

Resisting the Culture of Schooling Series - VII

What's the REAL Story?

Generating a Dialogue
Around the MDGs

Shikshantar: The Peoples' Institute for
Rethinking Education and Development

What's the Real Story?:
Generating a Dialogue around the MDGs

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Dear Friend-

By July 7th 2008, eight years will have passed since the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Millennium Declaration comprised of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015.

Over this period, media campaigns have gradually introduced the MDGs into mainstream public discourse around the world. The MDGs claim to provide a comprehensive analysis and articulation of global crises and a package of clearly implementable and measurable solutions, presented as development goals, targets and indicators. They are thus becoming the framework within which an increasing number of institutional actors, as well as concerned citizens (and well-meaning friends), use to engage the world's problems and to define their development aspirations.

After reviewing the literature on the MDGs, we believe there are many serious questions that are yet to be raised about the MDGs and what their implications are for the majority of people worldwide. For the most part, the only critiques that have been raised so far revolve around failures related to implementation of the goals. There have been almost no critiques raised about the legitimacy of the MDG framework, or the overall direction in which they seek to take the entire planet. We would like to open a dialogue on this. By initiating this dialogue, we are not trying to ignore/belittle/devalue various kinds of violence, exploitation and suffering that are taking place around the world. Instead, we believe that it is through such dialogues as this that we may understand more deeply the systemic roots of these crises, as well as generate new visions and lines of action to engage with these.

The authors in this publication reflected on the following questions:

- What are **your own experiences** with MDGs? How have they impacted you or your community?

- How well do you feel the Millennium Declaration holds up as a universal **guiding framework** for vision, policy and action? What assumptions about development, progress, empowerment, social change, etc. are embedded in it? What is harmful about it? Should there be such a document?

- How do you feel about any of the **specific goals, targets or indicators**? What is missing? How do you think specific programs and policies based on the MDGs have supported or undermined the well-being of communities and nature?
- What is your opinions of the **process** through which the MDGs have been developed and are being implemented? What priorities, perspectives and institutions do you think this process reflects? How would you imagine a different process for generating and sharing of societal aspirations?
- What might you offer as an **alternative to the MDGs** that could support healing and regeneration? Could you propose 1-2 specific principles/questions that would be important to dialogue about across communities?

We have prepared this publication so far in three sections. The first offers essays which strike at the whole of the MDGs framework, trying to explore their conceptual underpinnings and wider implications. The second section looks in detail at several of the specific MDGs, trying to explore what they mean in particular for different social areas. The third set of essays tries to offer other ways and possibilities beyond the MDGs, for moving forward into the next decade of conversation together.

The fourth section is up to you. We look forward to your questions, comments, reactions, reflections, and more... Please send us your thoughts by email at <shikshantar@yahoo.com>. We hope to share the next round of this dialogue before the 8th anniversary of the MDGs (i.e., July 7, 2008).

With best wishes,

Manish Jain and Shilpa Jain
Shikshantar Andolan

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS
TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2015
(SUMMARY)

The MDGs:

- * synthesise, in a single package, many of the most important commitments made separately at the international conferences and summits of the 1990s;
- * recognise explicitly the interdependence between growth, poverty reduction and sustainable development;
- * acknowledge that development rests on the foundations of democratic governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights and peace and security;
- * are based on time-bound and measurable targets accompanied by indicators for monitoring progress; and
- * bring together, in the eighth Goal, the responsibilities of developing countries with those of developed countries, founded on a global partnership endorsed at the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico in March 2002, and again at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in August 2002.

According to UNDP, the MDGs are comprised of the following eight goals, targets and indicators:

*** GOAL 1: ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER**

Target 1: Reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day

1. Proportion of Population Below \$1 (PPP) per Day (World Bank)
2. Poverty Gap Ratio, \$1 per day (World Bank)
3. Share of Poorest Quintile in National Income or Consumption (World Bank)

Target 2: Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

4. Prevalence of Underweight Children Under Five Years of Age (UNICEF)
5. Proportion of the Population below Minimum Level of Dietary Energy Consumption (FAO)

*** GOAL 2: ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION**

Target 3: Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling

6. Net Enrolment Ratio in Primary Education (UNESCO)
7. Proportion of Pupils Starting Grade 1 who Reach Grade 5 (UNESCO)
8. Literacy Rate of 15-24 year-olds (UNESCO)

*** GOAL 3: EMPOWER WOMEN AND PROMOTE EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN**

Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015

9. Ratio of Girls to Boys in Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Education (UNESCO)
10. Ratio of Literate Women to Men 15-24 years old (UNESCO)
11. Share of Women in Wage Employment in the Non-Agricultural Sector (ILO)
12. Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments (IPU)

*** GOAL 4: REDUCE UNDER-FIVE MORTALITY BY TWOTHIRDS**

Target 5: Reduce by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five

13. Under-Five Mortality Rate (UNICEF)
14. Infant Mortality Rate (UNICEF)
15. Proportion of 1 year-old Children Immunised Against Measles (UNICEF)

*** GOAL 5: REDUCE MATERNAL MORTALITY BY THREE QUARTERS**

Target 6: Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio

16. Maternal Mortality Ratio (WHO)
17. Proportion of Births Attended by Skilled Health Personnel (UNICEF)

***GOAL 6: REVERSE THE SPREAD OF DISEASES, ESPECIALLY HIV/AIDS AND MALARIA**

Target 7: Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS

18. HIV Prevalence Among 15-24 year-old Pregnant Women (UNAIDS)
19. Condom use rate of the contraceptive prevalence rate and Population aged 15-24 years with comprehensive correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, UNICEF, UN Population Division, WHO)
20. Ratio of school attendance of orphans to school attendance of non-orphans aged 10-14 years

Target 8: Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

21. Prevalence and Death Rates Associated with Malaria (WHO):
22. Proportion of Population in Malaria Risk Areas Using Effective Malaria Prevention and Treatment Measures (UNICEF):
23. Prevalence and Death Rates Associated with Tuberculosis (WHO):
24. Proportion of Tuberculosis Cases Detected and Cured Under Directly-Observed Treatment Short Courses (WHO)

***GOAL 7: ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Target 9: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; reverse loss of environmental resources

- 25. Forested land as percentage of land area (FAO)
- 26. Ratio of Area Protected to Maintain Biological Diversity to Surface Area (UNEP)
- 27. Energy supply (apparent consumption; Kg oil equivalent) per \$1,000 (PPP) GDP (World Bank)
- 28. Carbon Dioxide Emissions (per capita) and Consumption of Ozone-Depleting CFCs (ODP tons):

Target 10: Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water

- 30. Proportion of the Population with Sustainable Access to and Improved Water Source (WHO/UNICEF)
- 31. Proportion of the Population with Access to Improved Sanitation (WHO/UNICEF)

Target 11: Achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020

- 32. Slum population as percentage of urban population (secure tenure index) (UN-Habitat)

*** GOAL 8: CREATE A GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT, WITH TARGETS FOR AID, TRADE AND DEBT RELIEF**

Target 12. Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system Includes a commitment to good governance, development, and poverty reduction — both nationally and internationally

Target 13. Address the special needs of the least developed countries Includes: tariff and quota free access for least developed countries' exports; enhanced programme of debt relief for HIPC's and cancellation of official bilateral debt; and more generous ODA for countries committed to poverty reduction

Target 14. Address the special needs of landlocked countries and small island developing States

Target 15. Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term.

Target 16: In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth.

Target 17: In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries

Target 18: In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications

Official development assistance

- 32. Net ODA as percentage of OECD/DAC donors' gross national product (targets of 0.7% in total and 0.15% for LDCs)
- 33. Proportion of ODA to basic social services (basic education, primary health care, nutrition, safe water and sanitation)
- 34. Proportion of ODA that is untied
- 35. Proportion of ODA for environment in small island developing States
- 36. Proportion of ODA for transport sector in landlocked countries

Market access

- 37. Proportion of exports (by value and excluding arms) admitted free of duties and quotas
- 38. Average tariffs and quotas on agricultural products and textiles and clothing

- 39. Domestic and export agricultural subsidies in OECD countries
- 40. Proportion of ODA provided to help build tradecapacity

Debt sustainability

- 41. Proportion of official bilateral HIPC debt cancelled
- 42. Total Number of Countries that Have Reached their HIPC Decision Points and Number that Have Reached their Completion Points (Cumulative) (HIPC) (World Bank-IMF)
- 43. Debt Service as a Percentage of Exports of Goods and Services (World Bank)
- 44. Debt Relief Committed Under HIPC Initiative (HIPC) (World Bank-IMF)
- 45. Unemployment of 15-24 year-olds, Each Sex and Total (ILO)
- 46. Proportion of Population with Access to Affordable, Essential Drugs on a Sustainable Basis (WHO)
- 47. Telephone Lines and Cellular Subscribers per 100 Population (ITU)
- 48. Personal Computers in Use and Internet Users per 100 Population (ITU)

Part 1 -
checking the
HEADLINES

BEYOND THE SMOKESCREEN

Helena Norberg-Hodge <hnh@isec.org.uk>

Economic globalisation is responsible for widening the gap between rich and poor, eradicating biological and cultural diversity, and contributing to rising violence, ethnic friction and even terrorism. Global climate change, one of the greatest threats to life on earth, is, to a great extent, a product of globalised economic activity. This essay argues that, instead of reversing these crises, the Millennium Development Goals in effect support this destructive process. We need a big picture analysis—one that enables us to identify root causes and to take the immediate steps necessary to reverse the juggernaut of globalisation and move towards localisation.

It can be difficult to see the roots of our global crises; we are blinded by development rhetoric, unquestioned assumptions about “progress” and false measures of success, such as GDP. Only if we are able to look through the smokescreen of conventional notions of economic development, can we see the root causes of today’s crises. The global spread of poverty, hunger, inequality, environmental damage, and even terrorism, stems from the same root cause: our unsustainable economy. Though clearly well-intentioned, the Millennium Development Goals don’t question the exploitative economic model that actually created most of these problems in the first place and continues to exacerbate them.

Today’s global economy has its roots in colonialism and slavery. In the early years, European countries spread their influence across the world, robbing other peoples of their land and labour. A European elite forced people to provide for their needs rather than for the needs of their own people. Whole countries were converted into “banana”, “coffee”, “copper” producers. Large scale agricultural production for export was favoured over diversified farming for local and regional needs. In the process, trading corporations expanded and became more and more powerful.

This was followed by an era of “independence” and “development.” During this period, former colonies were considered to be in control of their own affairs. However, the economic enslavement continued. A new Westernised elite was encouraged to continue providing for export markets rather than for their own people’s needs. This enslavement was reinforced by an ever increasing debt.

Today this process continues in fundamentally the same direction. The deregulation of global trade and finance is systematically removing barriers that previously curtailed the activities of transnational corporations and banks. In other words, trade “liberalisation” has meant freeing giant monopolistic corporations to move in and out of countries as they please. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and, more recently, the World Trade Organisation have furthered and promoted these policies.

Proponents argue that unlimited global trade increases “efficiency.” They consider it more “efficient” to eradicate local and regional trading systems. More efficient to standardize crops so that everyone eats the same variety of GM corn, the same variety of hybridized rice, the same soft drinks, the same candy bars. More efficient for everyone to wear the same clothes, listen to the same music and even think the same thoughts. More efficient to fly apples from the UK to South Africa to be waxed and washed and then flown back to the UK to be sold in supermarkets. More efficient for Spanish markets to sell Danish butter, while Danish stores sell butter produced in France.

Due to the distance between the decision-makers and the impact of their decisions, leaders have difficulties seeing what is actually happening in the world. However efficient it looks on an economist’s computer screen for each country to specialize their production for export, in the real world it’s a recipe for poverty, pollution and social instability.

If we investigate reports from the pre-colonial era, we find that many of the poorest areas today were once productive farms and forest. Life in pre-colonial societies was far from perfect, yet in most cases people were able to provide for their basic needs. Trade extended in concentric circles from the village to the region and beyond. It was naturally geared towards importing products that could not be produced locally. Generally, communities were strong and resilient. Children were raised with a sense of belonging and cooperation—essential traits for any society where people need to work together.

Conventional development, supported by the MDGs, furthers the process of economic globalisation. This system is responsible for eradicating cultural as well biological diversity and increasing pollution and poverty worldwide. Localisation, on the other hand could bring about real sustainability—on economic, environmental and social levels. It is a process of shortening the distance between consumption and production, to strengthen local economies and eliminate redundant

trade. It is about re-regulating rather than deregulating global trade and finance and shifting subsidies to support regional and local trade. Unlike the one-size-fits-all, top-down globalisation model, localisation is about adapting economic activity to culture and place. It honours and protects the diversity of peoples and environments that are the very foundations of life on this planet.

Economic Development

Instead of reversing the exploitative nature of the economic system, the Millennium Development Goals, in effect, support it. Looking at the MDGs in the context of the bigger picture it becomes clear that from the very first stated target—to decrease the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day—they support narrow assumptions that contribute to poverty rather than alleviate it. In many parts of the South millions of people still live relatively well in rural villages and smaller towns. They are dependent primarily on a local economy in which long distance trade and money are not essential to provide for basic needs. They meet their needs through more direct relationships—with the land and through trading with others in the region. It is vital that we move beyond the assumption that ever increased economic growth benefits the majority of people.

The global economic model systematically disassembles the structure of the rural economy, leaving many unable to provide for themselves, their families and communities. People are pulled off the land into urban areas where they are forced to compete for scarce, low-paying, insecure employment—away from assured subsistence to dependence on an exploitative globalised economy. When people are pulled into urban centres they lose the connection with others that stems from local bonds of interdependence. Additionally, competition for scarce jobs pits people against one another, creating tensions and even outbreaks of violence. Promoting a development model that has as its goal to increase the payments from a dollar a day is not going to prevent the enormous social and ecological breakdown that is being created in the name of development.

Education

Economic globalisation, like colonialism, standardises the process of education according to a Western model. No one can deny the value of real education, that is, the widening and enrichment of knowledge. But today education has become something quite different. It isolates children from their culture and from nature, training them instead to become narrow specialists in a Westernized urban environment. I have

worked in South for many years, particularly in Ladakh, or “Little Tibet,” an isolated region in the Himalayas. Over the last three decades, I have witnessed the drastic changes wrought by development there. In Ladakh, modern schooling has been acting almost as a blindfold, preventing children from seeing the context in which they live. They leave school unable to use their own resources, unable to function in their own world.

For generation after generation, Ladakhis grew up learning how to provide themselves with clothing and shelter; how to make shoes out of leather and robes from the wool of their animals; how to build houses out of local wood, stone and earth. Children were given an intuitive awareness that allowed them, as they grew older, to use resources in an effective and sustainable way. None of that knowledge is provided in the modern school. Children are trained to become specialists in a technological, rather than an ecological, society. School is a place to forget traditional skills and, worse, to look down on them.

In every corner of the world today, the process called ‘education’ is based on the same assumptions and the same Eurocentric model. The focus is on faraway facts and figures, a supposed universal knowledge. The books propagate information that is meant to be appropriate for the entire planet. But since only a kind of knowledge that is far removed from specific ecosystems and cultures can be universally applicable, what children learn is essentially synthetic, divorced from the living context. If they go on to higher education, they may learn about building houses, but these houses will be of concrete and steel, the universal box. So too, if they study agriculture, they will learn about industrial farming: chemical fertilizers and pesticides, large machinery and genetically modified seeds.

Modern education has brought obvious benefits, like improvements in the rate of literacy and numeracy. However, it has divided Ladakhis from each other and the land and put them on the lowest rung of the global economic ladder.

The global educational system is making us all poorer by teaching people around the world to use the same resources, ignoring those of their own environment. In this way education is creating artificial scarcity and inducing competition. It gives most of us the knowledge useful only for becoming anonymous producers and consumers in the globalised economy, where jobs are limited. Modern education is therefore linked to mass unemployment and poverty. Basic local knowledge, such as

how to build your own shelter or grow your own food—skills that have ensured the survival of humans for millennia—have become the domain of specialists. In order to reverse the damaging effects of conventional education there is an urgent need to reshape it to provide knowledge for ecologically and culturally sustainable communities.

Health

In the global economic system, healthcare is a profit-making enterprise like any other industry. The development and manufacture of medicines is controlled by huge pharmaceutical corporations. Other corporations, such as insurance companies and “health management organisations,” control access and distribution of healthcare to much of the world. With few controls on their activities, these corporations reap massive profits while individuals are forced to pay higher and higher prices for the most basic of treatments. In the United States, the number of uninsured and underinsured citizens has reached crisis proportions. Many people cannot afford the cost of insurance premiums; they simply cannot get the medical care they need. When people in the richest country in the world do not have free access to basic healthcare, how can we expect that same system to provide it to people in poorer countries?

First and foremost healthcare needs to be for people, not profit. Scaling down the power of multinationals and linking healthcare to localised economies would bring about a decrease in infectious illness. It would also encourage more preventative and holistic treatment methods, which ultimately save costs. This would better serve the needs of people than the sort of agreements currently negotiated with pharmaceutical corporations.

Ecology

Localising economic activity would dramatically reduce the human ecological footprint and structurally bring far greater benefits than negotiating international environmental treaties. Reversing the globalising trend would significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, curtail the exploitation of non-renewable resources and encourage environmentally-sensitive production methods.

Globalisation is, in large part, a process of urbanisation especially in developing countries. Urban centres around the world are extremely resource intensive. The large-scale, centralised systems they require are, almost without exception, more stressful to the environment than small-scale, diversified, locally adapted production. Food and water, building materials and energy must all be transported great distances via vast

energy-consuming infrastructures; their concentrated wastes must be hauled away in trucks and barges, or incinerated at great cost to the environment. In their identical glass and steel towers with windows that never open, even air to breathe must be provided by fans, pumps and non-renewable energy. From the most affluent sections of Paris to the slums of Calcutta, urban populations depend on increasing amounts of packaging and transport for their food, so that every pound of food consumed is accompanied by a dramatic increase in petroleum consumption, as well as significant amounts of pollution and waste.

It is not enough to “improve the lives of slum dwellers,” we need to prevent the creation of slums in the first place. Rebuilding local economies allows for a more decentralised development: it allows rural communities and small towns to flourish, offering people a chance for a better life rather than spending their days working for a pittance in a sweat-shop factory.

Privatisation of water is just one more consequence of a global economic system where corporations are in control. Much water is currently used for irrigation of monocrops for export. If local populations were able to control this resource many more people would have access to clean water. Many developing countries devote a large proportion of their water to producing thirsty crops (ill-adapted to arid climates) destined for European markets. Reducing dependence on exports could free up natural resources for the use of the local population. Small-scale, appropriate technologies for purifying water abound. As part of a program of localised development, these systems would ensure a safe supply of drinking water to rural communities.

Localisation for the Millennium

Economic localisation is a far more effective strategy for addressing poverty, social and environmental problems than conventional development and globalisation. Increased food security through agricultural self-reliance coupled with a clean water supply would, in addition, reduce infant mortality. Curtailing the power of global corporations would lessen the opportunities for exploitation—for example, the formula marketing policies of Nestle in Africa which resulted in innumerable infant deaths.

If we shifted our Millennium Development Goals towards localisation on a global scale, we could do more than halve the number of people who don't have access to clean water or go hungry every day. We could actually eliminate hunger and poverty worldwide. Localisation fosters an interdependent network of strong communities and local

economies rather than a collection of countries in competition with one another and dependent on a volatile economic system. There will always be changes in local conditions that bring about ecological instability and social problems. However, if economies are adapted to the local environment and the needs of the community, if people's ties to one another are unbroken, if people have free access to their own natural resources, then they are far more likely to recover quickly from any crisis.

There are heartening moves in the direction of localisation. Countless grassroots efforts show that people are ready to shape their own futures, to create a more sustainable and humane world. However, to implement localisation we need policy change at the national level as well, and ultimately an overall international framework that fosters grassroots change. If we really want to address poverty, hunger, inequality and environmental crises, then localisation offers a much greater chance of success than the conventional development path. Let us set real positive goals that have a chance of success. It is high time for a shift in direction.

“One of the fundamental flaws of the MDGs is that they continue to perpetuate the 20th century model of deficit Development. The assumption is that local communities and traditional cultures are ‘empty’, ‘backward’, ‘ignorant’ — that they have no conceptions of healing, learning, sustainable living — and that modern institutions, experts, markets and technologies are the only forces that can conceive of and bring forth progress and development. A scan of all the MDG documents reveals not a single appreciative utterance about the peoples of the Global South. Not one single word. How can it be that the MDGs have nothing positive to say about the peoples that they supposedly wish to help?”

Apparently, the authors of the MDGs do not believe that the wisdoms, powers, knowledges, skills, relationships, imaginations that are still dynamically living in ancient civilizations around the world have anything important to contribute to the vision of the new millennium.

If we wish to find new ways out of the titanic-like mess that we are in today, I believe that we must make a strong commitment to intercultural dialogue. An honest intercultural dialogue and partnership for the new millennium can take place only if there is an appreciation and honoring of the perspectives, experiences, ways of living, even cosmologies, of the ‘Other’. It should be clarified that appreciation does not mean blind acceptance or romanticization. Rather it implies a willingness to see and engage with dynamic diversities and possibilities from a place of mutual learning and respect. An appreciative process will enable us to create more spaces for openly rethinking the mold of Development and the ‘roots of the problem.’”

- Manish Jain, Shikshantar

SLOUCHING TOWARDS FLATLANDS

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"If your life has not three dimensions, if you don't live in the body, if you live in the two-dimensional plane in the paper world that is flat and printed, as if you were only living your biography, then you are nowhere. You don't see the archetypical world, but live like a pressed flower in the pages of a book, a mere memory of yourself."

- Nietzsche's Zarathustra, Carl G. Jung

India is the land of my grandparents and a country my family has fled from several times. For some reason, it keeps calling us back. Last year I was involved in the delivery of an ambitious development project in India. Its initial stated goal was to halve the rate of child malnutrition in India within ten years. There are some 100 million children in India that suffer from some form of under-nutrition. The goals of this project were derived from and closely linked to the MDGs – in particular those relating to women and children.

The project took roughly three years to put together. A large part of this time was spent talking to stakeholders and funders. Stakeholders largely consisted of government officials (including some panchayat leaders), corporate executives and civil society leaders. Part of the reason this phase of the project took three years was that in its earliest conception the project was to be located in India, without a decision being made about where exactly in India. Over the course of this time the geographic focus of the project emerged – with factors such as political support and infrastructure being key determinants for where to start work. The project ultimately involved a number of Indian institutions, including various departments from the Government of Maharashtra, a UN agency, a small number of corporations, a number of NGOs, a New York-based development NGO and us.

In many conversations with stakeholders and funders, a power-point was used to frame and explain the project, its scope and its reason for being. A set of the MDGs relating to women and child development in India were used near the start of the presentation. The 'indicators' concerning the question of India meeting its MDGs came from UNICEF. This data showed that India was not going to meet these goals. In the meetings that I sat in, I remember many questions being asked, such as where the funding would come from and so on, but I have no recollection of the goals ever being questioned, nor the data ever being queried even though they were a key part of framing the project.

The MDGs themselves and the whole business of tracking indicators can be thought of as an intellectual and cognitive exercise belong to a very peculiar universe, one that most people on the planet (in terms of sheer numbers) do not live within. The MDGs come from a way of being and thinking, from a place, that can be thought of as “Flatland” a two-dimensional, self-referential, closed universe defined by the boundaries of reports and power-point presentations. Edwin Abbot’s classic book *“Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions”* is the story of an inhabitant of a two-dimensional world. It explains what life is like in such a place a story the inhabitants of a two-dimensional world sketches the qualities of this world. In a Flatland universe, a sphere can only be perceived as a circle. In a Flatland paradigm, people are not people but statistical cases, suffering from ‘grade 1,2,3 or 4 malnutrition’ or simply ‘ill’ – they are not whole people.

But people do not live in power-point presentations. People are not categories. People are not shadows.

The Government of India runs one of the largest development projects in the world, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). ICDS has an 2007-2008 annual budget of Rs 4761 crore¹ (USD\$1,185,212,845.41) or just under USD\$1.2 billion. On paper there are ICDS centres that sometimes don’t exist in the real world. One ICDS centre I went to looked like a fire-bombed wreck. The young doctor showing us around shrugged and said that these things sometimes only exist on paper, or they really exist (that is, have a building and a worker) but the food that is meant to be arrive never makes it, because it’s siphoned off along the way.

The workers who run ICDS are required to fill in reams and reams of paperwork, which all get shuffled vertically up the chain of command. The workers who collect the data never really know what it’s for or how it will be used. Decisions are made on the basis of this ‘data’ far, far away from the collection point. But often the ‘data’ is inaccurate. In one ICDS centre I saw a chart that said one thing (that there was no Grade Three or Four malnutrition in her village) with the worker talking near a child that was almost certainly suffering from Grade Three or Four malnutrition (determined by height to weight ratios). Suffice to say the ‘data’ sometimes has nothing to do with reality and is always an extremely poor representation of reality. ICDS sits on the ground but is run out of Flatland. The bureaucrats who run it live in a massive parallel universe of paper.

Entire projects live and die in Flatland, never really coming to grasp that the real world (or the world of ‘Space’ as Abbot calls it) does not consist of circles and squares, but spheres and cubes, not of statistics but people

of flesh and blood who have their own beliefs and thoughts and feelings. Unfortunately, armies of governmental, corporate and NGO staff labour in Flatland, dealing not with reality but with a parallel universe of intellectual abstractions, that is, people as categories, treating development as an engineering problem. Work in Flatland consists of creating cognitive categories and then treating these categories as reality, building an entire world with categories as building blocks. From time-to-time this world of Flatland intersects with the real world, not by design, mostly by accident.

In India, we took individuals out into communities (for three nights) to engage with the world. We took them to engage their senses directly in the phenomenon of malnutrition (as opposed to the epiphenomenon of malnutrition represented by documents and power-point presentations). This was a challenging process. Initially, many people objected to this activity. Should we not instead sit in the office and listen to presentations from the experts on malnutrition? Why do we have to go and live in a village without plumbing, without proper amenities? Why can't we stay in a hotel? What can we learn there? Why had we not given them a list of questions and then they would simply go and collect the data?

Once the shock of the situation wore off, the group I was with (which included government officials, a medical doctor, two young corporate executives, an NGO worker with impressive academic credentials in nutrition but no experience 'in the field') generally began appreciating the experience of engaging with real people without any specific data-gathering agenda (or agenda-shaped space for that matter). Simple engagements revealed complex issues, for example one participant reported "It was revealed that the Anganwadi (ICDS) worker who herself was illiterate did have the material but didn't use it out of fear that the kids would tear it all up." This raises a great many practical questions about the success or failure of nutritional programmes on the ground. If the worker was illiterate then how was she coping with the reporting requirements? If the worker was not using the materials then what was she doing about teaching people about malnutrition?

This kind of exposure, unfortunately, is extremely rare in the world of Flatland. Three nights within a community was considered a large investment of time, whereas years behind a desk is considered acceptable. In my experience, development professionals rarely hang out, pay attention to and make friends with the villagers or communities they are meant to serve (unless of course they are anthropologists doing 'field-work' or somehow a part of the community itself). If this happens it

is generally an accident, not seen as relevant to the goals of a project. At best they might run a PRA type programme and at worst they might fly in and out, speak some platitudes and roar off in cloud of dust.

As we made our way through our project, we retreated further and further into Flatland. Planning actions on paper, creating power-point presentations and so on became more important than anything we had seen, anything that we might feel or the relationships we had built.

The pushy PP style tends to set up a dominance relationship between speaker and audience, as the speaker makes power points with hierarchical bullets to passive followers. The power-dynamics and the hierarchy of large hegemonic bureaucracies are embedded in and particularly well-suited to Flatland tools, particularly power-point. As the pressure mounted, we tacitly decided to play by the rules, to collude with the power-structures of Flatland by talking to them in the language of Flatland. We were human beings behaving, increasingly as the project went on, like bureaucrats. It would have, perhaps, been more helpful (and required more courage) to the people we wanted to help to be human beings behaving like human beings².

Within the context of our project, notions of what it means to be healthy all came from textbooks. For example, I found it fascinating to hear many professionals talk about how malnutrition affects IQ – when in fact IQ as a concept has long been discredited³ and has no analog outside of Flatland. The complexity of how food affects cognitive development and the link to behaviour is just that, complex. Yet, the biology of children is being configured on the basis of normalised notions such as IQ. Why? Why not look at the real world? Why not “close the textbooks and open our eyes?”⁴ Our project became a microcosm of the larger systems that it was attempting to shift. Our goals were not owned by the people that were most affected by them and neither are the MDGs. The voices of the people who, at least in theory, are most affected by the MDGs, are nowhere to be found.

From conception (by a visionary Dutch business-man) to execution (led by a ‘visionary’ non-Indian team – including me) – the goals and processes for the project were not set by the people most closely involved in delivering the project or affected by the project. In other words, many of the people involved ‘on the ground’ – the stakeholders, the Indian facilitators, the communities – never had any voice in the conception of the most important parameters of the project. Consequently they never really owned it. When things got hard, they understandably shrugged. Why should they risk and fight for something that never gave them a

voice? That they did not conceive? That did not reflect their dreams and aspirations? When they are not being seen as whole people?

The leaders (Indian and non-Indian) that conceived and designed the project – within the context of a highly bureaucratized, hierarchical system were all very well intentioned and serious about the project. They were deeply concerned about the status of children. What we profoundly failed to understand was one relatively simple thing. People are capable of extraordinary creativity, courage and determination when they have the agency to set their own path, create their own goals and design their own processes. Goals set far away in foreign countries (or distant capitals), processes designed by foreigners, decisions made by technocrats in the centres of power do not start bush-fires of creativity and determination. In short when people have ownership then they are capable of addressing the most complex of challenges.

It has become clearer and clearer to me that the work I am engaged in involves building our capacities to cope with phenomenon – that is, the mess of the world, 'the swamp', the heat, the smell, the emotionality, the conflict and all the things that come from engaging as whole people with whole people. This means leaving our desks, holding our models lightly and engaging our senses. The reward being work that is deeply rooted in the complexity of the world, owned by the people who are affected by them (instead of opaque, unaccountable agencies), in other words, development projects that deliver what they say they will deliver.

However, this engagement is not what we are trained for. It is possible to get a graduate degree in nutrition without ever seeing malnutrition or even practicing good nutrition yourself. Our schools and our universities train us to deal with epiphenomenon, with charts, with power-point, with numbers, with words, with images – with Flatland. I am starting to see how this training re-enforces the power-structures and dynamics of hegemonic systems of control. Fortunately, these systems of control will never really succeed at forcing people to own goals that are alien to them. Yet they continue trying, spending billions in the process⁵ and probably failing to shift situations that are, to put it mildly, deeply unjust. If we are genuinely interested in change then we will muster up the courage to question our own systems and ask ourselves why we have retreated into the paucity of Flatland.

The question of why we and I retreated into Flatland is a question I continue to carry with me and puzzle over. What strategies should we pursue in our journey out of Flatland? What strategy should we pursue when we meet hordes of people on their way into Flatland?

The tragedy of our project in India is not that it failed in any conventional sense, although it's highly doubtful that it will meet its own stated goals. The tragedy is that along the way it abandoned the phenomenological foundations we started with and instead embraced Flatland as a paradigm, as a way of engaging with the world. In doing so, I believe we ensured that it will fail.

The tragedy of the MDGs is not that they won't be met. Rather it's that so many people with eyes and ears, with the senses to perceive and engage in the world, will have to dim their perceptions in order to operate in Flatland and continue to campaign strongly for others to do the same, that so many people will live their lives, "like a pressed flower in the pages of a book."

Endnotes

¹ Source: <http://indiabudget.nic.in/ub2007-08/high.htm>

² In hindsight, looking back at the years of meetings – we pursued a mixed combination of deep listening (what we called "Deep Dialogue Interview" and presentations. During many power-point presentations we made during the course of developing the project, we were propagating a power-dynamic very particular to the Flatland paradigm – we were effectively making use of the dominance that gets created between speaker and audience in order to convince stakeholders to support our project. The listening on the other hand is probably what worked much better to convince people we were genuine.

³ For a thorough demolition of the concept of IQ, see for example, "The Mismeasure of Man" – Stephen Jay Gould.

⁴ Hernando de Soto, Massive Change interview.

⁵ Aid from 22 countries comes in at just under USD\$80 billion (excluding debt relief.) Source: The Economist. This is also not counting foundational and civil society funding such as The Gates Foundation (with a \$33 billion endowment).

A FRAGMENTED UNIVERSE

Munir Fasheh <mfasheh@yahoo.com>

*Like most declarations, **MDGs lack the intellectual honesty and moral courage** to go beyond what is – professionally and institutionally – “correct”, and against interests of big powers and corporations. They distract us from real threats, issues, and dangers and blind us from seeing real causes (by avoiding “why?” questions) and the underlying logic (with its dominant values of control, winning, and profit regardless of the cost we pay at the human and nature’s levels). MDGs are characterized not only by what they advocate but also, and probably more importantly, by what they ignore and make invisible such as pluralism, wisdom, harmony, dignity, hospitality, and generosity (which are crucial to human sanity and survival). They blind us from seeing solutions that have existed and still exist in people and communities, mainly by believing that there is a single undifferentiated path for progress (as manifested, for example, by Goal #2: “achieve universal primary education”). They rob people of natural abilities and instill in them the feeling that they cannot do anything without institutions, professionals, and budgets. A metaphor that I find helpful in seeing the essence of universal declarations is “farming the Amazon”: on the surface, things sound good; at a deeper and long term level, however, they destroy what sustained life over thousands of years. Moreover, like modern thought in general, **MDGs deal with the world in a fragmented way, with no serious attempt to see how various elements/ phenomena fit together into a meaningful, interconnected universe...** As usual, the more universal declarations claim they want to solve world problems, the more problems accumulate: MDGs are no exception.*

Elaboration:

Every decade or so, as dominant distractions lose momentum and effectiveness, a new one is dumped on peoples around the world; MDGs is a current distraction. Often, such distractions take the form of universal declarations and recycled commitments made at international conferences and world summits. They usually consist of things that sound nice (like sustainability) but, in reality, they kill what has sustained people and human communities for thousands of years. Since 1949, a main weapon for dismantling people and communities, and robbing them of what they have, has been development. The fact that there are ‘good’ elements within these declarations is like poisoned meat, which municipalities use to attract and get rid of wandering dogs. We have been the target of declarations since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); it is about time that we see the underlying pattern and logic and protect nature and ourselves from their onslaught

I said above that MDGs lack intellectual honesty and moral courage. Putting the main causer of poverty and hunger during the past 60 years – the World Bank – as a body responsible for eradicating poverty and hunger, is shameless... some anti-poverty organization! To cite one indication, the All Africa Conference of Churches issued the following statement in 1995, marking the 50th anniversary of the World Bank and IMF (and launching 'Fifty Years is Enough'): "Every child in Africa is born with a financial burden which a lifetime's work cannot repay. The debt is a new form of slavery as vicious as the slave trade." In order to approve loans, the World Bank demanded Tanzania privatize its water system; made telecom privatization a condition of aid for Hurricane Mitch; demanded labor 'flexibility' in Sri Lanka in the aftermath of tsunami; and pushed for eliminating food subsidies in post-invasion Iraq. The problem with the World Bank is not Wolfowitz's girlfriend but what it does in the real world...

The lack of intellectual honesty and moral courage is linked to advancement of one's career and to symbolic gains. That's why MDGs avoid going deep into the "why?" questions (other than in technical issues). They avoid, for example, the main causes of hunger and poverty: greed and the pattern & level of consumption. The unreasonable level of consumption in rich societies is considered a basic freedom: freedom to consume, even if that meant consuming the Earth! *One does not fight poverty, one fights greed; eradicating greed is the way to eradicate poverty!* But MDGs lack the intellectual honesty and moral courage to say that. Hence, not only problems don't get solved but actually increase and accumulate.

Another manifestation is what MDGs ignore and make invisible. Goal #6, for example, says "reverse the spread of diseases, especially HIV/AIDS and malaria". Why do MDGs ignore ills that result from dumping nuclear and chemical waste by rich countries in small countries, and ignore diseases caused by radiation from nuclear reactors that serve military purposes? Why are they missing? Can the omission be explained through forgetfulness or innocence? Or is it because it is politically incorrect to say that because, then, formulators of the declaration would be stepping on the interests of big powers and corporations? Another example of this is ignoring the chemicals (that are the cause of many health problems), which food industries and corporations add to processed foods. Such companies are protected by law in the US not to declare what they add!

Like most declarations, MDGs are full of recycled language, repeating the same phrases that sound good but embody perceptions,

conceptions, and relations that ignore or rob what people and communities have. The recycled language includes: "achieve universal primary education", "empower women and promote equality between women and men", "ensuring environmental sustainability" etc. Insisting that education is a right (and that this right can only be achieved via a single universal path, disregarding totally the fact that children learn via different ways), and using the total budget for learning to support this single path (ignoring the fact that the majority of students graduate as useless people – having no life skills, and going through 12 years mainly rewarded for obedience) – reflect the inability of policy makers and policy implementers to see and to learn. Healing from the belief that education is the only path to learn, and regaining pluralism as a fundamental value, not only in learning but in all aspects of living, form the minimum that needs to be done to bring back sanity into the world. Having a pluralistic attitude in living is a most important challenge we face in the world today. Universal declarations are a main killer of pluralism. In this sense, they are not an 'enemy' that needs to be fought but more like a disease that we need to heal from.

In harmony with pluralism, the school path should be perceived as one path to learn; children/ students who like it, enjoy it, and feel that they learn from it, they should have the opportunity to follow it. But to impose it on all children and provide no other path would be a source of both physical and psychological harm. Every time I hear a person talk against child labor, I ask, "How do you define 'child labor'?" The answer usually is something like 'forcing children to do what they don't like, and are usually harmed by it, and are paid very little for it'. I say this applies exactly to schools: many children are forced to do what they hate; they often carry heavy books that cause them physical harm; they go through psychological torture by being constantly measured and judged; and not only are they paid little for such labor, but often are asked to pay! This is child labor par excellence! The fact that we don't even see it is worse than the fact that it is happening. [It reminds us of Milgram's experiment in the sixties where he found out that people don't mind torturing others if they are ordered by professionals connected to some authority. Milgram stressed that when an individual merges "into an organizational structure, a new creature replaces autonomous man, unhindered by the limitations of individual morality, [and] mindful only of the sanctions of authority".

"Empower women and promote equality between women and men"... Does this mean that men are empowered and don't need empowerment? If we stop seeing the world through ideological glasses, and use our eyes again, we will see that the main threats in the modern

world are mainly the making of men, and more specifically, of white male scientists. [Whereas, for example, indigenous peoples of the Americas had “caring for the 7th generation” as their guiding principle, people we admire – like Einstein – did not care even for living generations today!] Do we want women to be equal to men in creating tools that would add to current threats and to destruction? The goal to “empower women and promote equality between women and men” is a distraction from two things: first, distraction from seeing the harm and destruction that men’s power cause and, second, distracting us from seeing what women have. Considering those who can survive under any conditions to be the ones who need empowerment is part of the corruption of modern minds. In fact, it is exactly those who are employed by big organizations (like governments, World Bank, UN agencies, corporations...etc) – who obey rules without asking any questions – who need empowerment.

Item #11 under Goal #3 talks about “women share in wage employment” ... When are slave relations a measure? Empowering/developing women (or for that matter, any other group) is a manifestation of disregard and disrespect for what they have; it ignores the uniqueness of every person; and it reflects a linear view of the world. What has been sustaining the world is not the behavior and pattern of living of men and of ‘advanced developed’ countries but, rather, people who live simply, reasonably, and responsibly. No doubt, there are huge injustices towards women in almost all societies, but to advocate a shallow linear concept – such as equality – as the solution is not a serious call. Fighting for equality in legal matters is one thing, but to extend it to aspects that cannot be measured (such as the worth of a person or to dignity, hospitality, friendship, and uniqueness of every person) would be a disaster.

Another main ill of modern times (which goes against pluralism in living) is comparing people and countries along vertical measures that claim to be objective and universal. When human existence and human worth are measured via numbers, we should look at that as an alarm. As long as people, communities, cultures, and countries are compared by such measures, any claim of improving life on earth and saving the planet would at best be a false promise and misguided.

Talking about “ensuring environmental sustainability” without talking about reversing the current pattern and level of consumption (and its role in global warming) is again a sign of lack of honesty and courage. This was recognized centuries ago by Native Americans: caring for the 7th generation. Europeans were unable to learn such wisdom; instead, they killed the wisdom along with the people!

I find "farming the Amazon" a powerful metaphor that explains current crises around the world in the name of development. Bulldozing trees in the Amazon region and farming the land underneath (and failing to see the worth of such forests to human survival) is similar to bulldozing oral cultures via educational and literacy programs that fail to see the richness in peoples and in cultures and fail to see the worth of such cultures as sources of meanings and understandings that stem from and connected to life. In both cases, it is the belief in a single universal path for progress (usually referred to as development) that is the cause of destruction of beautiful natural forests and beautiful "forests of culture". It would be almost impossible to regenerate them once we lose them.

* * *

How can we heal from MDGs and their like?

I suggest three questions to be asked, which can help in the healing process:

- What are the consequences of what we say and do? That is, what do we lose by gaining something? [This is especially important in relation to what is presented as unquestionably and universally good, such as education, literacy, development, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and MDGs.]
- Why are the "why?" questions usually ignored? And how can we reactivate them?
- What can I do with what is available and that does not need a permit, budget, institutions, and professionals? This question is most crucial in healing because it is the one where people act, do, and relate. The question embodies a nice meaning of participation, self-rule, freedom, and creativity. Gandhi advocating the spinning wheel is an inspiring example in this regard.

“One of the possible pitfalls of the current campaigns in support of the MDGs is that much of the attention has focused on aid levels and on coordinating action at the national level.

While these are undoubtedly important issues, they are not the whole story. The wealthy countries could triple their aid levels – central government ministries could become models of coordination – and yet there is no guarantee this would result in progress for marginalized, rural indigenous people.

The reason is that the prevailing, underlying thinking in too many major development organizations is that the poor and hungry are helpless beneficiaries – not that they are the primary authors and actors for their own development.”

- Dr. John Coonrod, The Hunger Project

Excerpted from: **THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS: A CRITIQUE FROM THE SOUTH** (April 3, 2006)

Samir Amin

The Real Goals of Dominant Capital

A critical examination of the formulation of the goals as well as the definition of the means that would be required to implement them can only lead to the conclusion that the MDGs cannot be taken seriously. A litany of pious hopes commits no one. And when the expression of these pious hopes is accompanied by conditions that essentially eliminate the possibility of their becoming reality, the question must be asked: are not the authors of the document actually pursuing other priorities that have nothing to do with "poverty reduction" and all the rest? In this case, should the exercise not be described as pure hypocrisy, as pulling the wool over the eyes of those who are being forced to accept the dictates of liberalism in the service of the quite particular and exclusive interests of dominant globalized capital?

Besides, the MDGs cannot truly be taken seriously by their promoters in the imperialist triad, which implements them only when it is convenient and ignores them otherwise, nor by states in the South that, not wanting to take any risks at the present time, refrain from formally rejecting the proposals. In another time, a text of this type would not have been adopted and the states of the South would have, at least, imposed a compromise.

The MDGs are part of a series of discourses that are intended to legitimize the policies and practices implemented by dominant capital and those who support it, i.e., in the first place the governments of the triad countries, and secondarily governments in the South. The real goals, openly recognized as such, are:

1. Extreme privatization, aimed at opening new fields for the expansion of capital. Such privatization calls into question the existence of national state property, which should be liquidated on open markets, by foreign capital among others. Beyond that, privatization aims at eliminating public services, particularly in education and health. Here, the ideas developed in the MDGs concerning the elimination of illiteracy and the improvement of health lose all credibility. The privatization of property and access to important natural resources, in particular petroleum and water, facilitates the pillage of these resources for the wastefulness of the triad, reducing the discourse of sustainable development to pure, empty rhetoric.

2. The generalization of the private appropriation of agricultural land.

Just as with agricultural and food products, land, too, must be subjected to the general law of the market. This general offensive aims at nothing less than extending the policy of “enclosures” (referring to the “enclosures” implemented in England in the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries and then extended to the rest of Europe in the nineteenth) to the entire world. Its success would lead to the destruction of the peasant societies that make up nearly half of humanity. This destruction, now underway (and liberalism would like to see the tempo accelerated), is already the major cause of pauperization in the third world, which results in emigration from the countryside to the urban slums. But that is of little importance, since the minority of so-called modernized rural producers who will survive the massacre, and be subjected to the demands of agribusiness, will produce the superprofits that the latter aspires to capture. Nothing else matters.

3. Commercial “opening” within a context of maximum deregulation.

This is a way of lifting all obstacles to the expansion of a trade that is as unequal as it can possibly be in conditions characterized by a polarized world development and a growing concentration of power in the hands of the transnationals that control the trade in raw materials and agricultural products. The example of coffee illustrates the disastrous social effects of this systematic choice. Twenty years ago, all coffee producers were paid nine billion dollars and all the consumers paid out twenty billion for this same coffee. Today these two figures are respectively six and thirty billion. The gap between them is the gigantic profit margin captured by a handful of oligopolistic intermediaries. It goes without saying that in these conditions campaigns in favor of so-called fair trade, even when their promoters are moved by the most impeccable moral intentions, are not up to the challenge. The correction of these deteriorating terms of trade for the producers can only be obtained by the political intervention of government authorities—both national legislation and international negotiations and legislation.

4. The equally uncontrolled opening up of capital movement.

The fallacious pretext advanced is that deregulation would make it possible to attract foreign capital. Yet it is well known that China, which attracts more of this capital than other countries, has maintained a tighter control over foreign enterprises. Elsewhere, direct foreign investments are targeted at little more than pillaging natural resources. In fact, the IMF imposed the opening of “capital accounts” in order to facilitate the indebtedness of the United States, allow speculative capital to engage in pillaging raids, and subject the currencies of the South to systematic undervaluation. This undervaluation, in turn, makes it possible for local

assets in these countries to be purchased for next to nothing, to the evident advantage of the transnational corporations.

5. States are forbidden in principle from interfering in economic affairs.

Internally, the state is reduced to narrow police functions. Internationally, it is reduced to guaranteeing debt service, as the first (and almost exclusive!) priority in public expenditures. The debt is hardly anything more than a particularly primitive form of exploitation and pillage.

This model is presented as being without an alternative because it is imposed by the "objective" requirements of globalization, which negate the power of national states. In reality, the causal relation is just the reverse: this particular form (among other possible ones) of globalization is allotted the objective of destroying the ability of nations and states to resist the expansion of transnational capital.

That is why all these principles, openly adopted by the writers of the MDGs, can only produce what I have elsewhere described as apartheid on a world scale, reproducing and deepening global polarization...

In fact, then, the social goals proclaimed by the MDGs do not constitute the real goals of the whole exercise. Their supposedly democratic packaging must, in turn, be subject to a legitimate doubt. No democracy can possibly take root if it does not support social progress, but, instead, is associated with social regression. This is undoubtedly the reason why the vapid term "governance" is served up as an accompaniment to the empty rhetoric of the MDGs.

The writers of the document appear to have paid no attention to the facts. In the course of three decades following the Second World War, the highest rate of growth known in history took place, along with full employment and notable upward social movement and, if not always a reduction in inequality, the stabilization of structures aimed at more equitable income distribution. But it appears that because the systems in existence at that time regulated markets, these procedures were "irrational" and their results "bad." In the course of the following three decades, accompanying the welcome deregulation, there has been a collapse of growth, a breathtaking increase in unemployment, precariousness, and other manifestations of pauperization, and mounting inequalities. Yet it appears that this system is nevertheless better and more rational. That is undoubtedly because in the preceding systems the rate of return for capital was in the range of 4 to 8 percent and since then it has doubled, moving to between 8 and 16 percent. ...

“The studies suggesting \$50 billion more is needed each year are frequently misinterpreted and contribute to an excessive — and unhelpful — focus on aid. All of the studies have significant problems with the methods used to arrive at the bottom line. The more careful ones come with caveats, but these tend to get lost once advocates or the media get hold of them. More importantly, by putting a price tag on outcomes, cost estimates inadvertently create an illusion that any goal can be met, if only the right amount of money can be mobilized. Among development experts, however, it is widely accepted that resources are not the sole — and perhaps not even the most important — constraint to meeting the MDGs.

No amount of aid will make Africa grow at 7%. A huge literature looks at the link between aid and economic growth, and the results are not overly promising. Even those studies that do show aid can cause growth (for example, certain kinds of aid or that given to countries with good policies), also show very steep diminishing returns to additional aid. That is, even if aid boosts growth a little, more aid cannot make Africa grow like China.

In the social sectors, it is also already well known that more money often does not translate into results; more health spending does not necessarily mean better health. This is because of deep structural problems in local health and education systems that aid projects have a poor record of rapidly removing. The effectiveness of aid is at times also undermined by the way donors operate.”

*- Michael Clemens and Todd Moss,
The Center for Global Development*

Part II -
reading the
fine
print

THE POVERTY TRAP

Alex Jensen <khamzang@riseup.net>

“Placing all the world under a single yardstick, so that all forms of community life but one are disvalued as underdeveloped, unequal and wretched, has made us sociologically blind. By eliminating this stupefying category from our minds, we should be able to look at the world afresh and see not just two possibilities – development or its absence – but a multiplicity of actual and possible ways of ordering communities. Rediscovering the value in these diverse communities does not mean discovering a value in being poor, but discovering that many of the things that have been called ‘poor’ were actually different forms of prosperity.”

– C. Douglas Lummis, ‘Equality’ in *The Development Dictionary*

Sweatshops and subsistence

For the millions of people who have been estranged from land and community as sources of livelihood and sustenance and have in turn become dependent on the cash-mediated market economy to meet even basic needs, dearth of money may mean real material deprivation, i.e. real poverty. An increase in the material necessities (food, water, shelter, healthcare and clothing) and a rectification of the conditions that engender such deprivation is a laudable goal. Yet, it’s well-known that the existence of deprivation and the maintenance of the low wages related to it is an absolute necessity of global capitalism. Governments the world over have been contorting themselves embarrassingly to attract foreign corporations for decades, and one of the the main goodies they always dangle is low wages, cheap and desperate labor. When the ‘Asian miracle’ economies collapsed in the 1990’s, the value of national currencies plummeted, yet wages remained stagnant. In Indonesia, workers who had been dragged into dependency on the sweatshop economy as a result of three decades of neoliberal prescriptions ruthlessly applied by the Suharto regime were suddenly facing starvation. Horrible? Not for global corporations like Nike, which took full advantage of the new bargain by increasing investments – and profits – out of the desperation. This is one of the greatest contradictions of the MDGs in my opinion. Raising wages for those who really need it is at odds with the needs of capitalism. To paraphrase Eduardo Galeano, *the poverty of the poor is needed for the affluence of the affluent*. Yet challenging capital, challenging corporate power, challenging the consumer class lifestyle and ostentatious wealth, is nowhere to be found in the MDGs.

For global corporations, the right mixture is needed between incomes that are low enough to ensure a desperate workforce, but not so low –

as in the case of subsistence cultures – that there is a dangerous independence from the products of the industrial economy.

Income generating schemes, of the sort likely envisioned by the MDGs, are a cruel hoax for those who are victims of dislocation, sweatshop slavery, and other forms of structural violence. To throw a bone of ‘microcredit’ or ‘self-help programs’ to such victims of a system that requires their deprivation would be like feeling virtuous for giving someone a lollypop while standing on his head.

For subsistence cultures, income generating schemes, however well-meaning, can be a cruel hoax for quite different reasons – primarily, by hitching them to a dangerous dependency on the corporate economy. I remember once asking a professor of economics to consider a rural community that is well fed from its local forests and fields, healthier and happier than city-dwellers, and also completely bereft of money. Are such people poor, I asked? Yes, of course they are, he replied. This widespread but fallacious equation – that low income *automatically* equals poverty, and its corollary, that economic growth and rising incomes *automatically* equals wealth and better quality of life – is implicit in the MDGs.

More than increasing income, *per se*, what we arguably really desire is that the basic necessities, conditions and capabilities required for peoples’ flourishing be accessible and sustainably maintained. Income is a derived demand, not what is actually needed. For peoples whose continuing dependence on local landscapes and communities gives them independence from the money market, the ‘absence of income = poverty’ equation is fatally flawed. Millions of so-called peasants – small farmers, pastoralists, nomads, forest-dwelling tribes, village craftsmen, etc. – all over the world fall into this latter category.

Conventional institutional measures of wealth such as the GNP, fail to make this crucial distinction. The sweatshop worker who makes less than one dollar per day suffers from real material deprivation. A farmer in a rural village whose material and cultural/spiritual needs are abundantly met but also makes less than one dollar per day does not suffer material deprivation (this is not to argue that it is only a rural/urban phenomenon – rural people deprived of access to land who must labor in corporate plantations also undoubtedly suffer from material/spiritual deprivation. Their workplaces have often been described as ‘sweatshops in the fields’). Yet, according to the the standard equation, they are equally ‘poor’ and in need of more cash. But the fact is that materially content, culturally

intact communities are not poverty stricken in any real sense at all. They may lack purchasing power in a market economy, but neither do they depend on that economy. They also possess real non-monetary wealth which is invisible to and thus ignored by conventional economic measures. In the dominant economic discourse, money is wealth (not land, community, ritual, clean air and water, healthy food, etc.), and lack of it is poverty, period. Any questions about the universal relevance of this equation are attacked as 'defending poverty.'

Even more than income as such, perhaps, the problem is with the kind of economy that exists in which that income can be used, for both those who need income to survive, and for new conscripts into the cash economy. Is there a money economy worth having an income for? Is the market in which people – both urban and rural, subsistence and cash-dependent – must operate and negotiate just and safe? If we stop and ask 'what do we mean when we say 'The Economy?', it becomes clear on reflection that the answer is 'the global corporate-capitalist economy', which is primarily a dispensary of things that are psychologically and physically toxic (e.g., plastics, pesticides, cosmetics, electronics, junk foods, and all manner of shoddy products planned for quick obsolescence in order to keep the maw of industrial growth well-fed). Greater dependence upon that economy only diminishes real security and community values like health, environmental integrity, absence of waste, etc, both for those still engaged in subsistence *and for those divorced from land in sweatshops and slums*. It frays the the rich tapestry of local economies and cultural diversity that has been woven over centuries, replacing it with a bland, energy intensive and wasteful consumer monoculture. It also leads to loss of sustainable livelihood for traditional craftsmen, *forcing* them to need cash incomes to purchase the outputs of distant factories that have displaced things they used to produce themselves.

Of course it's often argued that communities getting swept into the orbit of the global industrial capitalist market actually means improving the 'standard of living', since (the argument goes) modern industrial products are superior in terms of performance and longevity, and are making life easier. Such thinking is depends on the mistaken assumption that the 'the good life' is universally accepted as industrial consumerism. Even if this were true, it would be suicidal to hold the current consumption and waste levels of (ostensibly) 'developed' countries as the entitlement of all peoples. Rather, these countries owe an enormous ecological debt to the rest of the world.

Such thinking also depends on disregard for the true values of the local things that are being systematically displaced in the process. Until such values are truly appreciated, it will be very difficult to convince people such as the economist that people with little or no money who build their homes from local mud bricks, bamboo, thatch and stone instead of purchased cement and tin are not 'poor' but rich in freedom from dependency on markets over which they cannot exert control (to say nothing of the superior performance of the traditional building).

This is certainly not to argue that subsistence-based cultures are too naïve or 'pure' to not be corrupted and destroyed by money. Indeed, to be fair, many farming communities all around the world can and do employ a more nuanced strategy of livelihood diversification – growing and supplying themselves with many of their basic needs and supplementing this with income generated by selling surplus. By doing so they gain flexibility and reduce vulnerability (especially if selling within the domestic market where currency earned is not at risk of unfavorable fluxes in exchange rates; and if global finance and agricultural markets were re-regulated to reduce the poverty-inducing volatility of the global economy). The point is, it's not always desired or desirable to supplant subsistence-based, rural livelihoods with ones based on earning income in 'The Economy.'

Finally, transforming formerly self-reliant, subsistence-based economies into cash-based market economies may actually undermine the more basic goals (making accessible basic necessities, conditions and capabilities required for peoples' flourishing). For instance, the first half of MDG 1 ("reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day") could in some cases undermine the second half ("reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger"). This has in fact occurred where formerly food-independent, subsistence-based communities have had their food security compromised as a result of income-generating, export-oriented development programs. For example, when prices for export crops that have supplanted subsistence crops have dipped below certain levels, the result has often been an increase in hunger. If income is insufficient to buy from the market what was once grown reliably at home, there is a significant loss in overall well-being. Furthermore, while the unpredictability of the weather is impossible to avoid, becoming dependent on the capricious global economy simply adds risk.

Disregard for alternative systems of meeting needs

Of course another shortcoming of the focus on income is the disregard for other methods of exchange and social interaction, such as local

exchange/trading systems, barter, 'freecycling', local currencies and equitable sharing of skills and services to provide real needs. Also disregarded are traditional and time-tested communitarian systems of reciprocal work, healthcare, provision of marriage and death ceremonies, and so on that have sustained innumerable communities since time immemorial. Why isn't the first MDG simply to reduce by half the number of people living without such a system of mutual care and support? Why isn't promotion of so many other alternative economic models an MDG goal? To recommend exposure to the vagaries of dollar-centric global financial markets instead is to recommend increased potential economic risk and insecurity.

For people without sufficient land, skills and capital, giving them these things via land reform and farmer-to-farmer education could be a more effective alternative than simpler income generating projects. Income generation in the absence of land reform is doomed to inadequacy wherever colonialism created giant estates and haciendas for the elite.

The commodification trap

For communities rich in forests and fertile lands, commodification, as a step toward increasing income, has the inherent tendency of inaccurate valuation that can result in wanton exploitation and despoilment. In practice, cramming complex and immeasurable meaning and value, of land and water for example, into simplistic numerical figures is virtually guaranteed to lead to undervaluing such "resources." The reduction of land, water, etc. into mere "resources" leads easily to their subsequent designation as "commodities," ready to be harvested (plundered) and sold for income. Rich heritages, sacred groves and the very substance and identity of place-based cultures can be carted off in a single transaction or under-compensated for by government appropriation.

'Poverty' and 'unemployment' as covers for corporate industrialization

Currently in India, the central government along with all the state governments are pushing industrialization, and in the case of the policy known as 'special economic zones (SEZs)' isn't merely pushing, but rather ramming it down peoples' throats. SEZs are basically regulation-free enclaves for the benefit of corporations to set up industries such as biotech 'parks', power 'plants', chemical 'hubs', car manufacturing factories, etc. The West Bengal government, to take one example, has been trying to set up a number of SEZs, including one for a chemical 'hub' for the Salim corporation of Indonesia. Problem is, there are few, if any, parts of West Bengal that are unoccupied or otherwise unused for livelihoods by the people. So the government tried to acquire land in the village of

Nandigram for the Salim corporation. The people blockaded roads, gathered in resistance. On March 14 2007, the government sent in the state police to break up the resistance. They did so by shooting at the unarmed villagers, killing anywhere from 14 to over 100 (reports vary), and brutalizing scores more.

The point of this story is that this particular tragedy, and the rest of the SEZ program, rests on the argument that it is needed to remove unemployment or poverty, to create jobs, to increase income. It rests on the assumption that work in traditional rural vocations, such as farming, pottery, basketry, weaving, cobbling, etc. do not count as employment; nor does work in the so-called informal sector, outside the cash economy, such as a mother nurturing and raising her children. She is 'unemployed' simply because her work is not measurable by the GNP. It is necessary to ignore these economic activities, these livelihoods that are invisible to The Economy in order to make 'Employment', which begins only when one moves out of traditional agrarian vocations and into factories or offices or the like, behind desks, with pay stubs and bosses. The fact that a goal of corporate industrialization is to make as much money using as few human employees as possible (or exploiting cripplingly low wages), and that "informal" or self-employment is destroyed for the majority in the process seems to be a minor inconvenient detail.

Manufacturing needs

While the MDGs are focused on satisfying basic "needs," the implicit goal and logic of the economic theory associated with conventional development in effect transforms these real *satiabile* needs into *insatiable* wants. (Without the doctrine that humans have endless wants in an economy of scarcity, conventional economic theory falls apart.) The result is the transformation of thirst, in the words of Illich, "into the need for a Coke...where mass needs are converted to the demand for new brands of packaged solutions which are forever beyond the reach of the majority." This is at once an act of insidious appropriationism and a false promise that the consumer class lifestyle is both fulfilling and universalizable.

Conclusion

The MDGs leave the larger injustices of the dominant, corporate controlled economic system un-interrogated and unscathed. Why is it that so many people have become dependent on a system that requires money to provide needs? What policies are dispossessing people of their land and driving them into cities in search of cash income? What products, technologies and worldviews are alienating them from their traditional

knowledge systems and simultaneously increasing their dependency on the industrial market economy? What about first removing the structural conditions that are engendering injustices, rather than leaving those in place and simply raising income? For example, what about ending export subsidies and agricultural commodity dumping by the overindustrialized countries on the majority agrarian ones, as a start? The MDGs do not ask such questions. The political roots of real material poverty remain unaddressed and unchallenged, and more human-scale, humane, just, ecological alternative models are unconsidered.

MADNESS DISSEMINATED FOR GREED (MDGS)

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In the last 24 hours, 200,000 acres of rainforest were cut, 13 million tons of toxic chemicals were released, 100 species of plant and animal species went extinct; 45,000 people died of starvation (38,000 were children).¹

Let that sink in for a moment.

My belief (backed up by a considerable amount of factual evidence) is all of this is happening **because of** the military-economic-political system dominant in the world today, and not in spite of it. To put it simply, the urge to progress/develop, to grow economies and expand markets — above all else — is causing this kind of massive destruction. It's been happening for decades, or centuries really — a push for a certain model of human civilization, resplendent (or decaying?) with big buildings, fast roads, huge factories, large dams, powerful bombs, many material goods, mechanical workplaces, nuclear families, etc. And in the last sixty years, with Development underway, it's been accelerating around the world.

The problem is, it comes with serious personal, social, spiritual, political, economic and ecological consequences. The statistic above is only the tip of the iceberg. What lies beneath are even more dire crises — depression, community dislocation, linguistic and cultural extinction, pollution of every element, oil wars, water wars, ethnic genocide, etc. My generation (those people in their 20s and 30s) is facing a world unlike any other known before to humankind... and it is probably true that the survival of this world will depend on the priorities we make and the directions we take in the next five to ten years.

What does this mean in light of the UN priority for the decade — the Millennium Development Goals? Look at the scale of what's happening and consider the root causes behind it. These problems have not emerged out of thin air; they are intimately linked to the kinds of institutions that exist in our midst today. Are the MDGs anywhere close to naming the kinds of violence and destruction happening, much less addressing and finding solutions to them?

In this contribution, I choose to focus on Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability - the one that seems most urgent and least questionable. Through my discussion, I will try to unravel the larger agenda of the MDGs. In the process, perhaps we will come to renounce them altogether and instead locally re-set our priorities for the coming decades.

What do the MDGs make visible? What do they make invisible? What language are they using and what are the assumptions and /intentions behind these words?

To begin with, first notice that Goal 7 talks about “Environmental Sustainability” — not ecological health, not natural or human limits, not earth’s balance... This word choice may seem like a small detail to many, but to me, it bespeaks of the relationship to nature that is being propounded through the MDGs. It is not one in which human beings are part of a larger web of life, but rather, one in which we look at the environment as something separate from ourselves, something to be owned, controlled and manipulated. As Chief Oren Lyons says, “What you people call your natural resources, my people call our relatives.” When this kind of ownership-relationship is promoted, each of the solutions suggested will be primarily technocratic, monocultured and capitalistic, not self-organized, diverse and regenerative.

Under Goal 7, the first target is to “integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies.” This is an oxymoron. How can anything that seeks development ever be sustainable? As has been shown time and again over the past 250 years, all Development/ Industrialization/ Progress/ Modernization, **by necessity**, must destroy nature to achieve its goals (in the form of cities, roads, dams, power plants, huge factories, global trade, etc.) These ‘enterprises’ all do great damage nature, not only to be created and but also to be sustained.

Moreover, the economic imperative of unlimited growth can never lead to a healthy and balanced ecology. All growth directly manifests as an exploitation of Nature’s gifts and resources. Where else will industrial goods come from? How else will factories and markets operate? In what other ways would cities expand and money be generated? Nature foots the bill, time and again. It is the only source of materials and energy, and the only site for dumping the pollution and waste. To reverse the loss of and damage to the ecology, we have to reduce and ultimately stop this kind of economic growth. In effect, this means drastically curbing the dominant forms of production, consumption and waste.

But this kind of web-of-life ecological consciousness is out of alignment with the nation-state agenda. The State must exploit nature to achieve profit and political power. Though it claims to be providing for people through this exploitation, in reality, throughout the world, the State’s actions are undermining peoples’ lives, livelihoods and future possibilities. Simply contrast its agenda with that of local traditional or indigenous communities, which seek to interact with nature in such a way that they

can be healthily sustained for generations. Consumption, production and waste practices grow out of long-term, least-harm thinking. For the most part, this means using Nature's gifts frugally and living one's life in such a way that the eco-system benefits, instead of deteriorates, from your existence... But nothing the State, or corporations, or the UN are doing today, in any way, adheres to these simple principles of human sustainability as part of a larger ecological web.

Note: neither in the goal itself, nor in the MDGs as a whole, is there any mention of reducing consumption, production or industrialization. Yet, if we look at every environmental crisis in the world today — from deforestation, to species extinction, to global warming — all are intimately linked to consumer habits and production systems. And without slowing down and ultimately transforming both production and consumption, there is no way we will resolve these problems. **Technocratic, scientific quick-fixes will not work** (good evidence is the fact that they haven't yet and have only led to more problems, e.g. the bio-fuels controversy).

Let me try to back this up by looking at the MDGs in more detail. The next two indices under Goal 7, Target 1 are:

25. Forested land as percentage of land area (FAO)

26. Ratio of Area Protected to Maintain Biological Diversity to Surface Area (UNEP)

The first problem with this, as with all the MDGs, is how incredibly vague they are and how unclear it is where the teeth are. Who decides this percentage and ratio? Moreover, what constitutes forest? It takes anyone but an economist to realize that old growth forests with local varieties of trees and plants are highly different from monoculture plantations of exotic species. So, what counts as forested land? Similarly, who will decide what ratio of area should be protected to maintain biodiversity? For that matter, how can biological diversity be quantified to know what ratio is adequate? In a rainforest where you have thousands of species of plants and animals, what difference does it make to the ratio if 10, 20, 50, even 100 species disappear? If the State, or the UN, or the corporate sector, declare something to be expendable, to be a 'weed', then it can disappear without anyone batting an eye. But each species makes a difference to the health of an ecosystem. Trying to quantify the unquantifiable, as though it can be objectively and fairly determined, is just one of the many fallacies of this MDG.

Again, note what's been made invisible. This doesn't say, "Protect all existing forest and bio-diverse spaces by halting any development/ takeover of such land." Or, "Encourage the plantation of local varieties

of trees and plants everywhere, cities, villages, wastelands, etc.” “Or increase biological diversity and the actual quantity of protected lands.” In fact, because nothing is actually outlined or clear in this target, it can easily be co-opted by the State or corporations. They can interpret the language in such a way to close off forests, label them ‘preserves’ and cut traditional communities from accessing them. Then, at a later time, the State or corporations can move in to exploit whatever materials they want, as the new ‘managers’ of the environment.

The next three indices are:

27. *Energy supply (apparent consumption; Kg oil equivalent) per \$1,000 (PPP) GDP (World Bank)*

28. *Carbon Dioxide Emissions (per capita)*

29. *Consumption of Ozone-Depleting CFCs (ODP tons):*

The odd thing about these three indices is that they can be at odds with each other. Ostensibly, the goal of the MDGs is to increase the supply and consumption of energy, while at the same time reducing carbon dioxide and CFCs emissions. But if the energy supply is being measured in kg of oil equivalents (which basically means oil or coal-powered plants), then how can both targets be true at once? If the MDGs were suggesting solar or wind-generated power, they ought to suggest a different unit of measure of energy supply.

Also, the MDGs were made to focus on so-called Developing countries. Yet, if reducing carbon dioxide emissions and CFCs are the goal, then efforts should foremost be directed at so-called Developed countries, who are consuming heads and tails over the rest of the world. The US alone consumes 25% of the world’s oil and produces 25% of global warming gases. This is not to say that so-called Developing countries aren’t producing CFCs or greenhouse gases. But clearly, a more honest conversation about the roots of the problem needs to happen.

On another level, who is going to determine what appropriate energy supplies and carbon dioxide emissions will be? UN bureaucrats seem incapable of coming up with anything that will actually halt the damage being done. And given that the Kyoto protocol has had so much difficulty being signed by several of the world’s richest governments, and that wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are being waged to secure an uninterrupted energy supply, who do we honestly think these indices will favor?

The next target within this MDG relates to water and sanitation. Who can argue with wanting safe drinking water from an improved water source and better sanitation for more of the world’s people? Yet, this MDG (like

the others) doesn't suggest how this should happen. Rather, it creates an entry point for private industries. All over the world, country governments are asking for corporations to meet their water/sanitation needs. Companies are only too happy to oblige, and profit from, this demand. This is happening from Bolivia to South Africa to Lebanon, and common people are losing control over their water resources.

Note again: The goal here is NOT to strengthen local watersheds with local capacities. It is NOT to prevent the theft of water by cities or companies. It is NOT to reverse the pollution or extraction of water that is happening. Nor does it suggest moving to dry compost toilets and similar water-saving forms of sanitation.

Now, to be fair, this target doesn't prevent these locally-determined innovations from happening. But given that the entire MDG framework is held within a context of Development, and that these local, home-grown, community-resourced acts are profoundly anti-Development (because they are not contributing to economic growth and privatization), it is unlikely that country governments or aid agencies will interpret this target in such a light. Here in Udaipur, we have found a simple solution of rainwater harvesting for dealing with our water problems. Yet, because it doesn't require large contracts or big money to implement, it is not being promoted in cities or villages (whose traditional water harvesting systems could be resurrected to sustain them again). If there isn't profit to be made, then you can bet those solutions will remain buried.

The last target — improving the lives of slum dwellers and reducing the slum population as a percentage of the urban population — suffers from similar practical and epistemological problems. The target again never questions urbanization, consumption or waste. It only mentions slums — as though they are causing the damage on the scale we are seeing. The target does not suggest that city-dwellers reduce their footprint on the earth; that the elites and middle class (financially described) give up their consuming habits and embark on a program of powering down and sharing more. Again, smoke and mirrors appear, and we look in the wrong direction for the root causes of environmental (un)sustainability.

There is another insidious part to this target. As far as I can see, there are two ways to improve slum-dwellers' lives: either by 1) re-distributing wealth or land (but such acts would be labeled 'terrorism' and/or 'communism' and so are unlikely to happen), or by 2) increasing resource extraction from rural areas... Hmm, decidedly inconvenient for Nature and for those residing in the countryside! The aftermath of such a strategy would most likely lead to the emergence of more slum-dwellers, in fact.

There is another storyline as well. Most of the work done today to 'reduce the percentage of slum dwellers' involves evicting people from their homes, which are on valuable real estate. This has happened everywhere from Chicago to Nairobi to Mumbai. So it's not 'life improvement' and poverty alleviation schemes that have pulled people out of slums, but rather a ready band of construction mafia, thugs, police and other government agents.

For me, the saddest part about the MDGs is that they are so out-of-date, in terms of the global conversations around ecology, health and recovering a balance with Nature. All the things that I have mentioned — from reforestation with local species to generating non-fossil fuel energy, from building community watersheds to using dry composting toilets, from reducing consumption to rethinking urbanization — are all actively being pursued and experimented with all over the world. It comes out in cradle-to-cradle design initiatives; zero waste and freecycling; slow food, local food, urban gardening and community supported organic agriculture; conversations about self-imposed limits and voluntary simplicity. A friend talks about the criteria that people are evolving to gauge sustainability: 1) do not violate the earth's crust; 2) whatever extracted should be able to be returned to the earth within a short span of time; 3) don't create products that cannot easily be returned to nature. Others talk about the need for dismantling the dismal structures we have created (like big dams and power plants) and holding companies responsible for their built-in product obsolescence. There are ample resources and alliances to draw from, to honestly achieve a goal of eco-balance and a better world.²

Instead of wasting our time with the MDGs, I propose we put our attention towards sharing these various initiatives, both within our communities and between communities. We have a lot to learn from each other about recovering our balance with Nature and healing our ecology. I feel this will happen when we shake the MDGs off our backs, and return again to what is present in our communities and in the communities around us. It means challenging the 'truths' that are being promoted through the MDGs: like 'consumption brings happiness'; 'more and bigger are better'; 'there is only one way to Progress'; or 'scientists and corporations will find a solution in the best interest of people and their ecologies'...

Can we take on the bigger task of making visible the invisible and then acting from this knowledge in new and creative ways?

Endnotes

¹ See Derrick Jensen, *Endgame*. 2006.

² See <www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/udaipur.html> for some of these links.

SAME SHIT, DIFFERENT DAY: THE UN, NEO-LIBERAL GLOBALIZATION AND THE CREATION OF MARKETS

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As we approach the seven-year anniversary of the adoption of the UN Millennium Goals (MDGs), and having suffered through seven years of affirmations, re-iterations and recommitments, it is an appropriate moment for a radical renunciation of the MDGs and the neo-liberal ethics which support them.

The MDGs were adopted in 2000 under a special UN procedure called a Consensus Declaration and were vigorously promoted by 'first-world', 'developed' countries, primarily the U.S., EU bloc and Japan, as the ostensible culmination of a series of international conferences and gatherings. At face value the MDGs appear benign and unassailable: who could argue against **Goal 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger**, or **Goal 3: Empower Women and Promote Equality Between Men and Women**, or **Goal 4: Reduce Under-Five Mortality by Two-Thirds**? What could possibly oppose these goals? Are they not the goals of everyone: to reduce suffering and poverty, to create equality and prosperity?

I want to argue here that the MDG goals are the perfect neo-liberal manifesto: saturated with double-speak and smokescreens, and using the language of suffering and poverty to pursue a 'development' agenda that is fundamentally about the creation of markets and consolidating hegemony. A cursory examination of the text of the MDGs begins to shed some light on the essential intentions behind the Goals. Together, with a little luck and work we can pull back the curtains on this Oz and begin to understand the fundamental rationales behind the Development Agenda.

I am pleased to contribute to this collection and am convinced that it will include articulate examinations of various aspects of the MDGs and will take pains to disassemble the rationales and intentions behind their implementation. I am also sure the explicit commitments to international compulsory education, which create the essential epistemological basis for globalization, will be thoroughly undermined. Given the scope and quality of this collection, I would like to make a specific point in the hope that it will add to our collective ability to respond forcefully to the MDGs.

* * *

The Goal I want to draw your attention to specifically here is #8 (CREATE A GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT, WITH TARGETS FOR AID,

TRADE AND DEBT RELIEF) which to my mind is the most critical thrust, and the most explicitly tied to what the UN refers to “time-bound and measurable targets accompanied by indicators for monitoring progress”. As the UN Development Programme puts it, the MDGs:

bring together, in the eighth Goal, the responsibilities of developing countries with those of developed countries, founded on a global partnership endorsed at the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico in March 2002, and again at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in August 2002.¹

Those UN gatherings were highly contested and highly suspect exercises in neo-liberal domination, with desperate countries seeking any kind of relief possible, and smug ‘first-world’ nations insisting on liberalized trade and investment agreements and private market access. To suggest that those Summits provide the ethical basis for the MDGs is pure fantasy.

The real story of the MDGs, as best articulated in Goal 8, is the attempt to build a palatable rationale for the international implementation of liberalized-trade and IMF-approved market reforms that provide the maximum amount of liberty for multinational corporations, private investors and international financial interests to access ‘developing’ world markets. This is what we now call Development, and it is based on a simple, arrogant Western rationale the world needs to be remade in our image. It starts from the belief that unfettered growth is an economic necessity and that market is the God which needs to be genuflected in front of. It ends with the bullying of every part of the world into ‘accepting’ neo-liberal market reforms and entry into a one-world, 24/7 global marketplace.

We should call the MDGs what they are: a manifesto for post-modern capitalism and imperialism enshrined in a new guise.

* * *

Hopefully pulling out a few specific points (among many possibilities) from the larger MDG text will begin illustrate my position that the MDGs are very little about alleviating suffering and much more about the liberty of international capital.

II – 10.1 : We urge Member States to observe the Olympic Truce, individually and collectively, now and in the future, and to support the International Olympic Committee in its efforts to promote peace and human understanding through sport and the Olympic Ideal.²

This one is especially infuriating for Vancouverites who are going to 'host' the 2010 Winter Olympics and any city that has had the 'privilege' to have the Olympic juggernaut come to town. The 2010 effort is remaking this city with mega-developments, the cleansing of poor and homeless people, massive road and highway building, and a fiesta for developers, public relations corporations, marketers and advertisers.

III – 20. 3 : To encourage the pharmaceutical industry to make essential drugs more widely available and affordable by all who need them in developing countries.

Any document which explicitly enshrines the rights of international pharmaceutical corporations has already blown their cover.

III – 20. 4 : To develop strong partnerships with the private sector and with civil organizations in pursuit of development and poverty eradication.

VII – 28.3 : To take special measures to address the challenges of poverty eradication and sustainable development in Africa, including debt cancellation, improved market access, enhanced Official Development Assistance and increased flows of Foreign Direct Investment, as well as transfers of technology.

VII – 30. 9 : To ensure greater policy coherence and better cooperation between the United Nations, its agencies, the Bretton Woods Institutions and the World Trade Organization, as well as other multilateral bodies, with a view to achieving a fully coordinated approach to the problems of peace and development.

These are three key pieces of the officially adopted resolution that tie all the earlier goals and targets – poverty and disease eradication, better infant health, more equality, etc. – specifically and explicitly to the capacity of countries to implement market liberalization. The MDGs ensure that any aid programs and/or financial support and/or debt reduction are specifically tied to countries' ability to increase their GNP's, increase exports, increase market access and increase privatization.

The heavy corporate lean of the MDGs should hardly come as a surprise. The UN been steadily and unapologetically moving towards closer and closer ties with corporate allies, relying on 'partnerships' to raise capital for projects, welcoming high-level executives into inner-circle advisory capacities and making sweetheart deals with some of the worst polluters on the planet.

This clear new direction for the UN has been titled the Global Compact and was unveiled in 1999 by Kofi Annan and launched in 2000, in concert with the MDGs, to encourage transnationals to become UN partners in development. Since then a mind-boggling array of companies has joined forces with various United Nations projects including UNICEF now calling November 20th *McDonald's*® *World Children's Day* (!) as McDonald's and UNICEF team up to 'raise money for the world's children' and BP-Amoco and Rio-Tinto sponsoring the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC). Other prominent Global Compact members include Shell, Nike, Novartis Aventis, Bayer, BASF, DuPont, and DaimlerChrysler.

As Kofi Annan said in 2000: "Confrontation has been replaced by cooperation. ... In a world of common challenges, the UN and business are finding common ground."³

* * *

So what does this mean on the ground? Fundamentally it is about undermining the capacity of local communities to determine their futures and turning over power to the market. Neo-liberal globalization requires international economic harmonization, an absolute minimum of local regulation (labour, environmental or otherwise), a push towards extreme privatization, and the capacity of international investors to provide for-profit services that incapacitated governments do not have the ability to support.

The MDGs speak of enhancing international diversity but the reverse is explicitly the case: in enshrining economic growth via globalized market accessibility, they posit greed and profit as fundamental, in fact essential, to the 'development' process. The MDGs are predicated on a false consensus: uttering Declarations, declaring them consensual, and then enforcing an economic measures to enforce the 'agreements'.

These agreements are mandated by Bretton Woods, the IMF and the World Bank, who mask their relentless efforts open markets as agreed-upon 'development'. As the IMF's *MDG Factsheet* page puts it;

(The IMF) also tries to ensure that developed countries' policies are supportive of low-income countries' development efforts, by advocating for increased foreign aid, the opening of markets to developing countries' exports, and the maintenance of a healthy enabling international economic climate...

Another more ambitious projection would take account of absorptive and administrative constraints and try to identify

policies to alleviate them so as to put the country on a higher growth path. This can help countries use the MDGs to design their policies, and guide donors in assessing the capacity of a country to absorb increased levels of aid and put it to effective use.⁴

Simply put this means undermining any regulatory efforts, allowing private investors to provide for-profit services, for cities and countries to issue international bonds to raise capital, and for transnational corporations access to local markets. The everyday effects of these policies are felt everywhere, in every country, in every region in the Global South, from the destruction of agricultural land for India's Special Economic Zones, to Bechtel's attempt to own Bolivia's water to the 'reconstruction' of Iraq to the destruction of local democracies and vernacular life across the globe.

* * *

I watched this UN-sponsored process of 'agreement' up-close-and-personal in the summer of 2006 when I attended the Third World Urban Forum (WUF3) held here in Vancouver. The Forum was marketed as a global meeting of minds to discuss the overwhelming issues of urbanization, especially in 'underdeveloped' countries, but what I witnessed was desperate municipalities from African, Asia and Latin America seeking any assistance possible from smug development financiers.

At an early morning networking session titled *Local Public Finances and Decentralization* Lamine Mbassa, the Director of Financial Affairs of Douala, Cameroon, described the way Douala has entered into the bond markets with a vengeance. He said that his city has had to attempt to access private market capital via bonds because "there was no other way...We have to market ourselves to companies."⁵ The conference's Final Report was clear in this regard: "The Forum ... recognised that the challenge is to shift from relying on international development finance to tapping local capital markets."⁶

And where it can be found is with private investors, banks, international lending organizations and the myriad of consultants and companies ready to step in: USAID, the World Bank, Padco, Price Waterhouse Coopers, IPF consultants, Evanson Dodge International, Shore Bank International, TCGI International, and seemingly innumerable private sector financiers, were constantly visible at WUF3. At the bar, at sessions, at private meetings, in the halls, all manners of financial consultants and representatives were willing and able to 'talk' with mayors and bureaucrats looking for money.

At a Wednesday morning event titled *Municipal Finance: Innovation and Collaboration* Brian Field of the European Investment Bank pointed out that his organization now had three times the lending volume of the World Bank at 52 billion euros. So many hands shot up at that point that the moderator suggested: "Maybe you might want to get together later with Mr. Field. ... Is your money available anywhere in the world?"⁷ Turns out, Why, yes it is!

At a Wednesday afternoon session sponsored by Industry Canada Dan Hoornweg, Senior Municipal Engineer for the World Bank was even more blunt about what it would take:

Look, give us enough of the right incentives and we'll be there...There is no shortage of investors. There are hundreds, thousands of investors, of pension funds willing and eager to invest if the incentives are right..... (speaking of water delivery and sanitation). Look, if services are so bad and we can improve things so much, people will be willing to pay fees for basic services. We can't supply service though, that we can't collect money for, but We will talk with anyone.⁸

Similar sentiments were expressed earlier in the day at the Municipal Finance dialogue session titled which was hosted by Anwar Versi, the Editor of African Business magazine, which is appropriately headquartered in London, England (!). He opened with perfunctory remarks and handed the microphone over to the speakers by saying, "This is a dialogue, we want to talk. We really want to know how we can raise money."⁹

Jacqueline Shafer, who spoke as a representative of the Bureau of Economic Growth and Trade, USAID (which had a massive presence at WUF3), took up his question with direct answers. She said that USAID was looking for municipalities with "corporate-style governance", that they would help cities "partner with the private sector ... structure innovative funding opportunities ... assist with revolving funds, bond funds and encourage partners to seek capital market funding". She also pointed to places like Mexico where Evanson Dodge has established the first bond-bank, and Karnataka, India where a massive World Bank loan has developed the water system as examples of the work they were interested in.¹⁰

* * *

These processes and the MDGs are straight neo-colonialism: surveying a Global South that has been brutalized by imperialism, then selling back new forms of economic domination as Development.

Its way past time to reject the false platitudes of the UN and their increasingly corporate-friendly agenda. We should be turning instead to local democracies, indigenous movements and vernacular resistance all over the globe for legitimate conversations on what 'development' can and should mean. I am not talking about isolationism, but renouncing all forms of globalization which are predicated on domination and predatory logics, and looking to confederalism and horizontal international relationships based on respect, not greed.

Wealthy Western countries should be offering reparations and reigning in all their citizens who attempt to turn profits on the backs of Southern misery. All nations need to disengage from neo-liberal globalization and pursue economic policies based on genuinely sustainable and ecological models of prosperity that do not rely on unfettered growth, but look to local control and local epistemologies instead.

Endnotes

¹ <http://www.undp.org/mdg/basics.shtml>

² <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.pdf>.

³ Kofi Annan, 'Working Together', *Business in Africa*, February 2000.

⁴ <http://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/facts/mdg.htm>

⁵ *Local Public Finances and Decentralization*

, Tuesday, June 20th, 13:30 - 15:30, Pan Pacific Hotel, Oceanview Suites 7 and 8.

Sponsor Organization:

Association internationale des maires francophones.

⁶ WUF3 Final Report, p. 4

⁷ Dialogue 2 - *Municipal Finance: Innovation and Collaboration*, VCEC - Ballroom C, Wednesday, June 21st, 10:00- 12:00.

⁸ Engaging the Private Sector in Sustainable Urban Development - Frameworks for Sustainable Partnerships, Wednesday, June 21st, VCEC-MR 15. Sponsored by: *Industry Canada.*

⁹ Dialogue 2 - *Municipal Finance: Innovation and Collaboration*, VCEC - Ballroom C, Wednesday, June 21st, 10:00 -12:00.

¹⁰ The total cost of the Karnataka project, for example, will be "\$310 million. The share of World Bank, State Government and ULBs is 74 per cent, 16 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. The duration of the project is five years and it will be executed from the coming financial year. The rate of interest on bank loan is six per cent."

The Hindu: India's National Newspaper, Online Edition, March 16, 2006. <http://www.hindu.com/2006/03/16/stories/2006031615990500.htm>

DUMP THE MDGs and START DE NOVO

Dr. Leo Rebello <leorebello@hathway.com>

On July 7, 2000, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Millennium Declaration, which comprised of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015. Everything is going on as per the plan — the plan being Population Control as per the Useless Eaters doctrine and concentration of wealth and resources in a few hands. In short, the repressive New World Order. **The MDGs, if not dumped forthwith, will lead the sheep (poor people of the world) NOT to greener pastures, but to slaughterhouses.**

At the outset I need to warn the readers that behind the facade of beautiful words, resolutions, the so-called goals and targets to be achieved, the hidden agenda is masked cunningly. Indira Gandhi's quotation, in another context but relevant to this discussion, caps it all: "At present 97% of the world's research is not relevant to us because it is earmarked for the priorities and to the induced appetites of technological leaders."

Vis-a-vis MDGs, I dare say: MDGs is a mirage. It is a con that will push 90% of the world in the direction detrimental to its future. Let me tell you how the MDGs for Health, in particular, are engineered to take humanity on the Highway to Hell, by analysing briefly the related goals and targets and showing you how the targets nullify the goals.

Goal 4: Reduce under five mortality by two-thirds.

Lofty Goal indeed. Nice way of fooling the world.

Can WHO reliably tell us that MMR vaccine is safe? That the vaccines are not laced with mercury? That vaccines have not created millions of children suffering from Autistic Spectrum Disorders? That Cancers, Juvenile Diabetes, Asthmas, Obesity and other diseases are not on the rise? Do the readers know what the Vaccines contain? Let me outline briefly the lethal contents of vaccines which tiny tots receive.

- * Free-dried attenuated live bacteria of the disease
- * Dextran glucose
- * Triton WR 1339 (a detergent)
- * Sodium
- * Human Fetal Tissue
- * Various Antibiotics
- * Preservatives and Sweeteners
- * MSG, Mercury, Thimerosal

The Polio vaccine for example contains three strains of Polio virus; formaldehyde; aluminium phosphate or aluminium hydroxide; neomycin, streptomycin and polymyxin B (antibiotics); 2-phenoxyethanol (a preservative); medium 199 which contains polysorbate 80 (an emulsifier); cultured on monkey kidney cells or calf fetus tissue. The inactivated (injectable) Polio vaccine is cultivated on Vero cells (African green monkey kidney cells).

Is it wise to give 20 to 30 vaccines to a child below two, whose immunity has not developed? And if UNICEF, WHO and other UN organisations are so concerned about children (and NOT about trillion dollar business on the one hand and multiplication of more diseases on the other) then why not safer, cheaper and more effective Natural, Vegetable or Homoeopathic Vaccines?

Do you understand the game plan between what is planned on paper and what is being done in practice? Let Dr. Aubrey Blumsohn, MD, put some sense into you: *"We have allowed the drugs industry to subvert the rules of science. We have watched quietly as governments and academics have colluded with industry to hide information critical to our patients. We have remained silent as our medical schools have churned out graduates who have no knowledge of the dilemmas and scandals of medicine. We have allowed many of our medical journals to become corrupted and timid."*

Native knowledge has been given a go-by. In fact, everything is done to kill the grandmother itself by the run-away consumerism and commercial approach to health, where 'one organ, one disease' specialists treat you for lifetime.

Goal 6: Reverse the spread of diseases, especially HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other major diseases

How are you going to achieve the above goal and targets? By creating AIDS Scare? By distributing condoms, and vaginal gels, and carcinogenic anti-retrovirals? By insisting that HIV causes AIDS even when HIV has not been identified? By deliberately giving *immuno-suppressants* as against *immuno-stimulants*? AIDS is the consequence of a suppressed immune system, which has been subjected to repeated onslaughts by four factors that build up toxins and deficiencies in the body: antibiotic abuse, recreational drug abuse, anal sex (which causes toxic shock to the receiving partner) and nutritional stress (malnutrition). AIDS is a chronic disease which is known as *Oja-kshaya* in Ayurveda, *Vettai Noi* in Siddha and *Al-Zabool* in Unani. Our approach should be "From AIDS Scare To AIDS Care."

Are you aware that the World Health Assembly the apex body has passed several resolutions to promote and use the Traditional and Natural Medicine, but in essence the WHO which has become the WHOre of Pharma mafia is defeating AYUSH - that is Ayurveda, Yoga and Nature Cure, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (on which depend 80% of world population) by passing several clandestine laws?

Target 8: Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

All these years and billions of dollars down the drain, has malaria been reduced? Has tuberculosis been reduced? In fact, more severe forms of drug-resistant malaria and tuberculosis are on the rise. Why are neem, holy basil, cinchona bark, and other such cheaper, safer methods not used? In Homeopathy we have at least 6 specific and 24 other effective remedies for Malaria. Why then are the WHO and its various organs not promoting Homeopathy, Ayurveda and Natural methods?

46. Proportion of Population with Access to Affordable, Essential Drugs on a Sustainable Basis (WHO). Can you tell me which are the essential and non-essential drugs? And why only anti-life synthetic drugs like antibiotics, steroids, anti-hypertensives, anti-pyretic, anti-retroviral, chemotherapeutic drugs and narcotic and psychotropic substances and more and more vaccinations? What about God's pharmacy called herbs, fruits and vegetables?

Immunity is inbuilt — either it is weak, medium or strong. It can be improved with proper diet and nutrition during pregnancy, lactation and in the first five years of growth of the child. Later on, by avoiding drugs, by taking proper food, rest and exercise, we can enjoy vibrant health throughout our lives. The MDGs, in contrast, are pharma-centered, business-oriented and not necessarily catering to the actual health needs and other needs of people. On the contrary, the whole edifice of modern medicine, and the development paradigm it rests on, is rotten to the core. For Health Goals, if the planners are sincere, we need to revert back to the age old wisdom of Ayurveda or Nature Cure, as Mahatma Gandhi said. We need to concentrate on fulfilling his incomplete vision of making every village a self-sufficient unit.

For individual health my mantra is: 'Health Care is Self Care'. This disease-centred approach has to end. For public health, we need to change our focus dramatically. Our present health system is top-heavy, over-centralised, heavily curative in its approach, urban and elite-oriented, costly and dependency creating. Unless it is community-based, people-

oriented, economically viable, decentralised, democratic and participatory, Health for All will remain an empty slogan.

My suggestion is to dump the MDGs since they reinforce a damaging system and lack common sense. As a first step, let about 100 of us meet and brain-storm on what we wish to do to save our future and the future of our children and grand-children. It is the total environment that is at stake. It is our health that is being systematically ruined. It is genocide going on mass scale, and we need to Arise, Awake and Act, NOW. The 100 should be independent doctors, nurses, educationists, legal experts, lawmakers, social scientists and journalists with clear vision. The emphasis is on "Independent" and "Clear Vision".

I am ready to give a lead, because I have over 25 years of clinical, teaching and research experience in the field of Holistic Health. Written 32 books and delivered over 10,000 lectures in 63 countries. I also guide doctoral and post doctoral students and have consistently refused lucrative offers to make billions. I am dedicated to my patients and students. I am mostly vegetarian and teetotaler; I have not inoculated or vaccinated by two sons and have achieved miraculous results like repairing broken bones without surgery, making quadriplegic get up and play, AIDS patients live without ARVs, I have given new life to MD patients, etc. As Thomas Edison once said: "The doctor of the future will give no medicine but will interest his patients in care of the human frame, in diet and the cause and prevention of disease."

REFLECTIONS ON “COMMUNITY” EDUCATION

Motaz Atalla <motaz49@yahoo.com>

In the summer of 2006 the UNDP in Cairo sponsored Sail The Nile, a campaigning journey down the Nile river, with stops at eight different MDG-related projects in different governorates along the way. The campaign aimed to spread awareness about the MDGs. A number of short films were produced documenting the projects visited (available at www.sailthenile.org) and I recently watched the one profiling a UNICEF community school in a hamlet in the governorate of Sohag. I used to work in a similar program promoting ‘active learning’ in government primary schools, and watching the video brought back many of the thoughts that had developed over the course of my old job—thoughts around both the fundamental incompatibility of government schooling with learning processes that truly nurture communities, and the problem with Development in general. I should state here that I personally have neither occasion nor the means for evaluating the community schools project *as a project*. Instead I mention it because it is a flagship project that’s used to promote the education MDG and the Development paradigm with it. It seemed to represent fundamental assumptions about education and development that are common among any project within that rubric.

According to a recent book written about the community schools initiative, it was devised in the early 1990’s with the stated aim of extending ‘quality education’ to remote, resistant and under-serviced hamlets in the governorates of Upper Egypt, through a framework that could later be expanded by the Ministry of Education (Zaalouk, xi). The schools would involve multi-grade classrooms and help to develop new, child-centered pedagogies replicable in formal mainstream schools. Now fifteen years after its inception, the program has been deemed quite the success, having imbued communities with civic vigor (busy education committees and rights-conscious students) and improved health and relationships as well as enriched minds. As a program for spreading formal education, it does indeed seem to have all the requisite good boxes checked. But where does the idea for such a project really come from and what are its wider impacts?

The prospect of receiving one’s nutrition through free, painless and sterile intravenous injections would surely prompt the question “why?” Similarly, we may look to the reasoning at the core of the community schools program and ask, as a child might, *why* it is that formal education, lathered in community-sensitivity, should be extended to those remote

and resistant communities in the first place. According to one early report, “in Egypt it has long been a stated policy that all children should attend school”. So one reason is that the Egyptian government wants schooling; I return to this later. The above-mentioned book mentions that an era defined by increased complexity and change and a glut of information and information-based systems—that is, a knowledge-based society—requires “a matching human resource component... based on research, reflection, knowledge generation and scientific methods of inquiry and analysis,” and that schools are thus increasingly becoming the center of society (Zaalouk, 11). There is also mention that schools “can no longer play a limiting and disciplinary role but are there to enhance moral imperatives and cultural values which include the democratization of learning, the empowerment of the self and whole communities, as well as the alleviation of increasing global poverty and inequity.” This implies that moral and cultural systems at the grassroots community level are incapable of enhancing themselves to suit changing times and thus need institutions to nurse such processes.

Institutions such as schools help communities adapt to changing times by instilling them with the values that suit those governing or profiting from the evolving order, rather than those simply adapting to it. Like growth-minded governments, for example, that might promote computer use at schools so their citizens can partake of the global economy and increase GDP. (Education reformers in Egypt are currently promoting centers of academic excellence, hoping for Indian-style technology-driven growth.) Also when we speak of education as helping to alleviate poverty and global inequity, do we mean schools can help undo the systems by which communities become morbidly dependant on state and market actors for their sustenance and self determination? Or will schools simply facilitate better access to those state institutions and global consumer markets? My experience points to the latter, and my impression of the community schools project is that they do the same.

Most girls, it is reported, “had ambitions to go beyond university: they wanted to be astronomers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers, police officers, neurosurgeons, architects and artists. Most of [them] sought careers and vocations in their own communities, and wished to serve the poor and the helpless.” (Zaalouk, 118) While such careers may seem to indicate newfound ambition, expanded horizons, opportunity, even empowerment, they remain essentially urban and non-physical in nature; and it is not clear how such vocations would serve rural communities except through modern urban institutions and practices. The children also “[repeatedly] indicated that they no longer carried out physical agricultural work. Nor did they have to look after the animals [and]... this

was indeed regarded as a promotion in status." (The less farmers there are, the more precedent there will be to mechanize farming and transform villages into countryside microcities overrun with supermarkets and imported produce.)

The contrast between such an outcome and earlier claims that "the school greatly emphasizes agricultural work and encourages students to feel proud of the communities to which they belong" (Zaalouk 37), is an example of what is often called the *hidden* curriculum. However much such programs emphasize community-centered learning and participation, the embedded hierarchies of roles and knowledges implicit in the totality of a program's elements will always weave their way into the fabric of the 'beneficiary' community, just as the discourses and sociopolitical relations within schools cultivate attitudes parallel to those explicitly intended through curricula. Why should the school children not want to be like their facilitators who they see traveling to the big cities all the time and consorting with powerful people? Or better yet, why should they not strive to be like the young professionals and foreign dignitaries who visit their villages with their sunglasses, their elegant clothes and air conditioned cars?

It's also reported that each school day included some time for physical education/sports and that some of the students would even do their exercises at home and during vacations. While there's little doubt that exercise is good for health, I have never seen a farmer who looked like he or she needed exercise. Physical exercise for its own sake only really makes sense in a context where physical labor is largely absent from daily life, as in much city life, and almost certainly in the occupations to which the girls are reported to aspire, having been exempted from the bulk of typical village work now considered inferior. One international visitor to the schools once commented "these cannot be poor children; their appearance, level of hygiene, and mannerisms are that of middle class urban children." (Zaalouk, 78)

The early report mentions rural resistance to education (for girls, in particular), stating that "fellaheen [farmers] see schooling primarily as a route out of the village, rather than as providing knowledge and skills directly useful to the development of the community." Villagers were later reported to have, on many occasions made statements effecting "how very privileged we are that you have come from Cairo to look after our interests," (Zaalouk, 47). Also village women began to request "classes that allow [them] to wash, cook and sew and acquire other home economics skills." These attitudes contrast the initial skepticism towards the schools, reflecting a belief and interest in their benefit. How

do women in such communities come to seek expert assistance for such basic and ancient domestic activities as cooking, washing and sewing? Also, aside from the deep historical roots of centralized administration in Egypt (which has only been the case in education for about a hundred and fifty years, ironically), what is it currently that makes villagers view the urban elites with such reverence?

While there are, again, complex historical factors at play, there are specific clear connections between the radical agrarian reforms of the last century and a half and the unenviable lot of many Egyptian villages today. We can add to this the damage wrought by agricultural and trade policies that promote cash crops over subsistence farming, making farmers increasingly dependant on money and consumer goods for their sustenance. The ecological fallout from the modern reworking of traditional irrigation systems has also contributed to the poor health situation. As far back as the nineteen forties, Father Henri Ayrout, founder of the Association of Upper Egypt for Education and Development, held that the Hydra of poverty, ill health and ignorance plaguing rural Egypt would only be destroyed by eliminating the ignorance. During preliminary negotiations for the community schools, project officials told villagers that that having a school would help them demand more services from the government, affirming village dependence on urban centers for basic services (Zaalouk, 47). There is no denying the Hydra exists, but instead of asking what produced and sustains it, Development chooses to try to tame it.

One way the project is reported to have furthered this taming process is reflected in the following passage:

“Against a background of traditionally tribal forms of organization and authority common to many of the communities targeted by the initiative, and in the absence of formal governance at the hamlet level, communities have taken their political lives in their hands. The lowest formal level of administration is the mother village, where village heads and local councils preside. At the hamlet level, the education committee has evolved as the hamlet’s ruling body. They have ownership of the central institution in the community, the school, and have managed to forge an alliance with the next level of rule, that is, at the village level.” (Zaalouk, 141)

The schools improved communities’ access to state bureaucratic channels, which means, conversely, bringing the heavy-handed state further into village life. (Also the schools themselves, targeting as they are children who may have passed enrollment age, facilitate ‘second

chance' enrollment into formal schools, in which strategically crafted curricula and the values inherent in schools' social and administrative culture combine to socialize state-ready citizens.) While the project talks about individuals empowered to engage the circumstances of their lives, empowerment of the community as a whole is framed in terms of access to existing state institutions and not at all in terms of local traditions supported by a social contract that's more immediate and less derivative and precarious than that of promoted by the state. What happens in such communities, then, when the state and its institutions flounder, rotting with corruption and inefficacy as they are today? What does the new power balances borne by this system do to the local social ecology?

When organizing active learning workshops for government school teachers, I would often hear the trainers emphasize the old Chinese proverb that's also the pedagogy's mantra, "I hear I forget; I see I remember; I do I understand". What I saw, though, both in the schools I worked with and watching the community schools video, was that all that schoolchildren seemed to be *doing* was generally still just education. That is, they were just 'actively' internalizing pre-selected curricula, and enacting similar, if less draconian, rituals to those required of children at regular schools. But, truth be said, the new teaching methods did help to at least cultivate minds more agile than forced rote learning does. Facilitators, trainers, teachers and program directors are continuously trying to make schools 'child friendly', that is, less unpleasant. There is indeed progress—the same progress that will have evolved thick hypodermic needles into the less painful thin ones used in the injections I mentioned earlier. And still there remains the question of why at all.

Like in other places, mass schooling in Egypt came about with the modern state and its vision for a citizenry better equipped to support the new industrial, administrative and military modernization project. Education before the modern era was highly decentralized, and crafts were learned by apprenticeship at the hands of masters. Also scholarship, at least in Muslim societies, was supported by endowments that meant anyone could go anywhere, and guarantee lodging, upkeep and the guidance of master scholars, whose certification was their own affiliation to the widely acknowledged masters of their field.

The foundation supporting the project I used to work on is partly funded by Lockheed Martin, Halliburton, Coca Cola, among others. Goal 8 of the MDGs advocates just such cross-sector partnerships. I wonder what motivates companies that profit from death and ill health to fund education. As far as I know, traditional philanthropists were far more accountable to their communities than is the case with these. Also

contemporary research on brain-based learning has shown that we learn best when there is no compulsion, when knowledge and skills are contextualized (applied); and learning is social. This suggests policies and models essentially based on pre-modern apprenticeship systems. While it is possible to argue that elements of this pedagogy can be and often are applied in schools (like in the community schools), to simply paste such methods onto a framework that is fundamentally oriented and accountable to the nation-state is, at best, to have gone half-way and, at worst, to have missed the point all together.

Visiting schools around the country, both as documenter and peddler of these pedagogies, I often felt a lack of fulfillment. I did not feel my work was beneficial except in a palliative way, namely, by making school days less unpleasant than they usually would be. Even when the work seemed to nurture children as agents of social change, I was still somehow dissatisfied. I eventually realized that my discomfort stemmed from a fundamental and problematic power differential of which I was a part, and on which all programs were based, and that none of which truly addressed. At first, I thought this discomfort was simply my guilt about being more privileged over my hosts. I then realized that it wasn't the power disparity as such that bothered me, but the fact that the system that accorded me this power was unjust. My privilege was thus tainted. The more I learned about the systemic and historical roots of Development, the more I realized it was like we were *all* swimming in a proverbial gutter. Except that I happened to have a wetsuit and a lifesaver, and my work was only providing others with the same protection, or helping them, at least, to make the best out of gutter water, but never to actually make the water clean. But what would it mean to clean the water?

It would mean, before anything else, acknowledging that Development, particularly as framed by the MDGs, attempts treats only the symptoms of a chronic illness and that it does so in a way that benefits NGO professionals, governments, multinational corporations, many of whom are responsible for the problems in the first place, and none of whom really suffer to begin with. To clean the water might mean to battle the corporations patenting the crops we've cultivated for millennia, and to confront the governments that enforce their entitlements by collecting our fines and throwing us in prison. It would mean reviving and regenerating the traditional wisdoms, social relations and technical mastery by which we were able to sustain life in our communities, before we became dependant on pseudo-qualified certified professionals and obsolescence-prone gadgets. Cleaning the water might mean for people like me that we seek the courage to renounce our wetsuits and

lifesavers when we learn that producing such comforts helps pollute the water at its source.

An education program that makes village children clean, socially engaged and starry-eyed about prestigious careers is problematic precisely because it construes and masks, with such sweet stories, the root causes of the injustices it claims to address. Were such a project to really engage the issues, it would be virtually unrecognizable as a development project. For it would seek a transformation not only in the 'target' communities, but in the community of its own members and proponents as well — the target being a collective self rather than a lesser other. It would have no interest in the support or partnership of persons or institutions not keen to rethink their own ways, or whose wealth came by exploitative or polluting means. It would welcome government and international development officials, but only if they agree to leave their proverbial hats at the door. It would be concerned not with delivering deliverables or complying with terms of reference documents, but instead with nurturing new discourses of accountability between people, and between humans and what sustains them on this earth. It would engage the big issues primarily by participating in the basic processes that constitute society, its members living as revisionist practitioners of the everyday rather than development planners. Such a project would be thinking up a different story altogether.

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Part III -
turning the
page to new
possibilities

Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front
by Wendell Berry

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready-made. Be afraid
to know your neighbors and to die.
And you will have a window in your head.
Not even your future will be a mystery
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card
and shut away in a little drawer.
When they want you to buy something
they will call you. When they want you
to die for profit they will let you know.

So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
Denounce the government and embrace
the flag. Hope to live in that free
republic for which it stands.
Give your approval to all you cannot
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man
has not encountered he has not destroyed.

Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millenium. Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophesy such returns.

Put your faith in the two inches of humus
that will build under the trees
every thousand years.

Listen to carrion - put your ear
close, and hear the faint chattering
of the songs that are to come.
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.

Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts.
So long as women do not go cheap
for power, please women more than men.
Ask yourself: Will this satisfy
a woman satisfied to bear a child?
Will this disturb the sleep
of a woman near to giving birth?

Go with your love to the fields.
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is nighest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.

*Manifesto: "The Mad Farmer Liberation Front" from The Country of
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MCOUNTERDGS, OR MILLENNIUM ALTERNATIVES-TO-DEVELOPMENT GOALS, OR FLOURISHING OF LIFE GOALS...

Brian Emerson <brian@oxhouse.org>

The MDGs leave the larger injustices of the dominant, corporate controlled economic system un-interrogated and unscathed. What policies are dispossessing people of their land and driving them into overcrowded cities in search of scarce or non-existent jobs? It's long since time to respect the landless, the dispossessed, the small producers as protagonists striving for and living out their own 'alternative modernities' (Arturo Escobar's phrase) and to cast off the degrading category of 'surplus labor' for the industrial growth machine. We ask: What products, technologies and worldviews are alienating people from their traditional knowledge systems and simultaneously increasing their dependency on the industrial market economy? Should we not first consider removing the structural conditions that are engendering injustices and environmental breakdown, rather than leaving those in place and treating symptoms of the structures? For example, what about ending export subsidies and agricultural commodity dumping by the overindustrialized countries on the majority agrarian ones, as a start? The MDGs do not ask such questions. The political roots of real material poverty remain unaddressed and unchallenged, and more human-scale, humane, just, ecological alternative models are marginalized, unconsidered. We propose the following alternative list (which does not pretend to be exhaustive or comprehensive) to address some of these shortcomings.

- 1) Respect and protect all life, of all species, for all generations to come.
- 2) End ecological overshoot (wherever it exists) by bringing consumption and production well within the absorptive and regenerative capacities of bioregions and the biosphere, and eliminate waste. Collectively explore ways to achieve just, ecologically sustainable and meaningful livelihoods for all.
 - 2a) Reduce by half the number of people living in opulence and excess, down to an amount consonant with true satisfaction, with the eventual goal of reducing that number by one hundred percent.
- 3) Economic transitions:
 - a. Work towards eliminating economic systems and institutions based on perpetual growth, competition, long-distance trade, commodification of life, and the pathological pursuit of profits. Replace

them with a multiplicity of economic systems that enshrine principles of sufficiency, cooperation, sacredness of life, justice, solidarity, contentment, happiness, kindness, love, least/no harm, and true costs. Jettison such distorted economic measures as GDP, GNP, various stock market indices and the like, and replace them with measures of genuine eco-social well-being.

b. Shift from the corporate-controlled, non renewable energy-dependent globalized economy toward a multiplicity of solar powered, localized economies (not to be confused with isolationism or xenophobia). Do this in part by ending perverse subsidies and other institutional supports that undergird and perpetuate the dominant existing globalized system.

c. Dismantle so-called 'free trade' policies in recognition of their basic function as instruments of transnational corporate empowerment at the expense of local autonomy, democracy, environmental quality and sustainability. Revoke all existing 'free trade' treaties and agreements for the immense damage already done by them, and prevent any such future treaties.

d. Respect and uphold existing alternatives to the global capitalist economic system, including but not limited to: subsistence economies, local exchange/trading systems, barter networks, local currencies, food sovereignty, solidarity economies, local fair trade networks, etc. Respect the land, water, air, seeds, food, biocultural knowledge and practices, genes, worldviews/cosmovisions, etc. of local cultures.

e. End legal personhood of corporations, and disband any corporations that have abused life.

4) Agricultural policy transitions:

a. Reorient agricultural economic policies from promoting ever greater export-orientation, corporate concentration, farmworker and environment-abusing industrialization (mechanization, standardization, monoculture and synthetic input dependency) towards localized, ecological, highly diversified, socially just agricultural systems.

b. End export subsidies and agricultural commodity dumping by the overindustrialized countries on the majority agrarian ones. Protect the ability to defend local producers through price supports, import controls, etc. Revalue peasant agriculture as an honorable and economically viable livelihood. Implement a just, global land reform to reduce real poverty and support the goal of community self-reliance and food sovereignty.

5) Repair as best as possible the injustices of historical colonialisms, and end the contemporary ones. This may include but is not limited to: land redistribution, dismantling of imposed development megaprojects (dams, power plants, superhighways, industrial parks, export zones, special economic (i.e. exploitation) zones, maquiladoras, boarding schools, etc.); repatriation of stolen cultural items; reparations of other forms of wealth that were raided, plundered, and siphoned off in the enrichment of today's dominator countries.

6) Disband all imperialist military structures. End immediately the production of weapons and other infrastructure of war, including but not limited to all military bases, missile silos, weapons laboratories, recruiting stations, training camps, occupations, etc. maintained around the world by any country (with particular attention toward the United States, today's greatest nation-state threat to peace and justice).

7) Disarticulate the damaging hierarchies that sustain oppression, low self- and cultural-esteem and inequality. Encourage the cultivation of each person's life-affirming skills, social contributions, efforts and sacrifices. Put a wrench in the treadmill of *relative poverty* and emulative consumption by encouraging the "true development" of spiritual contentment. Respect and uphold lifeways that differ from the urban-industrial-consumerist, and desist from unqualified branding of such as 'poverty'.

8) Disabuse our societies and minds of the "developmentality" which asserts that there is a universal, unilinear evolutionary trajectory of progress defined primarily by industrialization, mechanization, and economic growth, and which judges and labels nations/societies by this fundamentally distorted metric where 'difference' is often confused with 'lack'. Discontinue use of such terms as 'developed', 'developing', 'underdeveloped' and so on to describe or designate regions or countries of the world, in recognition of the basically ethnocentric and chauvinistic nature of such terms, and of the developmentality such terms engender.

9) Enshrine the precautionary principle as a basic guiding principle of life and economics. Consider harmful all technologies, chemicals, machines, etc. that are reasonably suspected of causing harm or having the potential thereof, and ban their further development and deployment until they are conclusively proven safe and in consonance with the first goal. Similarly, apply the precautionary principle retroactively, i.e. ban already-developed and deployed technologies, chemicals, machines, etc. that are reasonably suspected of causing harm.

10) Support place-specific, culturally defined socio-ecological goals that respect equality *and* diversity – as the Zapatistas say: ‘un mundo donde quepan todos los mundos.’ (a world where all worlds fit)

LOCAL FOOD FOR THE MILLENNIUM

Helena Norberg-Hodge <hnh@isec.org.uk>

The Millennium Development Goals address today's most pressing crises within the context of a conventional economic development model. They aim to at least partially solve endemic poverty, lack of access to basic education, gender inequality, ill-health, debt and environmental destruction. Yet, if we take a look at the bigger picture, we see that the root cause of many of these problems is actually the economic system itself. As a significant aspect of the global market economy, the global food system is particularly destructive. No honest assessment of our current social and ecological crises can ignore the role of the globalised food system in creating poverty, hunger, inequality and environmental damage. Since food is something everyone, everywhere needs everyday even small changes in the way it is produced and marketed can have significant impacts. Re-localising food systems means encouraging community building, empowering people, protecting the natural environment and alleviating the effects of poverty. If we really want to reduce poverty in developing countries, we should begin by bringing the food economy home in both the North and the South.

The global food system is characterised by large-scale, highly mechanised, monocultural and chemical-intensive methods, with production oriented towards distant, and increasingly global, markets. The abundant use of external inputs, large machinery and long-distance transport makes this system extremely capital- and energy-intensive. It is also characterised by a heavy reliance on the knowledge and technology generated by a small number of Western-style institutions. The goal is ever-increasing agricultural 'efficiency' – defined as maximising the yield of a narrow range of globally traded commodities, while minimising human labour. Enormous research and development efforts, largely at public expense, are directed toward that end. Too often, the resulting technologies are promoted to farmers irrespective of local ecological and social conditions. This has reshaped agricultural products, landscapes and diverse cultural traditions to suit the available technologies. In the process, nature and culture have been homogenised worldwide in order to better serve the global economy. Although variants are to be found within the global food system, its fundamental characteristics – largely determined by technology and international market forces – are the same everywhere.

The supposed superior productivity of industrial agriculture is largely a myth, one that has been propagated for years by its proponents and

beneficiaries. The main accomplishment of industrial agriculture has been to remove people from the land and to replace them with polluting technologies; overall yields have not increased. Studies have shown that small-scale, diversified agricultural systems have a higher total output per unit of land than large-scale monocultures. The higher productivity of small farms is all the more remarkable in light of the fact that large landholders control most of the best land, while small landholders – particularly in the South – have been pushed to more marginal plots. If providing food for the world's hungry is the priority, then we should begin the shift towards local food systems immediately, since they do a far better job of feeding people. Not only that, but small, diversified farms are better for the environment, providing more niches for various wild flora and fauna to thrive. If the farm is cultivated with organic methods the wildlife populations increase further, including beneficial predators of crop pests.

The global food system has a huge appetite for energy, and depends on large-scale centralised energy infrastructures to satisfy it. In addition to transport, energy is needed to process foods, to refrigerate them for their long-distance journeys, to produce the packaging in which processed foods are sold, and to power the factories in which industrial agriculture's many off-farm inputs are manufactured.

The net result has been increased pollution along with mass unemployment. The fundamental aim of the global food system is to increase trade, regardless of the consequences. The "free" trade system means that everyday, identical products criss-cross the planet. Britain, for example, exports roughly the same quantity of milk that it imports each year. As oil reserves dwindle and climate change looms, this sort of wastefulness cannot be tolerated. Taxpayers subsidise this unwieldy system. In exchange for our investment we get a polluted environment, increased unemployment, global poverty and food of poor nutritional quality.

Farmers in the South, many of whom are still part of local economic systems, are being pressured to enlist in the global food system. Government funding, as well as foreign aid, go toward production for export rather than production for local needs. This inevitably means monocultural production, with its agricultural and economic instability. It also means selling on global markets. Local farmers, as well as the communities they supported, now have to buy imported food to survive. This system has led to extreme distortions in the distribution of food. We are familiar with the problems of over-consumption in richer countries. Obesity is reaching epidemic proportions, while enormous quantities of

food are wasted. In the UK over 15 million tonnes of food is thrown away each year. Some of this food is rejected because it doesn't meet the standards of "attractiveness" required by supermarkets. However, 5 million tonnes of food goes into household waste stream. UK consumers actually throw away over a quarter of the food they buy, even though half of it is still edible.

In order to artificially regulate supply and demand, large quantities of food are also stored. India has amassed a surplus of 59 million tonnes of grain, while tens of thousands of children in the country remain undernourished. This sort of unequal distribution is becoming the norm even within countries of the South, where the rich elite have access to an abundance of food and the poor go hungry. It is clear this system is not working when millions of people go hungry each year and up to 24,000 people die of hunger-related causes each day.

Local communities in the South can easily be destroyed by events over which they have no control – a recession in Europe, perhaps, or a bigger-than-expected harvest in another part of the world. As global trade increases, corporate middlemen demand larger and larger quantities, thus squeezing out the smaller producers. Millions of farming families are being driven from the land. With no other source of income, they are forced to leave their ancestral homes and rural communities for the anonymity of one of the South's ever-expanding urban slums. Here they are likely to end up on a human garbage heap— without community, without connection to the land, without a secure food supply. Even if they earn only fifty cents a day rummaging through rubbish to sell in the city, the shift from the village will statistically register as economic progress at the national and global levels. The 'lucky' ones become part of the huge pool of cheap labour, toiling in factories and sweatshops contracted out to multinational corporations. On a densely populated planet, increasing our "ecological footprint" in the name of development is nothing short of madness.

Promoting local food economies worldwide while resisting corporate-led globalisation is vital if we want to avert further social and ecological breakdown. Since small-scale farmers and producers are the cornerstone of the local economy, a first step is to protect the rural economies that still exist. This does not mean that everyone should be engaged in food production, nor does it mean that those in the cold climates can never again eat oranges or bananas. The essential goal of localisation is to shorten the distance between producers and consumers *wherever possible*. This, above all, would assure food security in developing countries, giving people consistent access to staple foods from their

region. Instead of being concentrated in a handful of corporations, control over food would be dispersed and decentralised. If developing countries were encouraged to use their labour and their best agricultural land for local needs rather than growing luxury crops for Northern markets, the rate of endemic hunger would diminish.

It may seem like a small step, but the positive impacts of food localisation would be multi-faceted and far-reaching. Beyond the more obvious economic and environmental benefits, re-localising food systems would help rebuild community. We can thereby begin the process of revitalising culture. Through localisation we can achieve true sustainability, ensuring the wellbeing of people and the planet.

THE GREAT AGRICULTURAL CHALLENGE (excerpt)

Bhaskar Save

Bhaskar Save, an 84-year-old organic farmer, wrote a series of open letters to M.S. Swaminathan, currently chair of the National Commission on Farmers, Union Agricultural Ministry, Delhi, and widely considered to be the father of the 'Green Revolution'. Bhaskar Save offered not just a searing critique of the chemical- and petroleum-based agricultural model, but also a series of recommendations for making the move back to an organic and healthy agriculture/ecology. What follows is an excerpt from his third letter, which makes suggestions that are quite relevant to the MDGs conversation.

Suggestions/ Recommendations

1. The major thrust of our national policy should be to ensure the water security and food security of India through organically growing mixed, locally suitable crops, plants, and particularly trees, following the laws of Nature.
2. The Government should provide all necessary encouragement and support to the farmers presently using chemicals, for converting at least 20-25% of their land each year to a 100% organic path without any chemicals whatsoever. It is thus possible for India to be wholly (and happily) liberated from the poisonous agro-chemicals in about 4-5 years.
3. We should restore (organically) at least 30% ground cover of mixed, indigenous and locally adapted trees and forests, preferably within the next decade, especially on sloping lands prone to soil erosion. This is the core task of ecological water harvesting – the key to restoring the natural abundance of groundwater. Outstanding benefits can be achieved thereby in the shortest possible time at minimal cost. Such decentralized underground storage is more efficient, as it is protected from the high evaporation of surface storage. The planting of trees will also make available a variety of useful produce to enhance the welfare of a larger number of people. By inter-planting short life-span, medium life-span, and long life-span crops and trees, it is possible to have planned continuity of food yield to sustain a farmer through the transition period till the long-life fruit trees mature and yield. The higher availability of biomass and complete ground cover round the year will also hasten the regeneration of soil fertility.
4. A policy of conservative irrigation must be strictly followed, according highest priority of allocation to nutritious food crops. Indeed, most crops

grow best when the soil is just damp, enabling continuity of soil aeration. A high water consumption field crop like rice is a rare exception, which should be cultivated only in the monsoon, when it is a logical choice for growing in low-lying flat areas, prone to inundation. The unseasonal cultivation of rice with irrigation in dry months should be totally stopped, or at least phased out within the next five years. Growing of sugarcane in water scarcity areas must be banned, as also in poorly drained soils and dry climates with a high rate of evaporation. By this policy, at least 60% of our irrigation waters can be saved for local priority use. The irreversible ruination of fertile, agricultural lands through soil salinisation and water-logging will also stop.

5. High priority is needed to conserve in their decentralized natural habitats – and within the control of local farmers – the enormous wealth of our biodiversity, both of crops and uncultivated species.

6. Similarly, we urgently need to document from experienced organic farmers the depth of traditional farming knowledge specific to each bioregion and agro-climatic zone.

7. No unnatural biotechnological interventions whatsoever are needed. These, particularly genetically tampered species, may prove even more dangerous to our food sovereignty than have the chemicals.

8. Soil erosion needs to be checked on a war footing. Official records inform that presently over 350 million acres of land are seriously affected by soil erosion caused by rain and wind. The most effective and productive strategy of checking such erosion is by establishing ground cover vegetation, particularly perennials.

9. All crop residues and 'bio-wastes' must go back to the land to replenish its fertility. The drain of organic matter from our soils must stop.

10. Science can be harnessed to provide farmers with good, manual tools and implements, which can greatly help to increase work efficiency and reduce the toil. Continuous feedback should be obtained from farmers on what they find helpful.

11. Local farmer-level exchanges of experiences, skills and seeds should be encouraged and supported by the government. Again, the farmers themselves are the best judges of what support, if any, they need.

12. Urban areas should be encouraged to vermi-compost their kitchen wastes and grow organic, rooftop vegetable gardens. Additionally, urban educational institutes should facilitate practical understanding and work experience related to the regeneration of our natural wealth. For this purpose, academic leave may be granted for spending at least 15 days every year in the countryside. Schools in rural areas should preferably have monsoon vacations for about 45 days, starting a week before the rains – to enable the rural populace to concentrate on farming and planting work, which cannot be undertaken the rest of the year.

You are probably well aware of the huge strides Cuba has made in organic farming, which it was forced into because of the US led embargo on that nation. You are also acutely conscious that the fossil-fuel intensive path of chemical farming may be suddenly forced to stop if our fuel supplies (largely imported) are throttled, or if their prices mount sharply. Even if the big crisis does not come in the next 5 years, the degradation of our natural capital – our soils – is already alarming. So too is the depletion of our groundwater. The sooner we adopt the organic path, the better for us, and indeed, for the rest of the world as well.

It is perhaps unrealistic to hope for total, voluntary change in a hurry. But if we can achieve even 50% of the tasks listed above, our farmers have a fighting chance. Compromising for less than that would be a betrayal of the land and her people, and deep violence to our souls.

In conclusion, I wish you all the best, and have faith that you will courageously follow the voice of your conscience – the path of sanity.

With warm wishes and best regards,
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All of Bhaskar Save's open letters have been compiled and published in full by Earthcare Books, Kolkata, India, under the title "The Great Agricultural Challenge". Please contact Bharat Mansata <earthcarebooks@vsnl.com> for a hard or soft copy.

REVISED DOCTORS OATH

Dr. Leo Rebello <leorebello@hathway.com>

1st July is celebrated as Doctors Day all over the world. The day usually passes without a whimper. Many doctors have forgotten their Hippocratic oath or humanism. Therefore, I would like to administer the following oath to the doctors to serve as a reminder as to how important is their profession. Doctors to please repeat after me.

I, _____, do hereby swear on this solemn day that :-

I shall **not** prescribe unnecessary medicines and tests to my patients;

I shall **not** give false counseling;

I shall **not** overcharge and accept cuts and gifts;

I shall **not** rape tiny tots with mercury laced inoculations or vaccinations, for they pollute the blood stream of small children leading to serious diseases like AIDS, Cancers, Autism, etc. later in life;

I shall **not** prescribe lethal drugs, like anti-retrovirals, chemotherapy, or give ECT to my patients;

I shall **not** indulge in human organ thefts to the detriment of my patients;

I shall **not** be afraid of any authority and fabricate medical records or give false evidence;

I shall **not** exploit students studying under me;

I shall **not** manipulate findings or results to win grants.

I, _____, further solemnly affirm that:-

If I cannot treat a disease, I shall **not** say that AIDS, cancers, diabetes has no cure. But will tell the patient to try other systems of medicine.

I shall treat health practitioners of other systems with respect and **not** tell deliberate lies to prove my importance.

I shall study holistic healing modalities to increase my knowledge and wisdom.

I shall **not** even by mistake say that "HIV=AIDS=death" or cancers cannot be treated.

I shall **not** frighten my patients with unnecessary comments, opinions or advice.

I still remember what Hippocrates said, namely, "Let diet be your medicine" and shall accordingly prescribe fresh fruits, vegetables and good diet to my patients, rather than tonics, syrups, synthetic multi-vitamins, specially to children.

I shall **not** perform surgery, unless it is absolutely must and will **not** indulge in rackets like amniocentesis, caesarian section, silicon implant or liposuction.

I shall work to ban the useless and cruel animal experiments in the name of medicine.

I shall participate in periodic workshops, seminars, and conferences at my expense or on scholarship (no pharma funding) to educate myself and speak from my conscience if I am called upon to speak or preside.

Finally, I shall **not** consume alcohol, smoke tobacco, or take other narcotic and psychotropic substances. As far as possible, I shall also **not** take animal proteins.

I realize and aver that a great responsibility of people's well-being is upon my shoulders and I shall carry on my onerous task with utmost dedication.

This I swear in the name of God on this solemn Doctors Day and I shall repeat this oath daily lest I forget that I am in a divine profession to heal the world.

Oath written and administered by **Dr. Leo Rebello**
Website : www.healthwisdom.org

Part of turning the page to new possibilities is asking better questions. We take inspiration from Jacques Ellul's effort to raise more questions about the technology we are rapidly adopting and widely using today.

76 Reasonable Questions to ask about any technology

Jacques Ellul

Ecological

What are its effects on the health of the planet and of the person?
Does it preserve or destroy biodiversity?
Does it preserve or reduce ecosystem integrity?
What are its effects on the land?
What are its effects on wildlife?
How much, and what kind of waste does it generate?
Does it incorporate the principles of ecological design?
Does it break the bond of renewal between humans and nature?
Does it preserve or reduce cultural diversity?
What is the totality of its effects, its "ecology"?

Social

Does it serve community?
Does it empower community members?
How does it affect our perception of our needs?
Is it consistent with the creation of a communal, human economy?
What are its effects on relationships?
Does it undermine conviviality?
Does it undermine traditional forms of community?
How does it affect our way of seeing and experiencing the world?
Does it foster a diversity of forms of knowledge?
Does it build on, or contribute to, the renewal of traditional forms of knowledge?
Does it serve to commodify knowledge or relationships?
To what extent does it redefine reality?
Does it erase a sense of time and history?
What is its potential to become addictive?

Practical

What does it make?
Who does it benefit?
What is its purpose?
Where was it produced?
Where is it used?
Where must it go when it's broken or obsolete?
How expensive is it?
Can it be repaired?
By an ordinary person?

Moral

What values does its use foster?
What is gained by its use?
What are its effects beyond its utility to the individual?
What is lost in using it?
What are its effects on the least advantaged in society?

Ethical

How complicated is it?
What does it allow us to ignore?
To what extent does it distance agent from effect?
Can we assume personal, or communal responsibility for its effects?
Can its effects be directly apprehended?
What ancillary technologies does it require?
What behavior might it make possible in the future?
What other technologies might it make possible?
Does it alter our sense of time and relationships in ways conducive to nihilism?

Vocational

What is its impact on craft?
Does it reduce, deaden, or enhance human creativity?
Is it the least imposing technology available for the task?
Does it replace, or does it aid human hands and human beings?
Can it be responsive to organic circumstance?
Does it depress or enhance the quality of goods?
Does it depress or enhance the meaning of work?

Metaphysical

What aspect of the inner self does it reflect?

Does it express love?
Does it express rage?
What aspect of our past does it reflect?
Does it reflect cyclical or linear thinking?

Political

Does it concentrate or equalize power?
Does it require, or institute a knowledge elite?
Is it totalitarian?
Does it require a bureaucracy for its perpetuation?
What legal empowerments does it require?
Does it undermine traditional moral authority?
Does it require military defense?
Does it enhance, or serve military purposes?
How does it affect warfare?
Is it massifying?
Is it consistent with the creation of a global economy?
Does it empower transnational corporations?
What kind of capital does it require?

Aesthetic

Is it ugly?
Does it cause ugliness?
What noise does it make?
What pace does it set?
How does it affect the quality of life (as distinct from the standard of living)?

**SHIKSHANTAR:
The Peoples' Institute for
Rethinking Education and Development**

Shikshantar, a not-for-profit movement, was founded to challenge the culture of schooling and institutions of thought-control. Today, factory-schooling and literacy are suppressing many diverse forms of human learning and expression, as well as much-needed organic processes towards just and harmonious social regeneration. We are committed to creating spaces where individuals and communities can together engage in dialogue to: (1) generate meaningful critiques to expose and dismantle/transform existing models of Education and Development; (2) reclaim control over their own learning processes and learning ecologies; and (3) elaborate (and continually re-elaborate) their own complex shared visions and practices of Swaraj.

Shikshantar is based in Udaipur (Rajasthan, India). Our core team works in collaboration with local and trans-local partners through dynamic processes of participatory conceptualization. To learn more about our efforts, please contact us at:

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We welcome and encourage your questions, suggestions and support.