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Who Is Really Developed?

Rethinking development in a time of “ecological deficit”

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Forward

“Family, friends, community – these are the sources of the greatest love and joy we experience as humans. We visit family members, keep in touch with favourite teachers, share and exchange pleasantries with friends. We undertake difficult projects to help others, save frogs or protect a wilderness, and in the process discover extreme satisfaction. We find spiritual fulfillment in nature or by helping others. None of these pleasures requires us to consume things from the Earth, yet each is deeply fulfilling. These are complex pleasures, and they bring us much closer to real happiness than the simple ones, like a bottle of Coke or a new minivan.”

- **David Suzuki**

As I sit drinking my coffee and listening to the radio on March 31, 2005, a news story catches my attention: the World Bank board unanimously confirmed Paul Wolfowitz as 10th president of the World Bank (WB). Wait a minute, did I hear that right? Is this the Paul Wolfowitz who is currently the U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense, the one who works hand in hand with Donald Rumsfeld and the rest of the neo-con family in Washington? I listen again as more details are announced. Yes, I did hear it right, that was the name I was afraid they would say.

As I ponder this I am reminded of an interesting website that I have just come across: www.newamericancentury.org, where in the statement of principles it states:

“America has a vital role in maintaining peace and security in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. If we shirk our responsibilities, we invite challenges to our fundamental interests. The history of the 20th century should have taught us that it is important to shape circumstances before crises emerge, and to meet threats before they become dire. The history of this century should have taught us to embrace the cause of American leadership. Our aim is to remind Americans of these lessons and to draw their consequences for today. Here are four consequences:

- we need to increase defense spending significantly if we are to carry out our global responsibilities today and modernize our armed forces for the future;
- we need to strengthen our ties to democratic allies and to challenge regimes hostile to our interests and values;
- we need to promote the cause of political and economic freedom abroad;
- we need to accept responsibility for America's unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to *our* security, *our* prosperity, and *our* principles.”(emphasis added)

This statement of purpose is signed by 25 of the top neo-cons of our times, including... Paul Wolfowitz. Now how is it possible that someone who thinks that the purpose of the American government is to preserve and extend an international order

friendly to American security, American prosperity and American principles can head the most prominent development institution that exists today? The statement of principles goes on to say that:

“Such a Reaganite policy of military strength and moral clarity may not be fashionable today. But it is necessary if the United States is to build on the successes of this past century and to ensure our security and our greatness in the next.”

Is this a new stage in global “development”? How far is it going to go, and for how long, before we wake up and realize that there is little chance for positive global human and ecological development if we do not fundamentally re-think what development means in this century. With Paul Wolfowitz unanimously appointed as the new WB president then I have to think that most development as is promoted today rarely benefits anyone except policy-makers and wealthy elites.

Looking back over the last 50 years or so, what has been promoted as “development” has rapidly deteriorated our human, political and ecological well-being. Just in the past few decades we have seen environmental destruction that is far worse than that of the past few centuries. The gap between the rich and the poor has become a chasm that is likely to keep growing, while the AIDS epidemic is monstrously out of control, quickly killing off millions of people and wiping out communities all throughout the “third world”. If “development” isn’t currently an illusion to the majority of the world then after June 1, 2005, the start of Mr. Wolfowitz’s WB presidency, it most likely will be.

I. Introduction: Who and what is being developed?

“(Economic) growth is, indeed, the only engine which can pull countless millions from their present hopeless plight in the poverty trap. But it is also true that it is precisely the unthinking, limitless overconsumption by another part of the world’s population which perpetuates this entrapment and makes it even worse – structural adjustments notwithstanding. Both the rich and poor need development (humanization). For the rich, it is a question of recapturing what has been cast aside so foolishly, or carelessly lost in the intoxicated rush towards production for production’s sake and growth as if there were no tomorrow. This headlong path ultimately must lead to disaster, even for those who may have benefited originally or in the short term. For the poor, it is often a question of trying to preserve, defend and reinforce what they still have: their cultural and ethical values, their capacity to think and act autonomously, their artisan skills and oral prowess (oracy), and , above all, their ancient wisdoms and civilizations.

- Raff Carmen

Autonomous Development: Humanizing the landscape

Taking a closer look at the current state of the world I have to ask myself where is the development, or more precisely the development as Carmen and so many others envision? This question is rather cliché by this point, but that still doesn’t stop me from asking it. What are we “developing”? Human well-being? With a quarter of the world’s population, 1.3 billion people, living in severe poverty (UNDP, 1999), an estimated 799 million illiterate adults in the world (about two-thirds of whom are women (UNESCO, 2002)) and in 2003 with the number of people living with HIV at 38 million (UNAIDS, 2004), it doesn’t appear to be our human well-being. And that’s worldwide! What of the human well-being in the industrialized countries alone? The UNDP (1999) website states that “in industrial countries more than 100 million people live below the poverty line, more than 5 million people are homeless and 37 million are jobless.” In 2003 the United States alone had an official poverty rate of 12.5 percent, up from 12.1 percent the year before. The US census (2003) states that the total number of Americans living below the official poverty threshold is 35.9 million, a figure 1.3 million higher than in 2002. This is in addition to the 14.6% (around 41.2 million) who are living without healthcare (US census, 2002). It seems that “development” is lacking in industrialized societies as well.

Could it be that we are developing a more peaceful political situation? Well, of course, some would say “YES!” But despite the American-led freedom and democracy crusade, many countries have seen increased political instability which has affected the peace and security of their people. Just in the last year or so there have been massive political upheavals and violent clashes in numerous nations. The “war on terror” has left thousands of people dead and millions of others physically, psychologically and spiritually displaced. Tactics for spreading democracy and freedom – essential ingredients to becoming “developed” - seem to have caused more bloodshed and lack of security world-wide.

What about ecological well-being? One does not need to elucidate the ecological problems that “development” has caused. Anyone willing to take a closer look at - the pollution in our rivers, the depopulation of marine life in our oceans, the shortage of drinkable water, the massive destruction of our forests and rainforests and the increased warming of our earth! - can see that the health of the planet has definitely been overlooked in this development plan.

What has been considered? What about economic development? It seems that if almost all other sectors have been sidelined then economic development world-wide must have been achieved. Well as the US tops the economic development charts, ranking as one of the strongest economies to date, one would think it is a model for other countries to follow. But according to the American National Debt Clock, the outstanding public debt as of 15 May 2005 at 07:38:50 PM GMT was **\$7,761,620,448,180**. The estimated population of the United States at that time was **296,103,317**, so each citizen's share of this debt was **\$26,212.54**, and this increases every minute. Twenty minutes later, the debt was at **\$7,761,652,911,566**, that's **\$32,463,386** in 20 minutes (U.S. National Debt Clock, 2005)! It appears that even economic development in the US is suspect.

This information is not new. But frankly, it is difficult to grasp without first-hand experience. I have to ask again, where is the “development”?

There have been numerous development-related organizations established to address these issues. While some have seen results, they are often minor compared to the problems. It is not my intention to depress the reader into thinking that nothing can be done. It is very possible to create a better situation and I believe the solutions come in many forms. All of these different paths can be mutually beneficial, as long as we rethink what development is and how to approach it. Physicist, Fritjof Capra (2002:230) states that “a sustainable human community is one designed in such a manner that its ways of life, businesses, economy, physical structures, and technologies do not interfere with nature’s inherent ability to sustain life. Sustainable communities evolve their patterns of living over time in continual interaction with other living systems, both human and nonhuman.” Development must reflect this interaction.

In my opinion, the first route to achieving this is an understanding that development cannot be successful if it is not in line with ecological sustainability. When I use the term development here, I refer to Raff Carmen’s ideas presented at the beginning of this section. In my opinion in order to achieve Carmen’s vision of humanizing the landscape a radical shift from the position of ecological sustainability as a goal of development, to its use as a guiding principle must be achieved. Essentially ecological sustainability should not be seen as just a desired result of development but as essential to its underlining framework. Although I do understand that there are other important aspects of development such as housing, education, self-reliance, political stability, economic stability and health, I consider these to be intertwined with ecological sustainability.

In this paper, I will present two main arguments: First, in order for this change to take place we need an ecological assessment tool that helps clarify our global situation of development, where, in my opinion, development is most needed in industrialized countries, or to be more precise countries with the largest impact on the environment. The ecological footprint model helps

to provide this assessment. From this stance (the need for development in the West) it is significant to understand our individual impact on the environment and society thus introducing a more personal aspect to development. Assessing our individual choices and behavior can shed light on how they impact the human and natural communities within which we live. From this perspective, development can be seen as a process of achieving balance that involves all societies regardless of their economic status. When we see ourselves as vital interconnected parts of both human and ecological communities, true positive global development can start to take root.

It should be said in any paper, including this one, which attempts to provide new insights into “changing the game,” especially in western societies, that no matter how much surface level change happens, true positive development in reconnecting with human and ecological community cannot happen until a deeper cultural change takes place. Paradoxes such as ecological destruction and the increase of material consumption and overall assumptions about nature-society and the rational individual are deeply embedded in our western thought and must be considered. Perhaps the most frustrating element of these issues is the realization that one is playing with circles within circles of paradox that must ultimately be transcended. But I also understand, from personal and interpersonal experience, that this is inexhaustibly overwhelming and if we make a choice to strengthen the human and ecological community we live in, through our every day decisions, then we can work together to transcend these paradoxes. Thus, I am not proposing a revolutionary new paradigm to solve the “problems of the West”, but I do wish to provide insights into how our individual choices to participate in a “humanized landscape” play a large part in our local and global development. As follows, I will first look at what I believe is one of the most dangerous developments of our rational western economic thinking – the pursuit of unlimited growth through market and trade liberalization and the consequent dangers on life everywhere. Then I will explore how our ideas of progress and development can be turned upside down, revealing a global state of “maldevelopment (a concept I will discuss later)” when measured through the ecological footprint tool. Finally, I will conclude with some possibilities of

individual action that can help change the way we (in the “West”) view ourselves and our relationships to others – humans and nonhumans alike. Ironically this thinking is inspired by age-old practices and philosophies of the very same people that are often considered “undeveloped”. Hopefully this can provide some insight into new ways of thinking about development.

II. Insights into a Root of the Problem and Exploring Potentials for Change.

“All important insights are missed if we continue to think of development mainly in quantitative terms and in those vast abstractions - like GNP, investment, savings, etc. - which have their usefulness in the study of developed countries but have virtually no relevance to development problems as such... The common criterion of success, namely the growth of GNP, is utterly misleading and, in fact, must of necessity lead to phenomena which can only be described as neocolonialism.”

- ***E.F. Schumacher***
Small is Beautiful

2.1 The fairy-tale of unlimited growth

How did development get to where it is now? My opinion follows those thinkers that have theorized that the root of this problem is the dominant neo-liberal expansionist model of growth, wherein real “development” comes with the economic and material gain of individuals across the globe through open markets and liberal trade. With this in mind, as long as everyone has the ability to become rich then there is “development”. In William Rees’s (2002:3) discussion on the myth of “Sustainability through growth”, he notes,

“In recent years the governing elites of the market democracies have persuaded or cajoled virtually the entire world to adopt a common myth of uncommon power. All major national governments and mainstream international agencies are united in a vision of global development and poverty alleviation centered on unlimited economic expansion fuelled by open markets and more liberalized trade.”

This myth has essentially degenerated human beings into the sole role of the consumer, where our well-being depends on how well we perform as “players in the market”. Rees continues this discussion remarking that:

“At the heart of this expansionist vision (the ‘dominant economic paradigm’) is the belief that human welfare can be all but equated with ever-increasing material well-being (income growth). This contemporary myth has been the principal force giving shape and direction to political and civil life in both industrialized and so-called developing countries on every continent at least since the late 1970s. For the first time, the world seems to be converging on a

common development ideology, one that promises ever-increasing wealth for everyone, everywhere.”

The advertising agencies and marketing campaigns in the United States and other industrialized countries currently spend billions of dollars a year on leading us to believe that this is an agreeable solution to the world’s problems, consumption and economic gain for everyone. However, taking a closer look at the consequences of this mode of thought we see that the losers of the game are not only the poor nations but also the so-called developed countries.

2.1.1 Looking at “development” through the eyes of neo-liberalism

The expansionist model of growth goes hand in hand with neo-liberal economics; essentially the two are mutually dependent. According to Anup Shah (2004) of globalissues.org,

“Neoliberalism, in theory, is essentially about making trade between nations easier. It is about freer movement of goods, resources and enterprises in a bid to always find cheaper resources, to maximize profits and efficiency. To help accomplish this, neoliberalism requires the removal of various controls deemed as barriers to free trade, such as:

- Tariffs
- Regulations
- Certain standards, laws, legislation and regulatory measures
- Restrictions on capital flows and investment

The goal is to be able to allow the free market to naturally balance itself via the pressures of market demands; a key to successful market-based economy.”

Theoretically, increased trade will expand economic growth and thus promote human development, but practically it has proved disastrous to the majority of the world – human and natural alike. The most obvious impediment to this philosophy - which reflects some larger dichotomies in western thinking, namely man/nature and individual/society etc. - is that there are physical, natural limits of the earth. The global economy simply cannot continue to grow through natural resource use. But there are, of course, many other disturbing tenets. As summarized by Elizabeth Martinez and Arnaldo Garcia (1997), neoliberalism entails:

- “• The rule of the market -- freedom for capital, goods and services, where the market is self-regulating allowing the “trickle down” notion of wealth distribution. It also includes the deunionizing of labor forces and removals of any impediments to capital mobility, such as regulations. The freedom is from the state, or government.

- Reducing public expenditure for social services, such as health and education, by the government
- Deregulation, to allow market forces to act as a self-regulating mechanism
- Privatization of public enterprise (things from water to even the internet)
- Changing perceptions of public and community good to individualism and individual responsibility.”

Through the guise of achieving progress and social justice, governments and economies open up their markets and develop through free trade in goods and services, free circulation of capital and freedom of investment (George 1999), and everyone is supposed to gain. But who has the ability to freely trade goods and services and freely invest? Obviously it is the individuals, large multi-national corporations and governments with the money and power to participate in the global market. I find it important to mention that development as is promoted today has been designed to benefit these individuals and corporations. This will become more clear later as I discuss the role the Bretton Woods institutions.

2.1.2 The role of technology

Fritjof Capra (2002) takes this idea to another level and discusses the impact of technology on accelerating the delivery of the new economy. He states that current financial products now have virtual worth instead of tangible worth and therefore it is not so much the maximization of profits that becomes so influential, it is the maximization of shareholder value. This brings me to another belief that has evolved out of the current economic model: the so-called “technological fix”, the ideology that technology can save us from all the ecological, economic and human woes of the present and future. In the words of Bruce Rich (1994: 264):

“Let us examine one of the outstanding success stories in the twentieth century of how economic growth created demand and a market, which unleashed technical innovations leading to substitution of an older technology with a less materials – and capital-intensive - alternative, structurally transforming the industrialized economies of the planet. It is nothing less than a paradigm of the economic and technological trends of modern economic growth...And indeed for decades, this story appeared to be a model of a “win-win” solution to an ecological and economic problem that fostered economic growth, increased human welfare, and virtually eliminated environmental risk.”

And the story continues at an alarming rate, but as time goes on we see that success is relative. Despite the convenience of some technical advances of the

past century, many of them are coming back to bite us in the butt. Rich continues this discussion by presenting the case of Freon 12, the non-toxic, nonflammable cooling agent used in refrigerators, coolers, air-conditioners and the like. This revolutionary product was created in 1931 and it took about 55 years to identify its catastrophic ecological consequences (Rich 1994). The National Academy of Sciences concluded, “We now understand that the very quality that made them (the Freon gases) seem so safe – their stability – means they will continue to destroy ozone molecules far into the future even if we were to end their production and use at this instant (Rich 1994:265).”

Unfortunately this is only one example. There are other innovations that are having a negative effect on our lives, some, arguably, as dangerous as Freon. While some would point out the automated financial markets which are moving profits from the material, physical plane into the magical, unknown realm of shareholder value, others would discuss genetically modified food and bio-technology as poignant examples. I will discuss the latter topic further in this paper, but for now it is useful to look at the impact of global market automation. As Manuel Castells (Capra 2002), the author of a series of books on the Information Age, writes,

“The outcome of (the) process of financial globalization may be that we have created an Automaton at the core of our economies (that is) decisively conditioning our lives. Humankind’s nightmare of seeing our machines taking control of our world seems on the edge of becoming reality – not in the form of robots that eliminate jobs or government computers that police our lives, but as an electronically based system of financial transactions.”

In the industrialized countries this has caused massive downsizing and job loss in essentially all sectors. Companies must lower their costs to increase shareholder value to compete on the global market. One of the major consequences of the restricted concentration on profits and shareholder value in the new economy is corporate mergers and purchases. Capra (2002:142) discusses this further:

“In the global electronic casino, any share that can be sold for a higher profit will be sold, and this becomes the basis of the standard scenario for hostile takeovers. When a corporation wants to buy another company, all it has to do is offer a higher price for the company’s shares. Once these hostile takeovers became possible, the owners of large corporations used them to gain entry into new markets, to buy special technologies developed by small companies or simply to grow and gain corporate prestige. The small companies, on the other

hand, became afraid of being swallowed, and to protect themselves they bought still smaller ones in order to become larger and less easy to buy.”

And thus starts the endless cycle where we find ourselves today: massive corporate mergers, leaving people behind to look for new jobs in an increasingly scarce job market. The worst affected areas are the “Third World”, but even in the richer countries it is proving more and more dangerous as the loss of jobs increases along side the amount of people living under the poverty line. Meanwhile, the wealthy CEOs are unaffected, getting richer and enjoying more benefits, a reward for their play in the global capitalist game. This is important for my discussion because it illustrates the negative effect that neoliberalism and growth economics have on both “rich” and “poor” countries. The “West” is not rich. Although there is industrial development it is at the cost of ecological, economic and social well-being. Once this is recognized, we can stop seeing development as something that is done to poor people and realize that we are all victims and we are all responsible in creating meaningful development.

2.1.3 Privitization

Coming back to Martinez and Garcia’s summary of neoliberalism, other principles they discuss should be expounded upon, most notably the elimination of public expenditure for social services and privatization. Both these principles negatively affect all communities, in particular poor ones. As a rule of market-based economics, governments must make money any way they can to maximize their economic growth, so social services such as education and healthcare are often the first to be cut. In addition, the major infrastructure maintenance such as roads, water supply and environmental protection programs are also top priority for cutbacks. On the whole, this drastically reduces the safety net for the poor in all countries. In addition to cutting funding for social services, government deregulation is strongly proposed by neo-liberal policies. As it goes, governments should take a clear stance against anything that could diminish profits, such as those pesky environmental regulations and human rights issues. The market-based economy assumes that private companies will provide infrastructure and benefits but little consideration is given to the costs.

Privatization (or getting the governments to sell off state-owned enterprises, goods and services to private investors) is the crux of neo-liberalism. Although it is argued that privatization increases the efficiency of products and services, the evidence is limited. It has mainly concentrated the wealth into a few hands, creating a highly abusive system where the public pays higher prices for their needs, mostly through foreign companies who don't have to provide any public protection if something mysteriously goes astray. Here again we can see glimpses of how development has been designed to benefit industry at the expense of the public.

Who will pay for the clean up of a potential massive oil spill? Or for the healthcare of the affected population, especially if the government isn't regulating the services anymore? These questions are at the forefront of the critique of growth-based, neo-liberal economics and development. It is rather evident that these principles are not benefiting people in need. But in spite of all the consequences, how do these policies get endorsed by "developing" countries? Many people would argue that the world financial institutions are the first reply to calls of help from developing nations, coming to the rescue with plans, projects, and strategies to better the lives of the poor. Taking a closer look into these institutions reveals quite a different story.

2.2 The Bretton Woods institutions – the road to disaster

Some of the harshest and most justifiable critiques of the neo-liberal development model are the dominance of world financial institutions. The World Trade Organization (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), together known as the Bretton Woods institutions, are the biggest global promoters of free trade and market liberalization. However, they have caused significant controversy by their transformation to a sort of global "development" agency from their original intended roles of reconstructing post-war Europe (WB) and assuring the stability of the international financial system (IMF). Many would argue that their policies and intentions were benign but according to some, such as George Monbiot, these institutions were designed to promote US interests and used as

“instruments of US economic policy.” Evidently, American imperialism was a top priority. Monbiot (2005) writes:

“The World Bank and the IMF were conceived by the US economist Harry Dexter White. Appointed by the US Treasury to lead the negotiations on postwar economic reconstruction, White spent most of 1943 banging the heads of the other allied nations together. They were appalled by his proposals. He insisted that his institutions would place the burden of stabilising the world economy on the countries suffering from debt and trade deficits rather than on the creditors. He insisted that “the more money you put in, the more votes you have”. He decided, before the meeting at Bretton Woods in 1944, that “the US should have enough votes to block any decision.”

Thus, according to some it was not the transformation of these institutions that allowed the promotion and enforcement of neo-liberal thinking, they were designed from the beginning as tools to create poverty in the Third World. The free-trade rules of the WTO are equally disastrous. Promoted as an organization to regulate trade and protect the interests of poor nations, the WTO does little more than enforce the same agenda as the WB and the IMF onto poor nations. People’s health, safety and overall livelihood are jeopardized to secure the power and wealth of a few corporate elites (Capra 2002).

In regards to the WTO, in order to achieve free trade, local food production is overturned in favor of export production, leaving poor communities starving while they send their food to the already over-productive rich countries. This leaves the ironic situation of food surplus in the “North”, food scarcity in most of the “South” and a grim ecological situation. There is an example of this in just about any poorer country where the free-trade rules have caused serious damage to its natural resources.

Capra (2002: 147) writes that

“the emphasis (on increased export production *sic*) has led to the rapid depletion of the natural resources required to produce export crops in country after country – diversion of fresh water from vital rice paddies to prawn farms; a focus on water-intensive crops, such as sugar cane, that result in dried-up riverbeds; conversion of good agricultural land into cash-crop plantations; and forced migration of large numbers of farmers from their lands. All over the world there are countless examples of how economic globalization is worsening environmental destruction.”

The devastating free-trade rules of the WTO are in effect identical to the structural (re) adjustment programs (SAPs) of the IMF. The IMF’s 3-step

process of privatization, deregulation, and market-based pricing, designed to pull poor countries out of their debt, is a devious sham. This has caused massive economic and social turmoil in all areas of society. One should only recall the political, social and economic disaster these policies caused in Asia, “the Asia crisis,” and more recently in Argentina. There are countless examples of the consequences of these policies, notably in Mexico, sub-Saharan Africa, Brazil, Colombia and Haiti.¹

2.2.1 The extremes of economic ideology

An appropriate and scathing example of the economic rationalization of these institutions comes from the leaked memo from Lawrence Summers, the Vice president of the World Bank at the time of the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992. In the report there was a section called “Dirty Industries”, where Summers “ironically” proposed an interesting idea to his colleagues: “shouldn’t the World Bank be encouraging *more* migration of the dirty industries to the LDCs (lesser developed countries)?” Bruce Rich (1994:247), author of *Mortgaging the Earth* sums up Summer’s reasons quite clearly.

“First, the conventional economic measurement of the costs of pollution to public health is calculated on the basis of lost earned income caused by the premature death and illness of wage earners. Obviously, the income and GNP lost through the death of a Mexican, let alone an Ethiopian, is much lower per unit of pollution than that lost through the death of a worker in the United States or Switzerland. Thus, ‘the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to it.

Second, “environmentally uncontaminated countries were logical places to dump pollution and waste since the marginal, incremental costs of pollution in heavily polluted places is higher.” Thus in Summer’s words, ‘I’ve always thought that underpopulated countries in Africa are vastly *under* –polluted, their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low (Rich states that Summers meant to say “high”) compared to Los Angeles or Mexico City,’ the chief economist lamented. Alas, it was only the laws of physics that prevented “world welfare enhancing trade in air pollution and waste” – that is, shipping dirty air from Los Angeles to the Zaire in a classical, “welfare-enhancing” market transaction.

Finally, Summers noted, ‘the demand for a clean environment for aesthetic and health reasons is likely to have very high-income elasticity’ – that is the poor of the world will endure a filthy, toxic environment because they die sooner. Another argument for shipping pollution to the poor, Summers

¹ For an in depth illustration of these examples, please see <http://www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/wbimf/imfwbReport2001.html>

implied, is that clean air is a luxury that they can do without, a matter of 'aesthetics'." ²

This statement, coming from the top of the "leading promoter of development" (at least in large-scale project based development) throughout the world, confirms that neo-liberal or classic economics is the force behind the current mainstream development thinking and strategies. Although this was over a decade ago, we are still experiencing the consequences of poor initiation by world leaders and financial institutions to protect the ozone layer and the environment. Unfortunately with the initiation of the US Deputy of Defense, Paul Wolfowitz, the problems could very well be exacerbated. The ecological impact of these policies will be discussed in the next section. My objective here was to provide a context in which the neo-liberal economic paradigm, promoted by Bretton Woods institutions, has developed and how through their disastrous economic reforms poor countries have experienced massive social and ecological chaos.

2.3 Ecological chaos amid neo-liberalism

In their "Citizens' Guide to Trade, Environment and Sustainability," Friends of the Earth International (2005) identifies the serious social and environmental impacts of trade liberalization as the following:

- "a failure to account for environmental and social degradation;
- a potential reduction in environmental and social standards;
- specialisation which increases monocultures and decreases diversity;
- environmental damage caused by long-distance transport;
- export-oriented growth which exacerbates all of the above;
- incompatibility with some environmental protection measures;
- increasing inequality between rich and poor countries, rich and poor people and women and men, all of which also exacerbate poverty and environmental degradation."

The neo-liberal development model regards the environment as it does anything else, a market to exploit, an endless source of resources for human manipulation. As the thinking goes, the earth belongs to us and we can do what we want with it. This "Infinite Environment"³ serves the sole purpose of

² Also available at this address: <http://www.mindfully.org/WTO/Summers-Memo-World12dec91.htm>

³ See William Rees's discussion on the Expansionist Perspective of growth versus the infinite "environment": Globalization and sustainability: Conflict or Convergence? p. 4

supplying precious materials for human consumption, and when we are done using them, acts as a sink for our wastes. Taking a closer glance at the ecological consequences of this thinking shows that the promises of “ever-increasing wealth for everyone, everywhere” are not so promising, and despite the technical advances of the previous decades, blind faith in technology is not the solution. I will discuss a few of the environmental impacts of neoliberalism in the following section, starting with biotechnology. Fritjof Capra presents an excellent analysis and overview of biotechnology and its relationship with agriculture in his most recent book, *Hidden Connections*, therefore I have based much of this next section on his ideas.

2.3.1 Biotechnology and Agriculture – a descendant of the Green Revolution

In relation to the environment, the most significant example of a “technical fix” is in biotechnology and, more specifically genetic engineering. Since the outset of genetic engineering scientists have recognized the risks involved, but in the past decade or so this care has been abandoned for profit. In Capra’s (2002:161) words:

“As global capitalism began to thrive in the 1990s, its mentality of allowing money-making to supersede all other values engulfed biotechnology and seemed to sweep aside all ethical considerations. Many leading geneticists now either own biotech companies or have close ties to them. The overriding motivation for genetic engineering is not the advancement of science, the curing of disease, or the feeding of the hungry. It is the desire to secure unprecedented financial gain.”

For the purpose of this paper, the most important application of genetic engineering is in Agriculture. The fight for or against Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) has been one of the most heated debates in environmental, scientific and development circles of the past decade. The creation and promotion of GMOs by such companies as Monsanto and Du Pont have left many people wondering if genetically altered food is the answer to world hunger. Biotech campaign ads focus on the importance of science in overcoming the irregularities of nature. They say that with biotechnology plants will now be resistant to harmful insects and weeds and more fruits and vegetables will be standardized to ensure quality. Thus, as they see it, science can create better food than nature herself. Altering plants to produce better food is a simple presentation of a complex issue surrounding biotechnology.

Just like with most technologies, the problem is not necessarily the innovation itself but how it is implemented and who it is owned by. If scientists can create plants resistant to certain insects then theoretically they can also make those plants resistant to something else, say insecticide or herbicide. Thus the farmer becomes dependent on the specific product to eliminate weeds or insects.

Another glaring issue is the intellectual property rights attached to seeds, making practices like the sharing of seeds a breach of copyright laws and punishable by law. All of these practices make farmers dependent on the company selling the seeds. Therefore, once a farmer signs a contract with Monsanto, for example, he is not just purchasing seeds but entering a life contract. Capra (2002:187) notes,

“The simple truth is that most innovations in food biotechnology have been profit-driven rather than need-driven. For example, soybeans were engineered by Monsanto to be resistant specifically to the company’s herbicide Roundup so as to increase the sales of that product...Technologies like these increase farmers’ dependence on products that are patented and protected by ‘intellectual property rights,’ which make the age-old farming practices of reproducing, storing and sharing seeds illegal.”

Farmers are experiencing these new controls over their practices everywhere in the world thanks to biotechnology corporations. In the United States alone, Monsanto has filed about “90 lawsuits against American farmers in 25 states that involve 147 farmers and 39 small businesses or farm companies. They have set aside an annual budget of \$10 million dollars and a staff of 75 devoted solely to investigating and prosecuting farmers (*Monsanto Assault on U.S. Farmers Report*. Center for Food Safety, 2005).” Although it is normal for a company to reserve an annual budget for legal issues, \$10 million seems a bit excessive. If the intent was to produce good quality food to feed the hungry, then why does Monsanto have a budget this high to deal specifically with farmer lawsuits?

Monsanto and other biotech corporations are quickly extending their monopoly and swallowing up traditional farming practices world-wide. Farmers in poorer countries are often unaware that such “revolutionary food technologies” draw them into a contract where they are forced to buy products

every year. And how do the “underdeveloped” countries feel about this? In a response to a Monsanto ad, claiming that genetic engineering is vital in feeding the poor, African scientists issued a statement against the corporation’s argument.

“We do not believe that such companies or gene technologies will help our farmers to produce the food that is needed in the 21st century. On the contrary, we think it will destroy the diversity, the local knowledge and the sustainable agricultural systems that our farmers have developed for millennia and that it will thus undermine our capacity to feed ourselves (African Scientists Condemn Monsanto” The Gaia Foundation press release 3rd August 1998).”

Many development specialists have emphasized that a lack of food is not the central problem of world hunger, rather it is a political issue of unequal access to produce and distribute food. In the majority of severely malnourished societies, starvation exists next to thriving "cash crops", and in people’s fields as well as their diets, diverse, local foods have been replaced with monocultures. This is partially the result of the aggressive Green Revolution technology from which biotechnology is a descendant. Major concerns towards this technology include biodiversity loss, negative impacts on human health, and the loss of opportunities and livelihood for small farmers.

Thus technology may help solve a small part of the problem, but it is not the solution. It sounds to me like deceit and dominance were written into a plan of food imperialism, under the premise of alleviating world hunger, with the production and distribution of the food controlled by a few profit-driven mega-corporations.

2.3.2 Transportation and global warming

The debate on global warming has come to the forefront of global issues in the past 20 years. Scientists, environmentalists, concerned citizens and even politicians have been voicing their distress over the “causal relationship between global warming and human activity (Capra: 209)” and demanding action to be taken to reverse the effects. Despite some positive achievements such as the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol by most industrialized nations (excluding the United States where the greenhouse gas emissions are by far the highest), the concerned voices have been lost in the sea of neo-liberal hubbub. Unfortunately, as the refutation of global warming

by proponents of neo-liberalism intensifies so do disastrous weather patterns, including, as some would argue, the most recent hurricanes in Florida, floods in Bangladesh and the tsunamis in the South Pacific.

An important element of neoliberal economics, which severely contributes to global warming, is increased transportation. Not so much individual transportation, which as promises of “ever-increasing wealth for everyone, everywhere” will definitely augment the consumer “need” for cars, but more so the transportation of goods, especially food. In a seminar series entitled “Our Food Choices: What are the Environmental Costs?” a serious discussion on the damaging effects of transportation to the environment is presented.

“The average food molecule travels between 1500-2500 miles from where it is grown to where it is consumed. Transportation probably has the greatest detrimental effect on our environment. Governments have subsidized corporations for globalizing agriculture and for transporting food products from sources to distant markets, often halfway around the world. The net effect is that the energy used to transport food costs much more than the actual price of the food item. (“Our Food Choices: What are the Environmental Costs?, Environmental Science and Management Program Seminar Series, 2004, p. 4)”

If the ultimate goal of free markets for everyone is realized than the rise in transportation costs and in fuel usage will skyrocket, releasing an excessive amount of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere. The rise in food transport puts other stress on the environment as well. Coming back to Capra’s (2002:147) discussion on this topic, he points out that

“New highways and airports cut through primary forests; new harbors destroy wetlands and coastal habitats; and the increased volume of transport further pollutes the air and causes frequent oil and chemical spills. Studies in Germany have shown that the contribution of non local food production to global warming is between six and twelve times higher than that of local production, due to increased CO₂ emissions.”

The increased level of greenhouse gas emissions could enlarge the hole in the ozone layer to proportions that could severely alter our earth, or at least give a sizable percentage of us cancer. This would be most apparent in the urban centers of industrialized countries, but would have a growing impact on poorer countries as well. Since urban dwellers are completely dependent on

imported food for their livelihood, they would be the first to feel these negative effects. Unfortunately, this is only one fragment of the issue.

According to their discussion on Cities and the Global Commons, Hardoy, Mitlin, et al.(1992: 122) introduce some disturbing yet constructive analyses of cities and global warming.

“The main contribution of city-based production and consumption to greenhouse gases is carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel combustion by industry, power stations, motor vehicles and domestic and commercial energy use. City-based activities also contribute to emissions of other greenhouse gases – for instance of chlorofluorocarbons by certain industries or industrial products, of nitrous oxide by motor vehicle engines and of methane by city-generated solid and liquid wastes. City-based demand for fuel wood, pulp and timber also contributes to deforestation in most countries. A considerable proportion of the greenhouse gas emissions arising from rural food production (for instance methane emissions from livestock and rice cultivation) can be attributed to city-based consumption of such food.”

2.4 Ecological “deficit”

As urban centers continue to expand, the ability for local ecosystems to adapt and sustain the consumption and waste patterns of the area will be significantly jeopardized. What happens when local areas cannot provide for nearby cities, which is currently what is happening under the mainstream model of development? How is it possible to continue promoting economic development if local ecosystems cannot support themselves? In other words what is the link between local and global sustainability? Hardoy, Mitlin et al. (1992:189) offer some insight.

“At a global level, the world’s cities cannot remain prosperous if the aggregate impact of their economy’s production and their inhabitants’ consumption draws on global resources at unsustainable rates and deposits wastes in global sinks at levels which ensure rapid climatic change. Many cities in the North achieve sustainable development goals within their own region (such as high-quality living environments and protection of local ecosystems) by drawing heavily on the environmental capital of other regions or nations, and on the global sink.”

The fact that most industrialized cities and countries sustain themselves by dumping their waste into other countries is not a new phenomenon; countries have been taking part in this global ecological trade for years. However, a deteriorating environmental situation world-wide, due to profit-driven, corporate control over waste management, has exacerbated its degradation of

the environment. Considering the leaked World Bank memo discussed earlier, it is evident that this is part of a calculated economic strategy, which is devised to benefit industry in expense of the planet and people.

The increasing number of countries and cities that are playing this ecological points game complicates the ability to assess the damage of separate urban centers and their countries. How is it possible to create sustainability within a particular area if that area is dumping its waste in other places? To whom does the waste belong and how can individuals participate in achieving local and global sustainability?

III. Rethinking development

“Breaking the myth that having (money) means development, and not having means underdevelopment remains one of the greatest challenges in the closing years of the twentieth century. Universal maldevelopment affects the over – and underdeveloped alike. Development is not and never can be neutral. It is a concept and an enterprise which is couched in human values (and) those values cannot be reduced to the level of subsistence (the economics of survival and growth).”

- **Raff Carmen**

Autonomous Development: Humanizing the Landscape

In the last section I explored the environmental impacts of neoliberal development and illustrated how the mantra of “ever-increasing wealth for everyone, everywhere” is nonsense. We must take an ecological stance in defining a new development if we are to survive as a species on this planet. This not only means a significant restructuring of our own lifestyles in the “West” but also a complete transcendence of development thinking, which separates the world into “underdeveloped” and “developed” societies. This cannot happen unless we take a radical approach to curbing our deficit and surplus problem, not only in the economic realm but also more importantly in the ecological sphere. So how can we go about doing this?

3.1 The Ecological Footprint Model

“Development” is meaningless if inhabitants on our earth as well as the earth herself are increasingly suffering and dying and we’ve seen that as economic growth increases, ecological destruction increases as well. But one way that we can imagine a new kind of development is to view progress through ecological eyes instead of economic ones. I am not claiming that environmental sustainability is the only factor in increasing global well-being, but by using an ecological assessment, a fundamentally different view of our global situation emerges. In my opinion, an ecological assessment includes a human aspect since we - human and nonhuman - are all a part of this global community and all play integral parts in sustaining life.

The ecological footprint is a tool that measures how much area (land and water) a specific population requires to produce the resources it consumes and to absorb its wastes. Mathis Wackernagel and William Rees introduced this model in 1994 and they define it as

“the area of land and water ecosystems require, on a continuous basis, to produce the resources that the population consumes, and to assimilate the wastes that the population produces, wherever on Earth the relevant land/water is located (Globalization and Sustainability: Conflict or Convergence?, William Rees. Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society, 22 (4): 249-268).”

This model has had significant impact in recent years because human consumption and waste patterns have already reached unsustainable heights - to a point where the earth cannot replenish herself. If we continue on our current path in a relatively short period of time we will exhaust the earth's renewing capacity. According to the Global Footprint network (2003), “today, humanity's Ecological Footprint is over 20% larger than what the planet can regenerate. In other words, it now takes more than one year and two months for the Earth to regenerate what we use in a single year.”

By measuring our ecological footprint we can see exactly how our individual, regional and national lifestyles affect the earth's ability to regenerate. Clearly, the ecological footprint of a particular area correlates with the respective income and consumer patterns, therefore rich countries like the US and Canada use up to 10 times the amount of land and water area than do poorer countries. For example, residents of the US expend around 12 hectares of productive land and water to support their lifestyles, while China's inhabitants use less than 2 hectares (Rees 2002: 13). Currently the United States has an eco-footprint about 12 times that of poor countries and it is only going to increase in the coming years. This has limited relevance unless we recognize the amount of productive land and water the earth can provide. According to Rees (2002:13),

“There are only about nine billion hectares of productive cropland, pasture, and forest on Earth and perhaps three billion hectares of equivalent shallow ocean, for a total of 12 billion hectares. In short, there are only two hectares of productive ecosystem per capita on the entire planet. With an estimated average eco-footprint of 2.8 ha per capita, the present human population already has a total eco-footprint of almost 17 billion hectares. This means that humanity has already ‘overshot’ the long-term human carrying capacity of the

Earth by up to 40%. It also means that to bring just the present world population up to say, Canadian material standards with prevailing technology would require three additional Earth-like planets!”

To complicate this issue, Rees adds that many dense, high-income, countries use up more land/water area than their domestic regions. Thus “these countries are running large ‘ecological deficits’ with the rest of the world. Their citizens live, in part, on life support services imported from other countries and by imposing a disproportionate load on the global commons.” In essence there is an ecological free-trade war, neo-liberal style. While rich countries reap the benefits by exploiting the “ecological surpluses” of the poor countries. Alas, economic globalization at its best. In the words of Mr. Rees (2002:14):

“Eco-footprinting thus reveals the hidden (thermodynamic) role of global trade. The enormous purchasing power of the world’s richest nations enables them to finance their ecological deficits by extending their ecological footprints deeply into exporting nations and throughout the open ecosphere (Rees 1996, 2001b). The obvious problem is that not all countries can run an ecological deficit – for every deficit there must be a surplus somewhere else. Indeed, the apparent surpluses of large ‘under-populated’ countries such as Australia and Canada have already been absorbed by the eco-deficits of other countries.”

Evidently, if this “eco-trading” is happening on a global scale then it is also happening on a regional level. Because residents in urban centers need to import the majority of their food and resources, their eco-footprint is far-reaching. By recognizing the industrialized cities’ massive “ecological deficit”, it is obvious to see the impact on poorer countries.

“Considering such ecological footprints can highlight how a wealthy city can greatly exceed the ecological carrying capacity of its region, because natural resources can be imported from distant regions or from other nations. But this does not become evident in environmental deterioration in that city’s surrounds, because city-based activities rely so much on natural resources brought from other regions (whose production draws on the carrying capacity of these regions). The consideration of a city’s ecological footprint can also reveal the extent to which it draws on the carrying capacities of other nations (as in imported goods) or on the whole biosphere (as in emissions of greenhouse gases and stratospheric ozone-depleting chemicals.) (Environmental Problems in Third World Cities. Hardoy, Jorge E., Mitlin, Diana and Satterthwaite, David Earthscan Publications Limited, 1992, p. 120).”

If we understand that so-called “developed” countries have a massive ecological footprint that is engulfing the so-called underdeveloped countries,

then how do we actually consider who is developed or underdeveloped? These terms become futile when looking through an ecological perspective of development rather than an economic one. Perhaps this is why the neo-liberal development scheme takes a “blind eye” to the ecological crisis that our planet is in by only using economic growth as an example of development. The ecological footprint analysis illustrates that we are all participants in a single global system.

The astonishing fact is that ecological assessments are already implemented and have been at the forefront of numerous development agencies since the 1970's; unfortunately little has changed. Why is this? I have not the time or space in this essay to profile all these organizations, nor is it my goal. However, in my opinion, most of them that have taken ecological and human aspects into account have overlooked an important philosophical element; the fact that progress or development is a global process that requires changes in both industrialized nations as well as in the “Third World”. In my opinion, the most valuable insight provided by the Ecological Footprint assessment, is the reconceptualization of development as a global process involving all societies and not a discipline, a plan, a project or a strategy that is offered or imposed on people in an attempt to improve their lives.

3.2 Who is really developed?

Many authors and organizations have emphasized that it is essentially impossible to discuss the underdevelopment of “third world” countries until we discuss the overdevelopment of “first world” countries as well. This makes sense since the two are opposite ends of the same problem. However, prevailing development theory, analysis and projects don't seem to take this issue to heart. There is still the notion that we (the developers) must cultivate the minds of the poor, or the “underdeveloped”. But if we analyze progress or development with the ecological footprint model, terms like underdeveloped and developed become defunct.

We must consider a terminology that encompasses both underdevelopment and overdevelopment and that presents an adequate picture of our global situation. In his influential book, Autonomous Development, Raff Carmen (1996:29) writes that

“There is no such thing as ‘underdeveloped’ or ‘less developed’ if the phrases carry the unspoken message that ‘under’ and ‘less’ stand in contra-distinction to ‘developed’. If that is the message, it has to be stated categorically that there is no such thing as a ‘developed’ country and that, used in that sense, ‘underdeveloped’ is part of a semiological conspiracy of obfuscation.”

As some post-development and alternative development thinkers have suggested, a more appropriate term for these two poles would be “maldevelopment.”⁴ Maldevelopment is defined by Johan Galtung (Carmen 1996:27) as “the global process involving all countries in which some are suffering from lack of resources while others are wasting them.” What a fitting description of our global ecological situation. Clearly if we speak in terms of maldevelopment, the current crisis is presented in a more fair and balanced way, where western countries, especially the ones with the highest levels of consumption and waste, can be held responsible to sustainable development goals as well.

3.3 Making development personal

Human-centered or sustainable development requires individual and communal life-choices. Each one of us with the ability to make our own choices in life plays a vital role in global development. By this, I mean, our individual actions and life-choices have the power to transform the collective development process. In particular, as individuals we have the choice to participate in what Carmen (1996) calls a “humanized landscape”.

It is becoming increasingly recognized that our human ecology and community is intricately linked and woven into a larger community of ecologies. Thus, the way we choose to live our life affects our human community as well as our ecosystem. Indigenous cultures and communities in

⁴ As mentioned in Raff Carmen’s chapter endnotes: “René Dumont uses the term ‘misdevelopment’. One of the earliest documents mentioning ‘maldevelopment’ is L. J. Lebrét, 1964. The term is taken up by the 1975 Dag Hammarskjöld Report on Development and International Cooperation.”

varying parts of the world have lived and practiced an inclusiveness in the web of life. This is not in any way a new philosophy.

Thus, I am not promoting some radically new development paradigm that's going to save the world, I'm only offering suggestions for those readers that are interested in applying an individual aspect to development.

3.3.1 A personal note on individual action

I decided to write on the idea of individual action for two main reasons. First, as a beginning student of anthropology I was exposed to a new body of information and knowledge about our world. Like many others who grew up in a middle-class suburb in North America, watching T.V. and eating frozen vegetables, I had to go through a massive process of "re-education," especially concerning my relationship to the environment. This proved to be a huge commitment, because once I started reading about one issue, it led me down a myriad of endless paths and circles into other issues. For about two years I was hopelessly lost in the literature and paradoxes of our society and felt increasingly helpless to do anything about it. There were always problems and then solutions and then critiques on the solutions and it quickly spun out of my control. And while I recognized that theory provides useful analyses of these problems, I got so fed up with the circles that I decided to remove myself from them as much as possible. I started to re-evaluate my lifestyle choices; where I was shopping, how I was eating etc., and this proved to be very helpful for me because I felt I was able to be a part of the solution instead of the problems.

This leads me to my second reason, the fact that I have found it fairly difficult to convince or educate friends and family about the power of individual action. After seemingly endless explanations about why I eat organic food, shop 2nd hand, carry a reusable bag and support local businesses, and about the importance of living a more environmentally friendly lifestyle, I recognized that I was getting brushed aside. According to many of them I was just going through one of those "she thinks she can save the world" phases. My good-intentions started to sound like a broken record

and I realized that my comments more resembled preaching to them than education. Frankly, this annoyed me, especially from friends and family who like my parents spent the majority of their younger years living in the “free love”, “tree-hugging” hippie age –the time of the greatest civil rights movement in the US. I guess I understood that they “grew up,” got jobs and houses and started to “face the reality of life,” but since when did this stop anyone from actualizing their individual responsibility? In the meantime, I kept living my life according to my own principles, and after some time I started to see some change in my friend’s and family’s life-choices. The change was small but it was still something. And I wondered, was it so difficult for them to make such a change. The answer was, of course, “No!”

So then why was it so difficult to motivate them? I eventually realized two important reasons, on which I will base this conclusion. The first being that ecological destruction was less apparent to them than the deterioration of social cohesion and the degeneration of human values. Second was the fact that the reluctance to change was not so much an unwillingness or laziness, but more of a feeling of helplessness and of waiting for the change to come from outside! This reason, especially made sense to me and I noticed its parallel to aspects of development, notably the rejection of western-based notions and strategies of development by communities in the South and an overwhelming success in creating development from within. In this next section I would like to explore a couple examples of communities who took development into their own hands.

3.3.2 Changing directions - another development

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement (Sri Lanka)

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka was created in 1958 by a young teacher and is probably one of the most well known examples of alternative development ideas put into practice. Based on Buddhist principles (including goodness, sympathy, and tranquility) and Gandhian values (truthfulness, nonviolence, and self-sacrifice), SSM has proven to be an enormous success of true development. Shramadana is defined on their

website ⁵ as “sharing work, knowledge, talents, and time.” It goes on to say that “The aim of the Movement is to use shared work, voluntary giving and sharing of resources to achieve the personal and social awakening of everyone ~ from the individual, to the village, and continuing up to the international level.” Awakening, according to the Shramadana philosophy, is the multi-faceted development of human potential, including all aspects vital to humanity such as the political, cultural, economic, social, spiritual and human. It does not favor one aspect over the other because it views them all as playing an integral role in actualizing human potential. The movement is based on a fulfillment of 10 principles, what they consider as basic needs, which are essential to achieving a Buddhist sense of personal and collective awakening.

“These basic needs are:

- A clean and beautiful environment
- Adequate provision of clean drinking water
- Minimal supplies of clothing
- Adequate and balanced nutrition
- Simple housing
- Basic health care
- Basic communication facilities
- A minimal supply of energy
- Holistic education
- Satisfaction of intellectual and cultural needs

This list illustrates Sarvodaya’s comprehensive approach to social development. It highlights not only economic and social needs, but also spiritual, moral, and cultural requirements such as cultural programs and village libraries (Sarvodaya, 2005).

This movement is significant and inspiring because its goals are based in an ideology that is understood in its own cultural context. Sri Lanka is a predominantly Buddhist society and SSM realized that to achieve a successful development the religious and cultural framework of their society must be taken into account. However, these principles are not limited to a Buddhist sense of human potential. Through a 5-stage village evolution, SSM participants carry out works and activities in areas such as “capacity building in the community, early childhood development, community health, environment and biodiversity, communication development, development of integrated education, and peace work and youth work.” The projects they

⁵ <http://www.sarvodaya.org/about/>

implement and the activities they develop are an inspiration to non-Buddhist societies as well. And their success is quite remarkable, illustrated by a “network covering 15,000 villages, 345 divisional units, 34 district offices, 10 specialist Development Education Institutes; over 100,000 youth mobilized for peace building under Shantisena; the country’s largest micro-credit organization with a cumulative loan portfolio of over LKR one billion (Sarvodaya Economic Enterprise Development Services, or SEEDS); a major welfare service organization serving over 1000 orphaned and destitute children, underage mothers, and elders (Sarvodaya Suwa Seta); and 4,335 pre-schools serving over 98,000 children; among others (Sarvodaya, 2005).” The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement is an impressive example of alternative development with a philosophy built from within and upon the needs of the people and community.

The Naam Movement in Burkina Faso

The Fédération National des Groupement Naam (FNGN), or better known as the NAAM Movement, is an important farmer organization in Burkina Faso. It was created in 1967 by Bernard Ledea Ouedraogo in an attempt to counter mainstream development, which operated with a very ‘top down’ approach and was highly politicized.

After working as a trainer of rural extension workers in Burkina Faso, Ouedraogo became increasingly aware of and alarmed by the attitudes and exploitation of the farmers towards the extension workers. The farmers would take advantage of assistance and materials provided by the workers, seeing them solely as extensions of the state to be cheated. Instead of turning his back on the extension workers or the village farmers, Ouedraogo recognized that there was no motivation behind this assistance, no binding philosophy or idea that empowered the farmers to think otherwise. So he explored village social organizations in his own culture and found a highly cooperative traditional Mossi organization that resembled these village groups. From there he decided to work within the NAAM structure and build a truly unique development approach based in Mossi culture. According to Pierre Pradervand (1989:22):

“The NAAMs represent a triumph of the idea of ‘developing without harming’ (an expression valued much by Ouedraogo). The Naam is a form of development adapted to local needs, created by the people themselves, which instead of destroying traditional structures from the outside, slowly, like leaven, transforms them from the inside.

Many development specialists feel that the lack of authentic popular participation has been the main failure of development in the past thirty years. “Development “ has been something that has been done for people, to people, sometimes despite them and even against their will, but rarely with them. The founder of the Naam movement has shown that one can create a form of development, “of the people, by the people and for the people” – hence his striking formula: “letting oneself be mastered by the grass-roots.” The experience also shows that development is as much a way of traveling as a precise destination, and that the destination will be determined to a great extent by the way one travels.”

Pradervand’s adventure through Africa, documenting African grassroots movements, illustrates numerous examples of “development from within.” People and communities all across the continent were, and continue to be, uniting against top-down, elitist development schemes brought in from the “North”. His journey tells a very different story of development within Africa, one that reveals the power of community action in achieving real success based around people, not developers or governments.

These projects are truly inspiring illustrations of what can be accomplished by combining creativity, community and cooperation; unfortunately they are few and far between. Most development projects are still planned and implemented top to bottom. Whether or not they are using local actors and experts is really beside the point, because in the end, final decisions are determined in the head offices. In my opinion, the future of development lies in a bottom-up, grass-roots approach where the people make decisions for themselves and receive help when they ask for it.

Such examples are important for my discussion because they illustrate successful cases of development from a community-based effort. I think it is also important to foster an understanding of “development from within,” on an individual level as well as a communal one. Whether we live in a communal society or an individual society, there are people working toward the same goal of what Carmen calls “humanizing the landscape.” The landscape as Carmen discusses is the overall fabric of human life. It is my argument, along

with others, that development is needed everywhere, but I would like to focus on examples which I have experienced first hand. As I discuss what development would look like in the West, I am aware that the “West” is a fictional term that is made up of different cultures, knowledge, life-styles, experiences and worldviews; it is not a geographical area. That said, I will talk about the West as I know it, which is North America, more specifically the United States and in particular its urban/suburban areas. I think this group of people is significant to focus on because their lifestyles are looked at and promoted as the goal of economic growth for much of the rest of the world.

3.3.3 Sustainable communities and individual choice.

Building and fostering sustainable communities - human and nonhuman alike - is at the forefront of a new kind of development. Concerned people in the West could benefit greatly from practical advice into how to work towards a sustainable community.

In my opinion, participation in a community means to take “community” out of the abstract level and move it into the physical plane, and this starts with the individual choice to participate in one. Individual choice is not the individualism in the sense as we know it now, it is the personal choice to cultivate human and ecological well-being. For the circles of activists, academics, environmentalists and socially aware citizens, these choices are relatively evident because they live in an environment that fosters awareness and action. For example I know many people working at environmental and social NGOs who ride a bike to work, eat organic and local foods and generally live in an ecologically conscious way; for them the importance of individual action is usually more apparent. But for people like many of my family and friends, who are concerned citizens but living in a maze of paradoxes, the power of individual action may not be so apparent. Thus insights into understanding how their personal choice, whether it is as consumer, worker or just a citizen can either help or hinder the building of sustainable human and nonhuman communities is crucial.

First and foremost, the myth that we are autonomous individuals who are completely separate from nature needs to be debunked. We are part of a living ecosystem in which a human, just as much as a flower or a tree, plays a vital role. This is essential in understanding how ecological destruction and the deterioration of community and human values are two links on the same chain. Or put another way, ecological sustainability is essential in the process of humanizing the landscape. When we think of ourselves as living parts of our ecosystem it is impossible for us to separate ourselves from nature. As we recognize our connection to our landscape, the ability to sustain this connection with individual choices, such as buying food from local farmers and supporting local businesses instead of face-less corporations, becomes much more meaningful.

3.3.4 The deterioration of the community

To enter into a detailed discussion about the theories of community - especially its changing role in a globalized society - would be out of the scope of this paper, so I would like to focus on the definition of a sustainable community defined by Fritjof Capra (2002:215):

“A sustainable human community interacts with other living systems – human and nonhuman – in ways that enable those systems to live and develop according to their nature. In the human realm sustainability is fully consistent with the respect of cultural integrity, cultural diversity, and the basic right of communities to self-determination and self-organization.”

Therefore, in order for a community to survive it needs human interaction as well as interaction with the environment. I think for this to happen both the “environment” and “community” need to move out of a conceptual plane and into our physical reality. I think that when many people hear the word environment, they think of it as an intangible thing, rather than the trees, plants, or animals that surround them. Part of this is, of course, the fact that we have displaced the natural world to build massive roads, buildings, strip malls and anything that constructs our suburbs. So nature has been domesticated to fit into our constructed space instead of the other way around. Most of our everyday interaction with the environment is through beautifying or domesticating: mowing the lawn, trimming the bushes, pruning the trees, weeding, etc., not through participation in our local ecosystems.

Along similar lines, most of our human interaction – outside of our personal networks of family and friends – is impersonal and often through economic structures such as the service sector. One could say that they interact everyday through checkout clerks at grocery stores, attendants at gas stations, servers at restaurants and so forth, but this is rarely meaningful human interaction, it is more often an economic transaction between people. Even our social security and general welfare is based on buying insurance, purchasing protection instead of depending on people for help. Charles Eisenstein (2005) discusses this topic further.

“Many people today seek “financial security,” as though, with sufficient money, we could be independent of all other people. Indeed it is true that with enough money, you can be independent of any specific human being—after all, you can always “pay someone else to do it.” This is a false security though, because it merely substitutes dependence on people you know with dependence on anonymous strangers. True and lasting health cannot come from such “independence,” which is really the attempted separation of oneself from the world. Health, which means wholeness, comes instead from stronger connections with others, not weaker ones, from interdependence, not independence. Like an ecosystem where each species relies on many others, security comes from strong mutual ties to other people.”

The breakdown of these ties, both human and nonhuman, has resulted in a de-humanized and de-naturalized landscape, where we depend more on commercial centers for our livelihood than on people. Communities are, of course, not only built on ecological principles. There are examples that are ideologically based, such as religious groups or political parties, but I think it is important to encourage communities built upon diversity and acceptance rather than similarity and restriction. As Geoff Mulgan explains, “a community may refer to neighbourhoods or workplaces, but to be meaningful it must imply membership in a human-scale collective: a scale at which it is possible to encounter people face to face...(and) to nurture human-scale structures within which people can feel at home. (A Sense of Community, Geoff Mulgan quoted in *Towards Post-development: searching for signposts, a new language and new paradigms*, Majid Rahnema Zed Books: 1997).”

From my experience, many people are becoming more aware of the breakdown of their community fabric, but are at a loss when searching for the

causes or solutions and end up reluctantly accepting it. The more we make choices built on human interaction the more we can understand the causes and aid in solutions, particularly, developing a sustainable community and preserving a healthy ecological system. Ultimately the success of a sustainable community depends on broader technical and institutional change, such as the design of businesses, physical structures and technologies that sustain human and ecological life. But this success is initially dependent on our choice to make it happen. Thus there are many practical actions we can take in our daily lives that promote ecological and human sustainability.

3.3.5 Giving food a face

If you ask the average grocery store clerk where the food they sell originates, chances are they would have no clue. On the same note, if you ask the average child in suburban America where food comes from, they will most likely say “the grocery store”. In general, our knowledge about our food is less than sufficient. An average customer is probably unaware that most of the fruit and vegetables that they purchase at large grocery stores are grown half way around the world. Not only grown, but shipped across the world as well, so in order for them to end up ripe in our stores they must be picked days before they are ready. In addition to this, we have no idea of the environmental or social issues under which that food is grown and/or transported. Within the liberal market economy, food has become nothing more than a commodity. The only point of interest between producer and consumer is the price. In other words the quality of the food that enters into our bodies is overlooked in a search for the best deal. Therefore, cheap producers, who cheat laws and cut corners take over the ones who spend the money to insure quality food.

It is impossible to know the background of our food before it reaches the shelves in our large supermarket chains, but buying locally grown food, where we can talk with the farmers about their practices becomes a way to make eating more human-centered. Also, it is an important way of knowing if our food is natural or genetically modified. Since there are no labeling laws in the US for GM crops, consumers have no way of knowing what they are eating.

Campaigns supporting local farmers and farmer's markets have increased considerably over the last few years because more and more people are realizing how their food choices affect their community; not only our human community but also our ecological community. As discussed earlier in the paper, transportation of food is one of the leading contributors to the increase in global warming and the destruction of local habitats. As the distance of food transport increases severely, so will the highways, freeways and roads that cut through our homes and destroy our community fabric. Thus we can see how a single choice can affect both our ecological and community stability. The main objection to buying locally grown food is the cost. The price of locally grown food is on average 10% more than commercial products but Gary Valen of the Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society, describes a few reasons why this extra percent might be worth paying.

*Quality is improved because locally produced food is fresh and does not have to survive a long transportation system or be processed for a long shelf life.

*Food buyers and farmers share common concerns about their home community and can form partnerships about how to protect the well-being of people and farm animals and how to sustain their soils, waterways, and air so that future generations will have access to a healthy livelihoods including good food.

*Since fossil fuels are getting more expensive and scarce and other factors may limit food transportation, it is a good idea for communities to protect their food security by being able to produce at least 25% of their own food.

*It makes good economic sense to keep some of the money spent on food in the community where it is produced.

*Local food projects supports and encourages more small-scale and community-based family farmers who contribute to the economic and social well-being of their community (Local Trade Organizations. Valen, 2005.)”

Our food is the most direct link to our ecosystem. Getting to know who grows it is an essential part of linking ourselves back into our natural world. Considering the social benefits of face-to-face interaction with the community and the environmental advantages of eating food close to home, it becomes clear that simple choices in our eating habits have the power to transform our local landscape.

3.3.6 The plea of local businesses

In addition to supporting local farmers, there are similar advantages to supporting local business. Money that circulates through local communities is

vital to their livelihoods. By supporting local business and people, both community and economic strength is sustained.

One of the biggest consequences of the decrease in local business is the homogenization and standardization of towns across the country. This is not only detrimental on an aesthetic level – a decrease in diversity – but also on a human level. Almost all the local shops are uprooted, replaced by mono-stores with cheaper prices and more uniformity, which means less human interaction between consumer and producer. These stores require new roads and infrastructure, which puts a lot of extra pressure on the local ecosystem. More roads equates to more cars, which equates to less space for pedestrians and bikers.

This problem is partly due to the fact that city planners and developers have a lot of power in city councils and convince local officials that the construction of these mega-stores will bring money and jobs into their community. Little is mentioned, however, about the low-paying nature of the jobs and that the stores are often famously opposed to the unionization of their employees. Moreover, the adverse effects on the local environment, like clear-cutting land to make way for the massive retail space, are often not discussed. Stores like Walmart, Target, Meijers, Sam's Club, Cosco etc. offer lower prices, more brand names and convenience, but the more people shop at these stores the more they are identifying with corporate profits rather than locally produced goods.

Perhaps the biggest problem with these stores is that a portion of the dollar spent is sucked out of the community in the form of corporate profit. By supporting local business instead, wealth, jobs and resources are recycled within a local system. Furthermore, by frequenting local businesses, one is more likely to be treated as a loyal customer and less like a face-less consumer. Supporting local businesses is one significant way to feel respected and to be treated like a human, while playing an important role in protecting the environment, both social and ecological. As discussed earlier in this paper, local goods require less transportation and thus have a lesser impact on the

environment. While the product difference might not be obvious at first, when one considers the advantages to supporting local business the impact of this simple choice becomes more clear. Considering where and from whom we shop is a simple but powerful way in which we can foster a healthy environment and community through simple everyday actions.

3.3.7 Our actions, their consequences

Returning to the ecological footprint model discussed earlier, one can recognize how their choices and behavior affect their surroundings. The model can also be used to assess an individual's impact on the environment. Although the results are shocking to many, this can provide a valuable insight into the effects of our life-styles. Personally, I found that taking the quiz at www.myfootprint.org, opened up my eyes to understanding the role I play in my environment and my community and brought a new meaning to the slogan "think globally, act locally."

The examples provided above require a bit of an adjustment to one's lifestyle. Simply finding local farmers and businesses can prove difficult for some, especially those who live in suburbs over-run by mega stores and strip malls. But resources do exist. The first place to look is probably the local yellow pages but there are many organizations who provide lists of local farmers, farmers markets and local businesses across the US, Canada and other places. Other groups provide lists of companies who have passed the test in the ecological sustainability of their products. But perhaps the simplest way is just to ask around. Talk to a neighbor or an elder who has lived in the community for a long time or visit community spaces, such as the library. There are usually flyers and announcements in many public places that announce local events, usually involving local businesses. These are just a few examples of how to easily support our local communities, which do not require a major restructuring of our lifestyle, just of our thinking.

Other possibilities that are often taken for granted are walking and biking, instead of driving everywhere. Moving at a slower pace where we have the chance to interact with people cannot only reduce our daily stress but also

provide a new chance to interact with our local surroundings. Walking also provides a huge assortment of smells, sounds and sights, which would be missed by driving by them in a car. And recognizing these helps to familiarize us with the natural landscape. Become aware of our natural surroundings. Learn the names of the trees, flowers and plants that are indigenous to our community (if there are still some remaining) and start to recognize them. Point them out to others and share your knowledge about them. These are simple actions but they all help to build social cohesion and nurture our connection to others.

We all have a choice to participate in a healthy community and environment, and to work towards sustaining it. This must start with respect and wisdom on a personal level, but can eventually move outward, expanding our concept of community to encompass the entire world both human and nonhuman alike. A sustainable community entails major redesign and rethinking of our institutions, particularly our global economic system, but the fundamentals to this change are located inside each one of us. Only when we recognize this can we move beyond our current economic paradigms and live life in a respectful and wise manner, where each one of us plays a vital role in global development. In the brilliant words of Majid Rahnema (1997:401),

“Fundamentalist” populist movements, through which certain interpretation of religion and spirituality has enabled a new breed of unscrupulous politicians and professional “revolutionaries” to achieve their own ends, have received wide attention. But less has been learned about the smaller groups of people, or even individuals, who, without any publicity, perceive the meaning of their lives as a dedicated search for the Truth, a search which starts from the deeper layers of their own inner world and manifests itself outwardly in new forms of praxis and co-action, and in friendship and solidarity with others engaged in the same search.

This way of being has firm roots in the traditions of resistance by the weak. In these traditions, ‘right action’ involving others starts always as a personal work on oneself. It is the fruit of an almost divine kind of exercise, which usually takes place in the solitude of thought and creation. A truth reached in the meditative world of a free searcher can bring him or her to experience the often painful and unpopular act of providing dis-sensus. Yet, if such dissent is not an end in itself, never inspired by an egocentric attitude, it is a cathartic means to bring about new and more serious possibilities of consensus.”

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