

The end of the era of development and the task of regeneration

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Under the spell of development, our natural world and human communities face disfigurement, collapse and extinction. The governments of the world are about to convene in Rio de Janeiro to seek a way out of this predicament. This event could represent an opportunity for mankind and the earth if the assembly officially abandons some of the prejudices which have shaped the era of development over half a century. But the event will turn into a threat if states of the world continue their march into one global economic society and have limited themselves to giving development a coat of green paint.

The challenge today is neither crisis-management nor reform, neither restoration of damaged nature and cultures nor simple revivalism. We need a mutation which entails a deep awakening through cultural disarmament and an end to the era of development itself. Furthermore we need to commit ourselves to take concrete steps toward regeneration of nature and cultures. Development has become counter-effective and reveals itself, now, as a blunder of planetary proportions. Development promised to reduce the gap between North and South, but in fact that gap has never been wider and deeper. Development offered an utopian vision of the good-life for all countries, but we know that our finite earth will not sustain that. Finally, development presents itself as the advance of civilization, but in practice endangers most of the cultures by wiping out the many diverse ways of being human, replacing them with the establishment of one single civilization for the planet.

Therefore we call for an end to the era of development and invite the peoples of the world to begin the task of reconstructing, re-harmonizing, re-generating, after the storm has passed. This may mean creating communities that will imaginatively combine the rubble of modernity with the remnants of traditions. We believe that the time has come for acknowledging the radical pluralism of our world. We need to engage in a total cultural regeneration process with the assumption that there can be no universal criteria by which this can be done.

However there are four temptations which may lead us off the path to a truly just society in harmony with the earth and with the cultural diversity of our world. The first temptation is diplomatic regression. As happened during the UNCED preparatory process and the Rio Earth summit, the diplomats were inclined to replay the power games of the 1970's between North and South; they welcomed environmental issues as new bargaining chips in the struggle of the global middle class over power and resources. The second temptation is the technocratic hybris of ecocracy: a new generation of experts sets out to optimize (not maximize) the exploitation and pollution of nature; they will survey, stretch and manage the bio-physical limits to growth and keep the planetary resource budget under control with the help of satellites and computer models. This temptation could also be called biological messianism. Some agencies and northern NGO's seek to cast public affairs in bio language; they prefer talking about populations instead of

peoples, about species instead of living persons and communities, about carrying capacity instead of well-being, about survival instead of quality of life, and about evolution instead history, a vocabulary which does not allow us to speak such things as power, culture or virtue. The third temptation is inertia, related to complacency of the have's, which under the disguise of patience and realism wants to preserve, for them, the advantageous status quo. They do not dare to undertake radical measures, because, they say, the inroads of development are too far advanced and humanity cannot go back. The fourth temptation is the reduction of the regenerating process to its western interpretation, thus maintaining the primordial myth of the west as the universal referent.

Instead, we believe that nature is not a commodity for consumption nor are societies exclusive gatherings of de-natured human beings. We plead for an economic disarmament and for post economic societies which overcome the pan-economic totalitarianism and graciously get by with a steady or shrinking volume of production. Such societies will gradually marginalize the principle of accumulation and begin to invent forms of good livelihood which do not require permanent growth. Such societies will leave behind the pauperizing myth of progress and affluence, and re-appropriate virtues of communal wealth and convivial poverty, that is, a mode of life based on the ethics of simplicity, frugality, conviviality and solidarity. In brief, we are ready to live in societies which remain below their capacity of producing goods, speed, services, in order to cultivate the arts of living and to remain in friendship and in kinship with nature. Further, we declare ourselves ready for cultural disarmament of our predominant culture of western origin so as to make room also for other cultures to flourish on their assumptions.

By way of examples, we can identify with the following goals as necessary first steps:

1. Progressively cancelling all debts incurred by countries of the South for development projects at the rate of 20% per annum;
2. Reducing the per-capita GNP in Northern countries to the 1960 level;
3. Stopping by adequate means the unlimited use of oil;
4. Reducing the amount of electricity used, at a rate that will allow all nuclear power plants to be shut down by the end of the decade;
5. Deconstructing the globalized model of education that is geared to sustaining Nation States and their development; regenerating systems of education of local communities in tune with their cultural and natural environment, thus sustaining the good livelihood of the communities;
6. Undertaking a massive campaign of re-education programs for the professional elites in the countries of the North and the South on the perversity of development. This will mainly consist in educating about: the pauperizing myth of development and about the process of impoverishment of the majority of the world; about the sacrificing of nature's regenerative energy at the altar of the growth economy; and finally about the servitude of the professionals themselves to the GNP of the Nation states which makes them "useless" for the task of creative regeneration of local communities;
7. Transforming all aid and development agencies into decentralized local cooperatives for the acknowledgement and regeneration of knowledge, ways of life and know-how's of the diverse cultures/peoples of the world; and for the pursuit of an intercultural dialogue on post-development, grass-roots movements among the peoples of the North and the South. redirect all funds to this purpose.

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