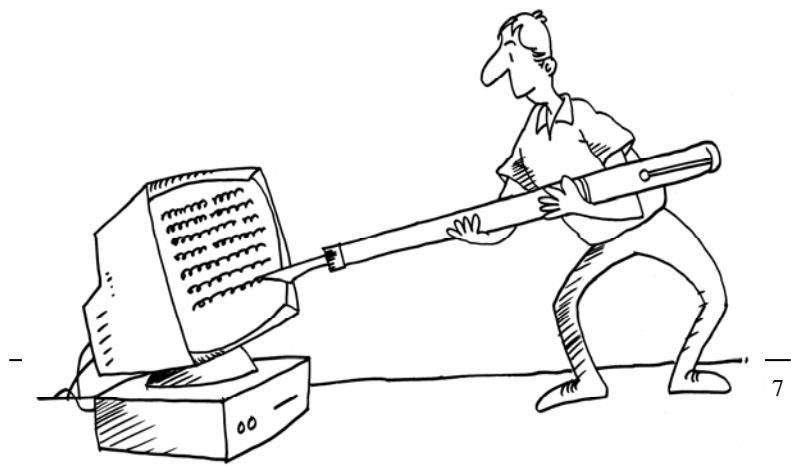
On the other hand, the invention of printing technology was decisive in the birth of Protestantism. Martin Luther tried to awaken believers by propagating the Bible, and the fact that to this day, Protestants place more importance on Bible study than

do Catholics is evidence revealing how Protestantism is a by-product of print culture. If one looks at the reformation from a different angle, one could see it as the confrontation between the medium of sacred images or icons versus the medium of the printed letter.

They say you see only as far as you know, but in fact you see only as far as the media you choose

The Internet is not a place where one screams alone and disappears. Comments go up right away, the writer is influenced by these comments and his next piece evolves. It's a two-way conversation. My space is not a place where I simply proclaim something and disappear, but rather it is like a lecture hall where I share with you my knowledge and experiences.

In addition, one didn't know whether a serial would go on for dozens of installments or finish after just a couple. This is clearly a different approach from that of newspaper serials, which are run according to a table of contents in which the order of writing



has been decided. This is because by leaving the fate of my writing to the interaction of cyberspace, posts can have an even greater sense of life. My writing will evolve, like a living organism, according to reader comments and my own circumstances. The Internet is not a newspaper published once daily or a broadcaster that changes its programming according to hourly time slots. In this space, the design of what I write follows the principles of the cyber world.

In the first part, I defined not just newspapers and broadcasters, but all space in which meaning is exchanged as media. Do you, the readers, believe your own eyes? Are you confident that what you confirm with your own eyes is absolute fact? If so, why is it that magicians manage to fool us almost every time? Can you really believe your own eyes?

Media controls content. A magician is a person who has mastered the principle upon which your brain's optical nerve system operates. That is to say, he understands quite well that the brain is a very selective and incomplete medium that doesn't see things as they really are, but rather chooses only what it wants to see.

If you master the media's operating logic, you can also control the way the media's subscribers understand the world. You can control their worldview. It's all the same world, but between the readers of the Chosun Ilbo, JoongAng Ilbo and Dong-A Ilbo (Korea's three biggest newspapers, which are generally

conservative) on one hand and those of OhmyNews on the other, that world looks completely different. Words don't convey this. Media controls content.

Marshall McLuhan once expanded media to the body. A hammer, the hand; a car; the foot; TV, the eyes... Media decides the content, but more importantly, media is the scope in which the world is contained. How does the world look? Nobody has gotten a view of what the world is. How many places can you actually visit in your lifetime? With the media known as your eyes, trying your best, the world you can see would be hard pressed to exceed a radius of several dozens of kilometers.

If those who control the media showed you only what they wished to show you, your image of the world as you understand it would be nothing more than what they showed.

If even the simple question of whether something does or does not exist is this complicated, imagine how much more so the complex world of ideology and socio-political tension must be.

Even with things we see with our own eyes, all we can do is make a judgment based on probability. Why? Because media controls content. We can only be sure that our worldview will change in accordance with the media's expansion and transformation.

For example, when did you start worrying about and having an

interest in events in some far off country? Wasn't this because the media informed you of those events? Scholars call this media role "agenda setting." This means that the media, even if it decides to simply show something without presenting any political analysis or opinions, can control its readers' or viewers' worldviews and ways of thinking.

They say you see only as far as you know. I've changed this phrase somewhat -- *you see only as far as the capacity of the media you choose.*

You are what you read ▶