

Contents

- 1 Community Development and Globalisation
- 2 Contradictions of benign capitalism and of social democracy
- 3 Bottom-up community development: Towards cooperative globalisation
- 4 The subjects of community development
- 5 Community development and the emancipation of human labour
- 6 Relations between community and government
- 7 Praxis methodology
- 8 Praxis education
- 9 The need for a philosophy of conflict
- 10 Conflict between the competitive environment and the cooperative approach
- 11 Hope



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cancomment

Globalisation and self-reliant community development

This edition of CAN Comment, written by Marcos Arruda is based on discussion between community, statutory and voluntary activists, which took place over three seminars in 1998.

It is hoped that the content of this paper will inspire deeper analysis of a vision for more self-reliant communities in a changing Ireland and world.

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Marcus's approach is holistic, taking into account the full range of economic, social environmental, spiritual and political issues that affect development.

In January and again in October 1998, I had the privilege of working with community development workers who are related to Community Action Network (CAN). The work consisted of three seminars, in January, involving in total 51 persons. These included representatives of governmental and social support agencies such as the Agency to Combat Poverty, the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, and Trócaire. The October seminar included Community projects, Voluntary

Organizations and Partnerships, and had 60 participants. The purpose was to share experiences and insights emerging from their work and from my 25 years of community development and education work in a variety of countries, including Brazil, United States, Nicaragua, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde. The central question was - What is the role and the importance of community development in the context of competitive globalisation that prevails in the today's world?

The participatory methodology ensured that I had enough time to listen to the participants and to learn from their experiences and insights as well. The participants were generally very committed people involved in the work of supporting development of a variety of communities, especially in the contradictory context of Ireland in the recent years.

The reflections that follow summarize the most important issues and approaches discussed in the seminars. Much of the wealth of ideas and experiences was left out for lack of space. In terms of methodology, the seminars had a gratifying combination of active participation, with integrative activities, which dealt with our feelings, emotions and sense of togetherness. This

integrated approach to the seminars, while combining the rational with the emotional and intuitive dimensions of our beings, was also a concrete means of doing things alternatively and not only talking about alternatives.

1 Community development and globalisation

Is globalisation good for the world?

Competitive globalisation is a process whereby capital surmounts national borders. Capital is a term broadly used to mean two things: **productive assets** (factories, equipment, land, and also money and finance) and **relations of production**, the hard core of which is the relation between capital and labour. In capitalism, capital and labour are set against each other.

Globalisation is intrinsic to the nature of capitalism since its origin in the 15th century. The peculiarity of its present stage is the acceleration of globalisation, based on technological and organizational innovation, side-by-side with neoliberal reforms and adjustments in both hemispheres. The competitive type of global-

isation expands in three complementary lines of growth:

- a) intensification of competition among large enterprises and banks, while excluding or submitting less powerful companies and national States;
- b) weakening of the power of States to control and regulate capital flows; and
- c) the fact that it is capital, commodities and markets that are being globalized, not labour or human beings.

In the Southern Hemisphere, neoliberal adjustment programmes have followed the financial collapse of economies in the early 80s under the burden of debt. Governments exchanged rescue packages with the IMF (International Monetary Fund) for their sovereign right to decide on their country's macroeconomic policies and development path. And now for two decades, the South has experienced **development from outside and from above**, and the IMF and IRDB (World Bank) have been their most outstanding promoters. Globalisation of Latin America was intensified in the 90s, as military dictatorships gave way to liberal governments. Local elites were ready to maintain ties of subordination with the Northern countries and global institutions, and were eager to consolidate the leadership of transnational banks and industrial corporations over their economies. They fed their peoples with the illusion that economic growth can best be achieved through income and wealth concentration; that development imitative of the Northern model, (promoted by Northern-based capitalist corporations and banks, and centered on making everything and everyone a commodity to be bought and sold in the capitalist market), is the only effective and positive way of engaging in "modernity", or the era of globalisation.

This approach to development, instead of being a solution to the problems of poverty, dependence and backwardness, has raised a number of even more serious problems: Latin America's households living under the poverty line (one dollar or less per day) increased in the 80s from 35% to 39% of the total number of households. In the 90s, income concentration in Latin America has reached new peaks. Brazil's record is among the world's worst, with the 10% richest controlling 43% of the country's income and the poorest 40% earning only 11% of the national income; 76% of the country's households earned less than the country's per capita income of US\$ 4,800.

2 Contradictions of benign capitalism and of social democracy

Can capitalism be "benign" or cooperative?

Capitalism has metamorphosed itself into a variety of forms along its history. One is capitalist statism, in which the State plays an intervening role in the economy and in the distribution and management of resource allocation. Another one is capitalist liberalism, in which private actors are given free reign over the control and management of resources, the setting of prices and the exchange of goods and services. In this case, the capitalist State becomes a mere subsidiary to the private interests of large economic and financial agents. The current status of capitalism is of this

kind and is commonly known as neoliberal capitalism. Other forms include a variety of "benign", "cooperative", social-democratic types of capitalism. "Benign" or "cooperative" capitalism refers to a system wherein the control over parts of the stocks of companies is relatively atomized, as opposed to monopoly capitalism; thus, part of the surplus is redistributed.

Let us not be deceived by the expression "cooperative" capitalism. They are antagonistic terms. In capitalism, capital competes with capital, labour with labour, and there is a permanent war of interests between labour and capital. Cooperation is the opposite to the essence of capitalism, which is private, exclusive, fragmented control over the means of production, and the consequent competition between economic agents for the appropriation of markets, profits and productivity gains. In social democratic capitalism, the economy is left in private hands, while the State plays an important role in redistributing the social product. In both cases, however, a division between social subjects (owners of capital) and objects (salaried workers) continues to split the economy and the political institutions.

Where does Ireland stand in this context?

The Irish economy is not really included in these categories. It chose a path of deep dependence on international investments, and it is not (yet?) equipped with institutions and mechanisms that ensure a fairer distribution of the social product among citizens. The vulnerability of the Irish economy and society to external crisis is high. Poverty and exclusion are still important traits of the Irish socioeconomy. At the same time, there is enough space for working people to break out of the feeling of perplexity and powerlessness related to unemployment, impoverishment and exclusion, by creating different forms of cooperative and associative enterprises, by building communities that incorporate in their practice and in their relationships the values of cooperation, complementarity, solidarity, and co-responsibility, by defining new patterns of consumption that are based on an ethic of "enough", of voluntary simplicity and frugality, and of sustainable harmony with nature.

Is globalisation conducive to community development?

Despite the protagonism of global markets and corporations and the gradual weakening of the State as a public socioeconomic agent, community development has been a target of both governments and multilateral agencies. They are concerned with the disastrous effects of neoliberal reforms on the labour force. The labouring class is made up of those who rely only on the sale of their labour to survive with their families. The top-down development approach argues that the capitalist market is the only rational way of distributing scarce resources and wealth in society. The persistence of inequalities, however, has convinced many of its protagonists that local communities have to be involved in solving some of their survival problems, which the market will not solve for them. Some State funds are needed, but the main goal is to engage communities in overcoming their socioeconomic problems, thus avoiding social unrest. They see community development as "a necessary cost", or "a compensatory policy" so as to let business move

on as usual. We call this the compensatory approach to community development. And we argue that only an emancipatory approach will truly make sense for working class communities.

The fact is that capital and the capitalist market throughout history have proved unable to respond to the deepest and most sublime needs of humankind. We are therefore called to reinvent the economy in a way that fits the human beings that we are: loving beings (at least potentially), interconnected with one another and with nature, and challenged consciously to remake this interconnectedness in ways that enhance our humanness and contribute to the evolution of our species and the Cosmos, of whose soul we seem to be an active part.

3 Bottom-up community development: towards cooperative globalisation

Is this the only way of making globalisation and development?

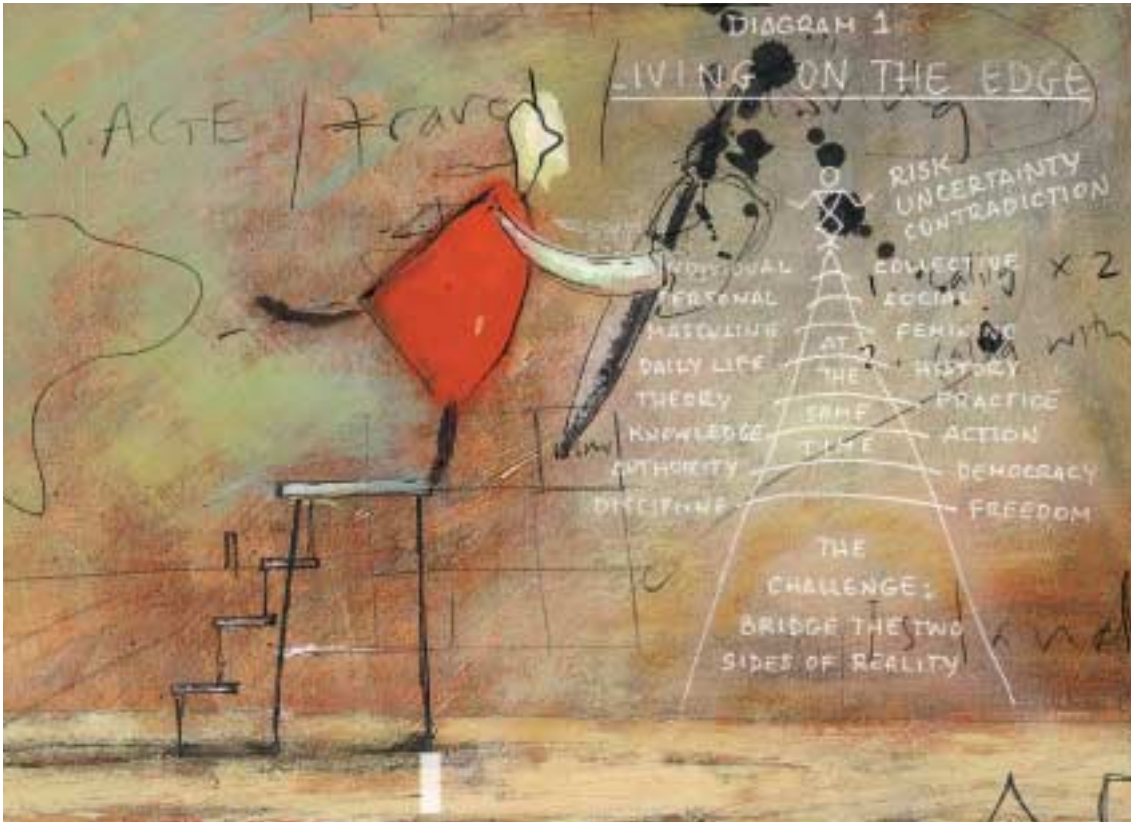
There is, however, a different approach to development. We call it bottom-up development, and we say that it aims at a different type of globalisation, one based on the values of cooperation, sharing, reciprocity, complementarity and solidarity. This approach values diversity, instead of considering it an obstacle to development. It sees diversity as a source of wealth, both in terms of human qualities and material resources. The "secret" in dealing with diversity is to maximize complementarity, that is, bringing together different human qualities and material resources available in a community (a collective of diverse individuals and families), so that their use is maximized for the well-being of each and every member, and of the community as a whole. This is the path to a dialogical form of creating unanimity, without stifling diversity at the community level. If we extend this cooperative concept from the local to the spheres of the nation (a collective of diverse communities) and globe (a collective of diverse nations and cultures), we come up with a new vision: one of cooperative globalisation.

Is development not the same as economic growth?

Not for us. We make a clear distinction between economic growth and development. Just as our body grows (quantitatively) and develops up to 18-20 years of age, then stops growing and continues to develop, so should we make the economy grow until it reaches an optimum point – the point we call enough – and then should stop growing and continue to develop qualitatively. But this can only happen if we consciously put brakes to economic growth, and redirect the economy towards seeking enough, and development towards the unfolding of our upper qualities and potentials.

Why do we talk about human potentials?

Because we do not believe that reality is only what we see with our eyes. Take the seed of an orange. It is at the same time a seed and potentially an orange tree. If we say it is only a seed, we miss acknowledging its potential to become a full tree and to give more fruit. If we ignore that it is a seed and only see the potential tree, we stop short of giving it the necessary conditions for it to develop



from seed into tree. This means that the seed, currently and potentially, is part of broader realms of reality which are crucial for the seed to become a tree or else it dies. Development is a process that occurs over time and must be given the adequate inner and outer environmental conditions.

How does this way of seeing affect community development?

Community development, in this perspective, can no longer be seen in isolation from the development of other communities, the nation and the world/human species. They form a system of interconnected beings and institutions, which are interdependent and need one another to survive and achieve full development of their own potentials as individuals and as a collective. In this view, we can no longer argue that the meaning of human life is to accumulate material goods and maximize consumption. It is personal and collective human development that we seek, including the fulfillment of our economic needs and wants, but also, and mainly, the development of the specifically human potentials. Well-being means access to enough material goods to have a dignified life, but also control over the development of our mental, psychic and spiritual potentials. We no longer look at the individual person, firm, community or nation as an absolute, nor do we seek to maximize the efficacy of only the individual, but also and foremost, that of the whole system.

4 The subjects of community development

Who should be the main subjects of community development?

Community development poses the challenge of empowerment. Working class communities, although they contribute to the growth of the national product and wealth of the country, are generally subject to unmet needs. Political democracy only exists if each and every citizen is also economically empowered. Where there is poverty, therefore, there is no full democracy. Economic empowerment means access to control and management of productive resources and to the results of one's own labour; access to markets, to credit, to a useful occupation, in sum, to all socioeconomic rights. Who creates wealth? Some say that it is capital. But then we must ask - who creates capital? The ultimate answer is human labour. The application of human knowledge, creativity and energy in labour is the creator of wealth. In complex societies like ours, wealth is the product of the labour of many: we call it social labour, or labour of the social individual. An integral democracy guarantees adequate distribution of the product of social labour.

An integral, harmonious development is one in which the community identifies and includes in its own development plan each and every aspect and dimension that needs to be developed. The subjects and protagonists of development ought to be the person and the community who possess the

potentials to be developed. Any help from outside must be taken only as complementary to the inner resources of that subject. The right of the person and the community to be respected as the main protagonist of one's own development implies the obligation to respect the same right of every other person and community. It also hints at the importance of articulating cooperation at the local, community level with solidarity at the level of cooperative nets and webs of exchange, regional, national and global.

Is self-development a viable goal?

In a vertically and hierarchically organized world, where the big and the powerful tend to overwhelm the small and the local, to talk about self-development may sound utopian. The Self, (understood as the individual or the community in the context of all their relationships), and only the Self can genuinely conquer emancipation. And the way to do it is to educate and empower the Self to become the full subject of its existence and development, in a spirit of cooperation and solidarity with other selves. But communities often are not motivated to take hold of that power and responsibility. Colonialism has left deep scars in the colonized. People were trained to submit to the oppressors. Dependence, demand and delegation of responsibility became a dominant ethos. Communities often expect all solutions to their problems to come from the outside or from government. Overcoming the culture of dependence and delegation is a key challenge confronting development workers.

What are motivation strategies?

In order to motivate communities to take power and responsibility over their own development, it is crucial to be clear about the obstacles that must be confronted. Among objective obstacles are the fragmentation of interests, lack of local resources, lack of active intermediary agencies, and social control from above. But perhaps the most difficult to overcome are the subjective obstacles, such as fear, deep-rooted individualism, lack of self-esteem, lack of trust in others, lack of experience about sharing decisions and working cooperatively, lack of a collective identity as a community. Motivation strategies must be devised in the context of the local culture, using adequate language and symbolism. Progress in overcoming those obstacles is not linear. Most important is to combine verbal exchanges with concrete action, learning together from the action and developing one's own capacity to share thoughts, concerns and decision-making.

Is social inclusion the real goal of community development?

We just argued that wealth is the product of social labour, rather than of impersonal capital or of individual endeavour. In capitalism, however, wealth is socially produced but privately appropriated. Naturally, the fruits of social labour should be socially shared, so as to fulfill adequately all the needs of each and every citizen. Competitive globalisation leads owners of capital feverishly to appropriate all the gains of productivity so as to compete in always more risky and predatory conditions. The consequence is two-fold. Those who remain employed are under permanent risk of being laid off; they are confronted with inhuman rhythms of work, increased competition with other workers, and weaker workers' organizations. The contradiction between labour and capital becomes blatant and this is pictured as an unavoidable fact of life. Those whose labour has been replaced by always more "intelligent" machines are laid off and excluded from the capitalist labour market. Social exclusion is not a phenomenon outside capitalism. It is intrinsic to capitalism and serves useful purposes for the capitalist, such as decreasing costs, increasing profit margins and weakening labour organizations. Social exclusion is the extreme outcome of a system that divides labour and wealth according to social classes.

Many believe that social inclusion is the way of overcoming social exclusion. They present this as the main goal of community development. We believe that bringing the excluded back into the capitalist labour market is certainly an improvement if compared with the deprivation related to their former condition. But it is no lasting solution because it tends to submit them again to a condition of dependence on a boss and a wage to survive.

The only true and sustainable way to overcome social exclusion is to emancipate human labour from submission. We need to rescue the humanizing and liberating content of human labour, its role as mediator of human action to build a humanized world and, in doing so, to build ourselves. To organize the economy and the market according to this central value, and no longer according to the narrow interests of capital. This is the fundamental challenge of the century and millennium we are approaching.

5 Community development and the emancipation of human labour

How can community development serve the goal of emancipating human labour?

When communities take the responsibility for their own development they soon find out that they have more resources and skills than they realized. It is easy to start by mapping the needs of each person and family individually and in their most immediate surroundings, the building, the street, the district. The subsequent exercise is to map the resources available: what does each person and family have as material resources and human skills. Putting needs and resources side by side may be revealing: many, if not most of the needs can be met by using the resources available in the community itself! Local systems of trade in goods and services can be established, with or without the mediation of money. The community can also create its own currency to mediate the exchanges, thus escaping the constraint of scarce finance.

Self-managed community development requires a strategy of combined financing. Although government funding may be necessary, particularly in the early stages of the process, it is crucial to mobilize local sources of finance. This will reduce dependence on outside funding sources and will proportionally increase collective autonomy and self-reliance in the community.

In many parts of the world, workers have taken into their own hands the task of reorganizing production, finance, credit, trade, consumption and services, on the basis of cooperation and solidarity. They have established self-managed enterprises in which cooperation, complementarity and solidarity guide relationships not only within the firm, but also in the exchange relations with other enterprises, communities, (and potentially regions and nations). In cooperative networks all partners gain in each exchange, because they realize that they are parts of more comprehensive wholes – ecosystems, or systems of interconnections among humans and between them and nature. They understand that the criteria of efficiency go beyond the material survival of the enterprise. In their view, efficiency is no longer just more profits with less costs, but also more quality and dignity of human life and labour. Efficiency is also about the blossoming of the subjectivity and singularity of each and every person and community, the well-being and happiness of each and every one of its members.

The space of the community offers a wide variety of possibilities of useful occupations to persons of all ages. It also offers the opportunity for people to organize cooperative forms of work that respond to community needs and generate income for those involved. Innovative systems of remuneration can be introduced. The community begins to feel a need to control its own finance and savings. Why put their money in banks if they can set up their own cooperative savings and loans associations? As they gain increasing control over their economy, they are able to deal with outside agencies on a more sovereign basis. They may invite a large production or commercial firm into the community, setting the goals and the terms for its intervention, in the framework of the community's self-development plan. They can also negotiate the participation of public

institutions and credits in ways that respect their autonomy and sovereignty over their development process.

These exchanges generate a strong feeling of individual and collective identity and self-esteem, which gives the community a sense of self-reliance that makes it easier to relate to other communities and to outside agencies with less mistrust and fear. An ethos of solidarity and reciprocity begins to seem natural to them, because they know it is the most rewarding for all.

6 Relations between community and government

Does cooperative community development do away with the need of government?

Here in Ireland many of the partnership type initiatives have often been criticized as top down development approaches. The same has happened with local development interventions by municipal, state and federal governments in countries like Brazil, Guinea Bissau and Nicaragua. Our view, however, is that the problem is not that the initiative starts with government and therefore follows a top-down method. The actual problem is the goal of government intervention.

In Brazil, community development initiatives led by the current federal government have generally been guided by the goals of "making communities and individual workers more competitive", or "including those who were excluded back in the labour market". In Guinea Bissau immediately after the defeat of Portuguese colonial rule in the mid-seventies, the federal government established a national literacy programme aimed at teaching the whole population how to read and write in Portuguese. It happens that only 5% of the Guinean population could speak or understand Portuguese, whereas more than 50% could speak creole and the rest only tribal languages.

These are examples of alienating government intervention. They do not help civil society become less dependent of government and on external cultures and values, or to become more aware of its own capacities and potentials, nor to be more empowered to manage its own development.

This is the key to the problem: governments are often linked with economic and political interest groups and are not concerned with the empowerment of civil society and the communities that constitute it. They are content with a partially or totally exclusive type of democracy. Civil society, when it becomes aware of its own powers and potentials, can easily do away with this type of government. However, communities can relate very creatively to a government whose goal is to stir the communities' capacities and potentials to overcome dependence and develop increasing autonomy and skills for self-managed, cooperative community development. Government intervention, in this case, can play the limited role of catalyst for the community to become the main protagonist of its own development and an active and conscious participant in the development of the region and the nation.

The goals and methodology of government intervention are, therefore, the determining



factors as to whether the intervention will be alienating and oppressive or constructive and liberating. Amílcar Cabral, one of the greatest leaders of the African peoples in this century, used to say that for the State to serve the cause of true democracy and social liberation civil servants have to be humble and use their power to empower the people. If they do not use power in this liberating way, sooner or later people will rise against them as they rose against their colonial rulers earlier on.

Overcoming dependence and paternalism

Community in contemporary societies is used to expecting development to come from above, to be done and managed by government, by others other than ourselves. Overcoming this trait of dependence and the traditional paternalistic, ‘assistentialistic’ approach by governments and politicians is crucial for the empowerment of the community. Realizing that development is related to the inner potentials of each person and community and not to what may come from the outside is a prerequisite. Only when a community takes the responsibility over its own development, does it become capable of relating to government and other outside agencies from a position of sovereignty, without the risk of losing control over its own development process. The goals and commitments of the acting government define its posture with respect to community development. If it wants to control and manage that development from above and from the outside, conflict will certainly arise. If its aim is to promote and support the empowerment of the community for self-

development, providing resources and counsel to the extent that it is requested and only as a complement to local resources and local human capability, then a creative relationship can flourish.

7. Praxis methodology

In our vocabulary, we avoid using the word “community” to mean spontaneous groups of people. Or they may be called “natural” communities. But we would like to stress that what makes a full community is a conscious decision of its members to share responsibility for their common destiny. In this sense, a human community emerges from an intentional process. This process involves getting acquainted with one another; building a common set of goals and ways of achieving them (a methodology); agreeing on a sort of social contract whereby each and every member assumes responsibility for specific tasks and contributions, and co-responsibility in the care of each other and of the whole.

A methodology that is based on a dynamic and creative combination of action and reflection, practice and theory is called praxis methodology. Methodology means the study of the way to reach certain goals. Praxis methodology proposes a way that articulates practice and theory, action and knowledge. In this perspective, the prerequisites of the cycle of development work include:

- 1 *Sharing vision and establishing general goals.*
- 2 *Research, collecting evidence, mapping the ground, getting to know the potential subjects of development.*

- 3 *Establishing specific goals for action, defining the mission or commitment of those involved.*
- 4 *Planning the action strategically and tactically.*
- 5 *Implementing the plan of action*
- 7 *Evaluation/research/planning of the new cycle of action.*

In this methodology, the cycle is not represented by a circle, but by a spiral moving forward in a non-linear movement that involves backwards and forwards flows and leaps. Let us examine briefly the steps of this cycle. (See diagram 4, page 8).

Sharing Vision – is the broadest, long-term project that ties the community together within itself and with development workers (hereafter called DWs) from outside. The vision is like a light in the future that can guide our steps. Yet, the future does not exist, it is present as a vision inside us. It is here and now that we build the future. If our actions are not coherent with our vision, the future will contradict the vision. There are usually conflicts of intentionality and vision between the community and the DWs, and also within the community. Most frequently, the community goals are very short-term oriented and linked to immediate, material achievements. The very interaction between DWs and the community is an educational process, which has to be carried out in a dialogical manner along the whole development process. The definition of a long-term, comprehensive vision is crucial, because it allows the community to define goals and establish strategies that link the existing reality with what is to be achieved through the development process. Dialogue on the vision

should make concepts and assumptions explicit. It should include discussion, for example, on what the participants mean by development, community, human needs, citizenship, rights and duties, democracy, etc.

Example of vision, spelled out by an Irish woman: a well-integrated, self-managed community in which men and women respect each others' differences and maximize their complementary qualities and potentials; an educational system that teaches children, adolescents and adults how to deal with the feminine and the masculine dimensions within themselves, and that embodies the teaching of gender differences and complementarity from the early years; a socioeconomy that expresses a dynamic balance between the masculine qualities of reason, dynamism, strength, initiative, objectivity and thought with the feminine attributes of intuition, receptiveness, respect for diversity, subjectivity, emotion.

Establishing General Goals – are landmarks for achievement through developmental actions. They emerge both from the expectations of the community, its interaction with the DWs, and the outcome of the participatory research. They can be general or specific goals, according to whether they are related to comprehensive, longer-term, or specific, shorter-term processes.

Example of general goals, spelled out by cooperative workers in Rio de Janeiro: a dynamic network of autonomous, self-managed co-operative and associative firms operating as horizontal and vertical chains of production of goods and services, trade, finance, distribution and consumption; adequate legislation to support and stimulate the development of a socioeconomy of solidarity; a fair system of national, continental and intercontinental trade.

Research on the situation - is a key starting point. Its assumption is that the protagonists of community development are the very members of the community. Therefore, the research must be participatory, seeking to involve actively as many of the members as possible. Natural local leaders may be the crucial research partners of the DWs. Research must be a function of the goals of community development, and not a mere exercise of curiosity. Its method and techniques must be informed by those goals. It seeks to identify a number of components of the reality of the community, including quantitative and qualitative, objective and subjective aspects. It must identify needs and resources currently and potentially available in the community and outside. It must identify all the existing actors and others who can become involved in the development process. It must examine the different scenarios and spaces where development action is to be undertaken. It must not be confined to the inner reality of the community, but must reach out for its interconnections with broader realms of reality. Research findings provide information that needs to be interpreted in the light of the vision and general goals, through analysis and synthesis. They provide the ground of the action plan.

Establishing specific goals for action – This is actually the first stage of action planning. The community, or at least its local leaders, must have control over the research findings in order to define specific goals for action, distinguishing priority

goals from secondary goals, and establishing a time scale as part of the strategic action design.

Example of specific goals, spelled out by the same group of Irish women: a) priority goals: set up a women's organization in the community; preliminary study for the creation of a women workers' cooperative; begin interaction with direction and teachers of the two public schools in the area; b) follow-up goals: involve youth and husbands in the creation of two mixed groups for discussion and action on gender issues; set up skilled psychological help in the local clinic to deal with gender related problems.

Mission/commitment – once vision and goals have been defined and agreed upon, this moment focuses the social contract that will bind the community together around self-development actions. These actions are related to concrete procedures, but also to self-management and collective decision making. In simple terms, who is going to be responsible for what, and how are operational decisions to be taken. Establishing the terms of the commitment also involves the DWs. These terms must specify the reach and the limits of their role, as well as the methodology of their intervention.

Plan of action – This is the moment of designing a plan that has two dimensions: **a) Strategic** - The dimension related to the general guidelines for the process aimed at reaching the goals, taking the situation and the subjects as identified in the research as the starting point: **b) Tactical** - This dimension is related to the immediate actions and procedures that will concretize the development process in the daily life of the community. The plan must consider all aspects of the reality of the community that should be the object of development work: education, health and nutrition, maternal-infant care, sanitation, production and distribution of goods and services, transport, finance, consumption, storage, trade, leisure, security, etc. It must first take into consideration the material resources and the human capacities of the community itself, and those from outside the community which would be complementary. The strategic and the tactical plans must include a clear specification of responsibilities of the various development agents, their relationship among themselves and with outside agents and institutions.

Action – this is the moment of carrying out the actions and procedures foreseen by the plan. It is a crucial dimension of the development process, the practical dimension, as opposed to the former moments, which are more, related to thinking, reflecting, theorizing. It is the test of the former moments and of how adequately they were implemented. It is the actual space for objective change, but it has an inherent power of effecting subjective change as well. In other words, by remaking the world, the human being remakes her/himself.

Evaluation/research – this is the moment of questioning the action, its achievements, its method, the involvement of its protagonists, in the light of the pre-established goals and vision. It consists of a research about the new objective and subjective situation generated since the action was undertaken. It opens the space for the new developmental cycle, involving a re-discussion of vision, goals and commitment, in the light of the accumulated experience and new insights. It

demands a new round of planning that serves to correct strategic deviations and to detail the next stage action. It also serves the purpose of rendering the protagonists more conscious of their own potentials and capacities, such as those of working and creating together, being empowered by that cooperation, managing their own development process, etc.

8 Praxis education

What type of education for community empowerment?

Education is a means for empowering persons and communities to become subjects of their own development and education. Education is a crucial dimension of community development. It must be associated with the community's development plan, and must be integral education, as well as praxis education, in order to fulfill the goal of an integral development and a praxis methodology. It must take the reality of the community, seen within its broader contexts, as the source from which to draw the elements for the educational program, schedules, rhythm, etc., as well as for the design of curricula and methods and the choice of techniques. Dialogical education demands that the students become actively involved in the educational process, desirably from the stage of research and program building onwards (see *digram 4, page 8*)

9 The need for a philosophy of conflict

In the development path, can communities avoid conflict?

Human reality is by nature diverse. Diversity has to do with conflict. We need to develop a philosophy of conflict. It includes not being surprised or afraid or reduced to perplexity and immobility as conflict arises, but rather developing the knowledge of seeking its roots and determining factors and designing the adequate method for dealing with it. Conflict arises within us or between the different aspects and dimensions that constitute the complex beings that we are. It also arises between couples, within and between families, and between the community and outside agents. Overcoming conflict in a constructive and liberating way is always a process of dialogue and an occasion for consciousness raising of both parties. The outcome is not any kind of imposed, submissive unity but rather creative unity.

How can we face risks and uncertainty and overcome contradictions?

Diagram 1, "Living on the Edge" (see page 3) This helps visualize the issue. On both sides, stand the risks. Falling down one slope means being trapped by one extreme and erring. The same is true of the other slope. The road of wisdom is the cutting edge of the blade. Walking on the cutting edge, bridging the two slopes, articulating the two poles or sides of reality, this is the challenge. This means accepting risk, uncertainty and contradiction as inevitable parts of life. Each one of us has to answer: shall we not take action because it involves risks, or shall we take action after preparing ourselves by identifying the risks and the ways of preventing ourselves from becoming their prey?



10 Conflict between the competitive environment and the cooperative approach

Is the dominant culture humanely constructive?

The competitive environment related to the capitalist order and hegemony, and characterizing the dominant type of globalisation that engulfs nations and communities worldwide, is a powerful obstacle to the development of cooperative relations within the community and between the community and outside agents and institutions. Competition is a form of relationship linked to the concept of the human being as an absolute, abstract individual, extracted from any context and affirmed as an isolated being. This is the concept that prevails in the current stage of human evolution. The same concept is extended to individual collectives such as community, firm, the social class to which one belongs, ethnic group and nation. From this perspective, the existence of other individuals, communities, firms, social classes, ethnic groups and nations is forcibly seen as a threat to be confronted by whatever means, an enemy against whom one must compete and fight so as to avoid being destroyed. Competitive relations have become so dominant in our class-divided societies that they have become a defining element of our culture.

What values underlie the construction of an alternative culture?

Cooperation, in contrast, assumes the human individual as a relational being, who can only be

understood, and can only act, in the complexity of the relationships that constitute one's being. It assumes that we are all interconnected among ourselves, in time and space, and with nature and the Cosmos (see Diagram 2, page 5). The understanding of this interconnectedness, however, is not spontaneous, particularly in the culture of extreme individualism and egocentrism that prevails in today's world. A process of individual and community education is required if a community wishes to overcome the dominant competitive culture and establish enduring ties of cooperation and solidarity. Cooperation and solidarity are values related to societies of the future – of the third millennium! A redefinition of solidarity requires a movement from the natural interconnectedness that ties us together, towards a conscious type of solidarity, that brings us together by daily renewed choice. Cooperation is based on mutual acknowledgement, respect, reciprocity, receptiveness and compassion. We call these qualities of the feminine, and they bestow the feminine with a creative and communicative power that is practically unlimited. Complementarity is another crucial value that makes cooperation a viable form of relationship. That is why we talk about the need to build new economic and social relations that balance the masculine and the feminine - a socioeconomy of "the creative feminine". In this ecosystem, exchanges no longer need to be mediated only by the interest of personal gain: what prevails is the concern with mutual gain, and also with giving.

11 Hope

A final element to be mentioned is related to hope. Many authors, in particular Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a French paleontologist, biologist and priest, and Sri Aurobindo, an Indian sage, fighter for Independence and master of yoga, converge in many aspects, including in the image of a complex spiral of evolution that brought the world of matter, to life, conscience and humanity in its present evolutionary stage. A process that has developed for almost five billion years, from the inorganic to the organic, from the more chaotic to the more organized, from the simpler to the more complex, from the more probable and certain to the more improbable and uncertain, from the more material to the more spiritual (see Diagram 3, page 7). A process that challenges the understanding of the scientific mind with enigmas that can more properly be called mysteries. Despite all obstacles and risks, nature was capable of reaching this highly complex stage which is represented by the human being, who is qualified as the top of the evolutionary wave of nature (taking into account only the beings we know about up to the present, and disregarding the myriad probabilities of other forms of intelligent life in the Cosmos, previous or simultaneous with homosapiens!).

What are the trends of evolution as it reaches the human stage?

At least four trends are visible from our standpoint. They are simultaneous and complementary trends. The first trend is towards



increasing personalization, or the development of the subjectivity and singularity of each human being individually. The second is toward increasing socialization, or the sharing of both the material resources essential for the preservation and reproduction of species life among the current and the future generations, and the inner wealth of always more fulfilled persons, through reciprocal sharing, genuinely cooperative communication and solidarity. The third, is toward increasing spiritualization, manifested by the prevalence of knowledge above physical strength in today's ecosocial system; the pointing toward

the development of the upper potentials of the human being – mind, emotion, psyche, spirit. The final trend is toward increasing "lovization" (from the French "amorisation"), the increasing development of the human being into an altruistic, loving being, or the expansion and increasing manifestation of the characteristically human senses of solidarity, cooperation, compassion and love. These, according to both authors, are trends identified in the natural process of evolution that led to the emergence of the human species. They make a point that beyond the natural there are other potential areas

of development belonging to the realm of human conscience and responsibility, such as ethics, esthetics and the conscious link with the Divine.

Looking at today's world we may find it hard to believe that these trends are ingrained in our competitive, aggressive, egotistic beings. Yet they are. And they are a basis for hope. And for always more conscious action.

Marcos Arruda December 1998



COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK (CAN) is a small not for profit organisation working for greater equality and justice in Ireland through community development. Since 1994, CAN has tried to raise debate on issues of current relevance and importance

to community groups through a series of occasional papers called CAN Comment. CAN would like to see further debate on the issues raised in this paper and welcomes your comments and views.



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