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Sustainable Development and Democracy in the Megacities

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This chapter looks at sustainable development in the megacities of the South, focusing on Lima, the capital of Peru. Although the problems of Southern megacities are back on national and international agendas, the recent attention has been triggered by environmental concerns; strategies are not aimed at addressing poverty or the lack of basic services. Although environmental sustainability and economic development are not necessarily incompatible, sustainable development must be redefined from a Southern perspective. This chapter focuses on community-based organizations, which may offer some means of achieving a form of development that integrates social and political concerns and is, therefore, sustainable. The fragmentation of issues and groups in urban environments is identified as a main threat to genuine development. The chapter concludes that public forums are a way of combating fragmentation, and achieving a decentralized approach to development and democracy in megacities, provided these constitute an informed and educational working environment.

The first part of the chapter reflects on the theoretical framework of this topic. The megacities in the South are seen as a thorn in the side of strategies for democracy and sustainable human development. Megacities do indeed provide the worst examples of unsustainable, inhumane development. In order to be sustainable,

urban development processes must be based on an integral approach to development. That is to say, the approaches to development must comprise all the dimensions that the people themselves recognize as essential to their well-being, both as individuals and as a community. Sustainable human development should be a process in which ethical principles and cultural values guide decisions, and thinking about it must not become trapped in the dominant, neoliberal development model. Working from an integral perspective with clear ethical principles and cultural values, it is possible to construct criteria for reviewing the different policies proposed by national and international agencies, and to evaluate the extent to which they support or hinder sustainable development. This theoretical reflection is concluded with a brief discussion of the central role to be played by democratic politics in processes of sustainable development.

The second part of the chapter suggests that a major obstacle to human sustainable development is *fragmentation*: the separation of people's aspirations, capacities, needs and desires into separate and unrelated issues. Our concern is to find ways to reintegrate the actors and the issues, bringing people, especially from low-income neighbourhoods, but also from the state and private sector organizations, together to discuss these issues. This is primarily a political task, one which involves building democratic political systems and scenarios that can lead to integral, sustainable development. Moreover, a democratic approach to development in the megacities must be decentralized, and occur in the areas where most of the urban poor actually live. The chapter concludes by reviewing some initiatives in Lima that might inform strategies to promote and sustain processes of democratization and development.

Sustainability: For Whom and How?

The urban poor

In 1987 the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development published *Our Common Future*, in which sustainable development was defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987). When this definition, couched in the terms of countries that have achieved modern social, political and economic development, is applied to the South, rather than generating meaningful dimensions of an integrated agenda, it seems out of context. The mechanisms that

should be used to “limit” development, which the term “sustainable” seems to imply, are not clear, but the steps suggested to limit resource use place the burden of responsibility on the South. This is an ethical and political problem that remains unanswered.

At the 1992 Earth Summit, 179 countries from the North and South, alarmed by the possibility that the present model of development was unsustainable, made a commitment to implement Agenda 21. Since then, 1,300 local authorities have responded by designing their own action plans for sustainable development (ICLEI 1996). For the urban poor in Southern megacities, however, “sustainability” is in many ways an alien concept. It is not easy to induce communities who are struggling to satisfy basic material needs essential to their own personal and social development to, for example, preserve rainforests or water supplies.

Environmental sustainability is one of the many issues that have originated in the North and migrated to the South. As with the others, it has been pushed up the agenda by the dictates of free-market capitalist development in the North. Without ruling out the importance of any of these issues (which include civic and employment rights, gender rights and the rights of the child), we must ask ourselves if they are merely part of an agenda being imposed on the South. It was not so long ago that the countries in the South were encouraged to move ahead on the development road the North had followed; today, this is considered inadvisable. Before blindly following the example of the North, we must make sure that sustainability is an essential component of our development process.

Sustainability can become a limiting norm and not a qualitative indicator of development, concerned, for example, more with conserving resources than with improving the quality of life, social justice and equality (Marcuse 1998). It is easy to understand that “conservation” has different meanings and different consequences when used by an affluent society as opposed to societies whose basic needs are still unsatisfied.

Could the North have achieved its own capitalist economic development if, from the outset, it had been obliged to limit use of natural resources, avoid pollution, pay just wages, provide safe and healthy working conditions, respect the rights of women and children and avoid exploiting workers from particular ethnic groups? Countries in the South, trying to move ahead on the road to development, are being asked to carry the additional burden of these major issues. This puts the Southern countries in a bind: either they must accept underdevelopment and deprive themselves of the goods

that other societies enjoy in excess, or they can continue developing as the North did—and risk contributing to the destruction of the planet. Obviously a third option must be found.

Terms of reference: A new and ethical look at development

It is now clear that the neoliberal model of economic development is creating poverty, as well as proving incapable of curbing the overexploitation of the planet and its resources. According to the *Human Development Report* (UNDP 1996), 89 countries are worse off economically today than they were a decade earlier. Therefore, poverty relief and redistribution methods are now being tacked on to the neoliberal model of global development.¹

Grassroots organizations, in particular, have often been successful in reducing the negative effects of neoliberal development and structural adjustment programmes (Goulet 1997). But, as David Morris (1996) has stated, it is not enough “to add a dollop of humanitarianism to orthodox development policies already in existence, as seems to be what is happening currently among official donors”. “Strategic adjustment with a human face” implies that rapid gross national product (GNP) growth per capita remains the basic objective, and social improvement is a by-product. If development is to enhance quality of life, it must be designed in such a way that humanitarian measures are interacting with, and even driving, the strategy for economic growth. It is not enough to add the adjective “sustainable” to what remains a market-driven model.

Ethics and development

Ethics and development is not a new topic. The discussion is at least as old as Weber, who was writing in the late 1950s, and Denis Goulet (1995) has written more recently in this field. In South America, Max-Neef was one of the most important intellectuals to make clear that economic development was not the same as human development, that *having* material goods was not the same as *being* a full human

¹ It might even be argued that the nation-state, weakened by transnational economics and globalization, has only survived because of its ability to interact with (or manipulate) the poor populations of the South, thanks to its role in administering development programmes. The “Washington consensus”, which the head of the Inter-American Development Bank organized a forum to study in 1996, recognized that development measures had often been applied as if following a neoliberal bible. This forum underscored the importance of the state in providing technological support, credit, information and, above all, redistribution.

being. “Development refers to people not to objects . . . the best development process will be that which raises the quality of life of the population” (Max-Neef et al. 1986:25, author’s translation).

Amartya Sen also put the development of human capacities at the centre of development strategies (Sen 1983). “If in the last analysis, we consider development as the expansion of the capacities of the population to achieve activities freely chosen and valued, then it would be entirely inappropriate to consider human beings as ‘instruments’ of economic development” (Sen 1999:600). Sen has also stressed that ethical principles and human values are essential for development, pointing out that even the nineteenth century political economists never said that self-interest was enough: Adam Smith, for example, asserted that sympathy, generosity and public spiritedness were also essential (Sen 1997).

Sen has gone on to argue that “capitalism could not have survived on seeking personal benefits alone” (1997:3). Values are essential to the process from the very beginning. Yet today, ethical and human concerns often enter the scene after the event, once structural adjustment has happened and the damage in terms of poverty and marginalization has been done. We do not want an approach to development and ethics that is defined by the very ideology that is the cause of the crisis itself. In this scenario, ethics and human values can only be used to give a face-lift to neoliberalism’s chain of negative effects: poverty and inequality, unemployment, environmental destruction, exclusion, violence, anomie and authoritarianism. Instead, ethical principles must be used to help us break out of the ideological chains in which we have wrapped our approach to development, and replace it with new and effective sustainable approaches.

Democracy and development

“Sustainable for whom?” is a question not so much about what type or model of development is pursued, but about how development decisions are made and who makes them. The term “sustainability”, like “participation”, can be used to maintain the *status quo*, focusing narrowly on particular issues and covering up deep-rooted structural problems. As Marcuse writes:

Sustainability is a treacherous [formulation of goals] for urban policy because it suggests the possibility of a conflict—free consensus on policies, whereas, in fact, vital interests do conflict: it will take more than simply better knowledge and clearer understanding to produce change (1998:104).

When sustainability is applied as a limiting principle, and participation is confined to poverty relief, the concepts can hide authoritarian control of major decisions in development, and cover up the real nature of the model itself. So, how can development—which must be “freely determined”—be upheld in a diverse and conflict-ridden urban society?

The Megacity: A Scenario for Sustainable Development

One of the most important results of the Earth Summit has been to place cities, especially the cities of the South, back on the agendas of nation-states and multilateral agencies. In the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) *Manual for Local Planning of Agenda 21*, Elizabeth Dowdeswell, then Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), observed that there are 213 cities in the South with more than one million inhabitants: “The future of cities will increasingly determine not only the destiny of the nations but also of the planet” (ICLEI 1996:iii).

It could be argued that the urban poor are getting onto the agenda through the back door (our cities are receiving increasing attention now because they are a threat to the planet); but whatever the reason, it is important to be on that agenda. The belief that everyone who lives in a megacity somehow benefits from the concentration of wealth and power found there, and so does not need priority attention, is being questioned. However, we would argue for a more positive view of the megacities, a view grounded in the potential and practices of the urban poor. If the growing demand for services is a threat to sustainability, we need an “approach entirely different for planning and providing services” (ICLEI 1996).

Some more positive approaches to Southern cities are being voiced. Maurice Strong, president of the Earth Council, writes: “Urban areas present the concentration of our worst social, economic and environmental problems, and also offer opportunities for some of the most effective solutions” (ICLEI 1996). In order to attend to social, economic and environmental problems with justice and equality, ethical values must predominate in the decision-making process. Democratic politics is the only way to ensure the needs of the poor are met in complex modern societies.

Nowhere in the South has the social and political basis for sustainable development (ethics and democratic politics) been so weakened as in the megacities. In Lima, for example, the approach

to development is being reduced to survival tactics: a scramble to provide nutrition, employment, health and security in a climate of violence and delinquency. Multilateral agencies and governments, faced with an increase in poverty, are focusing exclusively on the situation of the poor and neglecting the structural problems and the responsibilities of other actors in the globalization process. The poverty relief strategies that have received considerable funding have also tended to drag non-governmental organizations (NGOs) into emergency aid programmes, which in turn take up the time of community organizations (Roberts 2001:7).

Countries and agencies are turning away from integral development strategies to address more urgent needs that stem from poverty: food subsidies, preventive health education and treatment, small loans for activities that increase income. These programmes not only provide little medium or long-term relief, but they also do not constitute a development proposal for the community as a whole. Cultural values, especially solidarity, that have been an essential element of community-based organizations, are being eroded by emergency aid programmes, which focus on individual survival. The direct intervention of central government agencies and the overt manipulation of the poor in poverty relief programmes are undermining the basis for democratic politics. The urban poor are no longer citizens demanding economic and social rights, they are “beneficiaries” of the generosity of foreign governments and agencies.

Fragmented dreams and fragmented groups in the megacity

Fragmentation is a growing problem for human sustainable development—and for the democratic political systems that can make such development possible (Joseph 2000). Within the confines of the neoliberal model, the people’s demands and aspirations for a better quality of life are now treated as separate, unrelated “issues”: poverty, environmental destruction, gender inequalities, employment rights, etc.

This fragmentation of relief programmes makes it difficult to involve a range of actors in an integrated human approach to development. Often one issue neutralizes or blocks others. For example, economic growth seems to be at loggerheads with environmental concerns. The survival of small businesses, the current employment panacea, may depend on child labour, scant social benefits and extremely long working hours. Programmes devoted to building citizenship and promoting “civic participation”

or “local democracy” are often unconcerned about the nature of the decisions made.² Many of the campaigns for increasing the participation of women in politics do not take into consideration what the women to be elected think about development, democracy and human rights, or even about issues closely related to gender, such as reproductive rights.

The breakdown of development into discrete components is also illustrated by various approaches to fighting poverty. The original strategies in this area drew attention to the structural causes of poverty. However, as poverty grows, especially in the cities, it has become clearer—even though often not admitted—that poverty cannot be significantly reduced within the framework and criteria of the present model of economic development. Strategies have been designed to focus on pockets of extreme poverty, usually found in rural areas. Such compartmentalization has fragmented the main issues concerning the generation of poverty, and diverts our concern away from designing integral and sustainable approaches to development.

Two decades ago community organizations in the poor areas of Lima were concerned about the structural causes of poverty, and the injustices and inequalities embedded within them. These reflections came under a programme of popular education highlighting these concerns, which is now seen as a tool of radical Marxist political groups. In addition, Peruvian NGOs have been accused of being apologists for the terrorist organization Shining Path. This has resulted in self-censorship and the loss of much critical and creative work. Today, many agencies and NGOs operate in this way, avoiding discussion of the structural and ethical problems of the dominant development model.

Of even greater concern is that this fragmentation affects the social actors themselves. Each group or organization has its own specific area of interest, and this has seriously weakened urban popular organizations. By focusing on a single issue, and not trying to build common interests and goals, community-based

² At a recent conference in Lima, the city planner and councilman of Barcelona, Jordi Borja, described an incident that illustrates this point. Residents in a predominantly working-class neighbourhood of Barcelona organized to oppose the building of a recreation centre for elderly people. According to Borja, the local community rejected the idea of having “old people in our neighbourhood”. As Borja pointed out, this is “civic participation”, but participation with a clearly anti-democratic content. This anecdote serves to emphasize the importance of ensuring that our efforts to build a democratic political system are integrated into the processes of human development.

organizations (CBOs) are less likely to interact with organizations that have different, potentially conflicting, interests. This often leads to conflict and distrust. Once a wider development perspective is lost, a defeatist attitude may set in, weakening the vision and the will on which sustainable development strategies depend.

It is often said that the grassroots organizations have disappeared. This is simply not true. In fact, with structural adjustment, the number and types of such organizations have grown, especially in the cities. New organizations have sprung up to face problems that previously had been solved privately, by individuals or in the family, such as food, health and employment. In addition, new organizations have formed to cover responsibilities that the downsized state is unable or unwilling to face, such as environment, security and even criminal justice.

However, grassroots organizations have lost much of their capacity to relate to and co-ordinate with different sectors. Previously, such co-ordination took place at a political level (urban popular confederations worked with trade unions and peasant movements) and CBOs were thus involved with political parties and political campaigns. With the weakening of political parties and the virtual breakdown of democratic political systems, CBOs no longer work together in the same way. They have lost the common ground upon which proposals based on common interests and common values can be built. They have also lost their power to influence public opinion and political decisions.

NGOs have also been partly responsible for this fragmentation of issues and actors. NGOs working with communities have sought more professional expertise, becoming highly specialized in different problem areas. This necessary specialization is often reinforced by the demands of international agencies for concrete indicators—usually meaning quantitative indicators—to measure results in each specific problem area. This strategy has often been effective in responding to specific and basic human needs of the urban poor in a context of increasing poverty, reduced resources and the retreat of the state from its social obligations. However, the cost of this efficiency has been a lessening ability to link strategies and actors, and a reluctance to go beyond the short-term goals.

It is, therefore, imperative that sustainable development processes find ways for different social actors, working on different problems, to interact effectively. The strategies that we design in this endeavour must guarantee that ethical principles and values drive all stages of the development process—from planning to execution

and evaluation. This is a complex enterprise fraught with serious ethical, social and political challenges.

NGOs must address several problems raised by the sustainable development process. The basic question is: Sustainable development for whom? In other words, is it possible to build a common basis for human development when dealing with the world's diverse cultures, ethnic groups and religions? The dominance of neoliberal ideology risks imposing ethical principles, values and norms on people in the name of the "common good". It might be argued that increasing respect for individual freedoms seems to be leading to chaos, violence and anomie. This has allowed authoritarian or fundamentalist regimes to make headway in imposing their own ethical systems where the neoliberal model has not been fully successful.

In practice, it is not easy to establish a global strategy for development and democracy. Increasing poverty, and a growing gap between rich and poor, has helped encourage a cynical, individualistic stance throughout society. The poor, especially those living in the megacities, have absorbed much of the neoliberal discourse. Strategies designed to integrate participatory democracy into local development programmes are hampered by this.

The poor are well aware of the tremendous disadvantages they face and know that it is impossible for them to compete in a market, which is *free* or *liberal* only in name. An essential difference between the world of the urban poor 20 years ago and their world today is that political and social organizations were then on the rise, involved in building cities, and believing they could change the world. Today, much of this vital force has been lost and there is a growing feeling of the sheer impossibility of improving the situation through one's own efforts.

Poverty and exclusion, limited democracy and authoritarianism, as well as social, cultural and ethical fragmentation are the central problems we must address in order to move ahead toward sustainable human development. But in what scenario can such issues be discussed? How can a systematic process of human development be made to work in an adverse economic and political context? And in particular, what scenario will allow people who are immersed in poverty and excluded from most forms of power, in an increasingly unequal and unjust social system, to become vigorous social and political actors? We are faced with a triple task: to bolster the grassroots organizations that are the point of departure for any human development process; to place ethical, human values at the centre of the development process; and to build a democratic

political system which can make these principles effective. Our search takes us to the Southern megacity.

Megacities of the South

The “megacity” has several different definitions. From a European perspective, Peter Hall (1998) defines it as an urban agglomeration of over 10 million inhabitants. In this case, 50 of the world’s 60 megacities are to be found today in developing countries. (In 1960, only nine of the 19 megacities were in developing countries.) It can be argued, however, that although the number of inhabitants is an important factor in the definition, it is neither the only one, nor the most important. The megacity might instead be defined by its impact on society, development and the state.

There is an important difference between most of the megacities in Southern countries and the Western megacity. In the South, a different type of megacity has started to appear, which is more an *urban agglomeration* than a *city*. These agglomerations do not integrate the urban population, but are instead a physical expression of exclusion and disintegration. Although such disintegrated and segregated cities are more common in poor countries, there are growing indications that the megacities in the North could face a similar scenario.

Some analysts go further, and feel that we are witnessing the death of the city.³ Lima, the capital of Peru, is an example of a megacity in the process of disintegration. It is a megacity not in terms of numbers, but because it represents a large proportion of Peru’s population, as well as its economic and political power. It has over 7 million inhabitants, representing one third of Peru’s total population and 44 per cent of its urban population. The economic and political power concentrated there increased over the 10 years of Fujimori’s authoritarian regime. However, unlike the modern megacities in the North, the urban centre of Lima fails to provide facilities for all of its own population, or to provide links to other regions of Peru. This is an important factor in explaining why Peruvian movements for decentralization are so opposed to the megacity, and to Lima in particular.

³ As defined by Jordi Borja: “[The city is] a physical, political and cultural complex . . . a centre of population and activity, a social and functional mixture, the seat of government and civic participation, and a place to call home. The city means encounter, exchange, culture and commerce. The city, although composed of these mutable elements, constructs a fixed identity from the people that flow through it” (Borja 1997:2, author’s translation).

CBOs and sustainable development

The question of sustainable human development is particularly complex in the context of a disintegrating urban agglomeration like Lima. For the last 20 years—a period of political, social and economic crisis in most countries of the South—the Peruvian NGO Centro Alternativa focused its strategies on the low-income urban CBOs. Lima's urban poor have organized and found solutions—even if at survival level—to their basic material needs. In a real sense, the inhabitants of Lima's *barriadas* (poor neighbourhoods) have built their city.

However, the situation in the megacities of the South has changed, which has had an impact on the urban organizations of low-income groups. These changes led the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) to initiate a study of the situation of the CBOs in the megacities. The purpose was to evaluate CBOs' potential for participating with local governments in sustainable development processes. That study (Joseph 1999) confirmed that working with the urban CBOs, building on the strengths of the people and their organizations, enabled the fine-tuning of strategies for moving toward sustainable development in Lima, despite the increasing number of obstacles on the path. Work is currently continuing on refining a decentralized approach to development and government in the megacity.

It is only possible to summarize the positive aspects of the urban organizations here. In general, these organizations have demonstrated great creativity in solving their basic material needs. This was the case from the very beginning of the urban expansion around metropolitan Lima in the early 1950s, in what are now known as the "cones"—the peripheral urban settlements that extend along the river valleys that cut through Lima in the north (Chillon River), centre (Rimac River) and south (Lurin River). Each river valley is in the heart of the cones, which are separated from each other by the Andean foothills. The urban squatters organized every stage of the development of their habitat: invasion, urban design, basic services and legalization. There has been much praise, and rightly so, of the solidarity and co-operation which made this achievement possible. Women began to play a central role in community life and, later, in political life; women's organizations were the starting place for addressing gender issues in a comprehensive manner.

The following decades (1960–1980) were also vibrant in both the social and political arenas. The workers' movements grew in

number and strength due to industrial expansion and the support initially given by the military dictatorship to labour unions between 1968 and 1975. The peasant movement experienced a similar growth in strength when the land takeovers of the *haciendas* (large landholdings) were followed by the agrarian reform. The organizations in the urban periphery were also federated in Lima and at a national level. All of these social movements were representative of growing political activity, especially on the part of left parties such as the various Marxist groups and the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) party. The popular organizations were part of a movement that, it seemed, would lead to a more just model of human development.

From 1980, the political situation changed radically. For the purposes of this discussion, we will highlight structural adjustment, which was actually implemented in Peru from 1975, the beginning of the second phase of the military government. The Fujimori government, installed in 1990, applied the mandates of the “Washington consensus” without “anaesthesia”. This meant a tremendous reduction in the purchasing power of the poorer urban families, and subsequent job losses in factories and public institutions. The loss of jobs also meant the loss of social benefits, especially health care.

The urban poor responded to the new situation with the same strategies and mechanisms that they had used to build their habitat: courage, creativity, organization, solidarity and a sense of justice and dignity. However, a broader look at what has taken place, especially in the last two decades, shows that not only have the grassroots urban organizations become less influential, the worker and peasant movements have also been greatly weakened. This is due partly to the structural adjustments which have made labour laws “more flexible” in order to cut production costs and reduce government spending. Any union leader who becomes a bother can be quickly thrown into the growing ranks of the unemployed. The peasant movement has been hit hard by the break-up of community lands, the lack of technical and financial aid, and the individual struggle for survival within an ideological context of neoliberalism and a strictly market-driven agricultural strategy.

In addition, CBOs do not have the backing of the market-driven mass media. The fact that hundreds of thousands of urban poor defy adverse conditions and are not only surviving, but becoming involved in alternative development processes, is not considered newsworthy. The media, moreover, is essentially a barometer of what

is happening in society. In terms of politics, for instance, it seems that the best way to be elected in Peru is to be the best clown. In the recent parliamentary elections, candidates have had to jump off cliffs in hang-gliders, dress up as Batman and basically use all possible means to get press coverage. The issues of substance were pushed off the media agenda.

Another important factor is the virtual collapse of the political parties that, in previous decades, helped organize low-income movements, bringing them together under political platforms. Moreover, what is most alarming, and most pertinent for promoting sustainable and human development, is that the people themselves have become more and more uninterested in democratic politics. They do not expect the democratic political system to contribute to the solution of their immediate material needs and, even less, to help them move ahead on the road to development. The people's support for authoritarian government was not surprising: The Peruvian people chose to turn their backs on politics, to "exit" the democratic process (Hirschman 1982), delegating their political rights and responsibilities to others in order to get on with their individual struggle for survival (O'Donnell 1992).

The approach to sustainable development, therefore, has to go far beyond the simple conservation of natural resources. The conservation of the planet does not depend wholly on limiting the use of natural resources, especially in countries where basic material needs are still unsatisfied. Rather it depends upon adopting a new, ethical approach to development, in which the economic dimensions and material aspects are seen as means to a high quality of life. We need to build a political system that makes such development possible. We have come to understand that, in complex modern societies built on individual freedoms, ethics can only be brought into development through democratic politics.

A stable structure for sustainability

Even if we were to limit the scope of "sustainable" to the environmental aspects, it is obvious that without a democratic political system in place, concerns about our planet and its limited resources will remain ineffective. Achieving a stable basis on which to build sustainable *human* development is an even more complex challenge, and must be seen as a social, political and economic process. It is particularly important to include education in this scenario. The different aspects to be taken into account may be summarized as follows.

The social level

People and their communities are the point of departure (and return) in the development process. In the areas where the urban poor live, sustainable development must be based upon the ethical mandate to provide the basic human conditions that give each person a just opportunity to develop his or her full potential. Programmes for poverty relief and attention to basic human needs should be seen as part of an integral development process. This includes programmes designed to improve environmental conditions in urban areas.

Synergetic strategies are needed to unite problems, solutions and actors rather than reinforcing the fragmentation of society. While most programmes proposed for addressing these problems call for participatory methods, very few seem to take into account the fact that political and social systems have themselves become weakened and fragmented. A strategy, adequate in a country with a stable and institutionalized social and political system, is inadequate for the chaotic realities found in many of the megacities of the South.

Integral development

Redistribution, poverty relief and environmental programmes must be part of an integral developmental strategy, which includes all dimensions of human development and focuses on the quality of life and opportunities development provides. However, material economic development is still a priority, and concern for creating an integral approach to development must not risk promoting oversimplified solutions. Any strategy that proposes to link poverty relief and environmental programmes to integral development processes must create the necessary conditions for sustainable economic growth: the productive capacity that provides quality products *and* employment; market conditions that link local producers to local consumers; financial systems that sustain such an economic system; and legislation that protects the system.

An example of the misguided approach to development that is currently in vogue is the expectation that small or micro-enterprises will offer economic solutions for the urban poor. Evidence from the last 20 years shows that the informal sector's small businesses, which are multiplying in the megacity, usually add up to little more than a means of survival, with little or no chance of further development. Larger enterprises have better growth prospects, but their markets are limited and increasingly invaded by cheap imports. Judging by the purchasing power of the inhabitants of the Northern Cone of Lima, for example, there is a possible market for economic growth. This area has a population of nearly two million. That means two

million pairs of shoes, socks, trousers, etc. It also represents a market for furniture, building materials, medicine, services such as education and recreation, nutrition—the list is very long. It is not unrealistic to estimate that local producers could satisfy up to 80 per cent of these demands. However, a monopolistic and transnational production system, the concentration of commerce in a few shopping malls, a financial system that siphons out the savings of the poor, and a free-market policy that offers no protection for emerging enterprises all conspire against local production.

The political level

Democratic politics is essential for sustainable development. All strategies and programmes must be evaluated in relation to their effectiveness in building a democratic, institutionalized political system. This is another complex area, but one which we cannot afford to ignore. Our strategies here must address three basic aspects. The first is rethinking and reforming the state. There is no justification for imposing on all countries a “one-size-fits-all model”. Moreover, the state needs to do more than level the playing field. It must strengthen the players, give them the equipment they need and, especially while they are still young, protect them from other oversized players who invade the pitch.

To be sustainable, our political systems require professional political actors, both individuals and political parties. Many analysts have placed the blame for the political debacle in Peru exclusively on the political parties, both right and left. The voters seem to share this assessment and continue to punish the parties and their leaders. However, after 10 years of “independent” government⁴ we are becoming aware that without professional political actors, the aspirations and proposals of the people cannot be translated into viable political proposals. Independent rule has meant domination and manipulation and, most alarming, the collapse of people’s wish to participate in politics. It is almost certain that in the wake of Peru’s electoral process, which was questioned throughout the world, there will be a swing back to party politics. The question is how this process will take place, and what kind of political parties will result.

A third and central aspect concerning the political dimension of sustainable development is building a solid civil society and encouraging citizens to take a positive approach to political participation. Much effort and many resources have been dedicated

⁴ President Alberto Fujimori served for a decade without the backing of any traditional Peruvian political parties.

to “civil society” programmes, although many of them have been dominated by neoliberal ideology. Teaching people their civil rights and explaining the constitution and laws is essential. However, these programmes are hampered by the fact that people are often unwilling to participate in, and consolidate, the existing democratic political systems. The classic liberal model of democratic politics and institutions cannot, and should not, be imposed upon societies regardless of different historical realities.

Moreover, there are contradictions inherent in the democratic process. Surveys in Peru have always shown that the people, including the poor, prefer democracy to authoritarian governments. This makes it difficult to explain why an authoritarian president, who repeatedly transgressed constitutional boundaries, maintained a 47 per cent approval rating until his last days in office. Among the poorer groups, whom he manipulated most shamelessly, he held an even higher approval rating. If democratic politics are to be practically defended by the people, we need to revamp our strategies, work on different levels and scenarios and, most of all, low-income urban organizations must contribute to a new political elite. This is a matter of promoting processes that link democracy and development, rather than imposing a model scenario on a real situation. No doubt the resulting political system that will evolve from these processes will look much like the other existing democratic regimes as to norms and institutions. The difference will be that the resulting democratic regime will be a product of the people themselves and the processes they are involved in. Therefore they will be identified with the democratic system.

A strategy for sustainable human development must keep these issues at the forefront of the agenda. Our choices are limited, as are our resources. NGOs in Peru have some impact on the national level through networks and even in some government agencies, despite government efforts to close off official possibilities for partnership. However, actors and processes at the sub-national level must be at the centre of the plans. In the megacities this means decentralized strategies and, in the case of metropolitan Lima, we are designing and implementing development strategies for the cones. This means developing the particular resources that each cone has to offer to the rest of the city or country. For example, the Northern Cone offers parks, beaches and recreational areas, archaeological sites, fishing, shoe manufacturing and carpentry. As for government, legal proposals have been drawn up which will give municipal officials in each cone the resources and legislative powers needed to promote

development in their areas. As initiatives like these coalesce, we believe public spaces are emerging, in which a new popular political force will find innovative ways of linking democracy and development.

Public Spaces: A Decentralized Approach to Development and Democracy in the Megacity

Public spaces could present an answer to the structural problems facing sustainable urban development. In the UNRISD and UNV study (Joseph 1999), the evolution of *concertación*, occurring in the low-income neighbourhoods, is becoming something of a buzzword in Peru. According to the *Local Agenda 21-Peru*:

The concept of *concertación* is difficult to translate. It goes beyond consultation and brings the different stakeholders around the table so that solutions can be negotiated and responsibilities assigned. This includes conflicting interests where these exist (Miranda and Hordijk 1998:71).

Concertación includes elements of debate, discussion and consultation. In a process of *concertación*, different—often conflicting—actors and interest groups sit at the planning table, analyse problems, design solutions and, where possible, participate in putting these plans into practice. According to Romeo Grompone, *concertación* refers to “the integration of different actors in a system of negotiation and in the construction of public agendas”. This situation requires that each of the participants be recognized as a legitimate social and political actor (Grompone 1999:217). In this scenario, the actors and institutions involved must be open to making compromises and concessions.

Concertación therefore constructs a public space in which organizations of varying natures, with different and often opposing interests, learn to recognize the others at the table as social players with equally legitimate rights. The aim is to build common interest, and to incorporate ethical values and cultural principles into the development planning process, which is essential if development is to be truly sustainable.

This experience may plant the seeds for a new democratic system instrumental in achieving sustainable development, based on the following positive aspects.

- *Concertación* creates favourable conditions for discussing development and for broadening the interests of grassroots organizations. It allows concrete demands and needs to be

linked in synergetic strategies, and enables people to look beyond the short-term to medium- and long-term planning. This process leads to a more integral focus on development.

- Through exchange and discussion in the planning processes, the social actors become aware of their abilities, needs and interests, and they learn to express and defend these in dialogue with others. This process of self-awareness helps the participants to recognize the legitimacy of others' interests, which is essential for building a shared solution.
- In such an environment it should be possible to discuss openly ethical principles and values, and to incorporate these into the planning process. In turn this will broaden and strengthen a basis for trust and solidarity. It is becoming evident that "post-material" values can be important factors and may be incorporated into development planning, even when the actors are faced with crucial material deficits.
- A new understanding of, and new relations with, public agencies and local governments can be established, thus overcoming the relationship of non-co-operation that tends to predominate.

These are the reasons for advocating a strategy that strengthens urban grassroots actors, CBOs and local government, and consolidates public spaces for *concertación*. Before going further, however, a word of caution is required. Grompone and Mejia (1995) warn of the danger of reading too much into these experiences. In Peru, and many other Southern countries, participatory planning processes have drawn a lot of attention and raised considerable expectations. This is especially true in the cases in which local municipal governments, often under the technical direction of NGOs, are behind planning processes. These partnerships have often been quite successful in implementing concrete and immediate measures, such as urban infrastructure, solid-waste handling and nutrition programmes. But they do not necessarily take us farther down the road to stable democratic systems.

While it is important, therefore, to highlight success and to take a positive attitude to progress, especially in the context of poverty, violence and exclusion, in many cases these experiences are presented as ready-made solutions that gloss over deep-rooted structural problems. This over-exaggeration, often used for election or fund-raising purposes, can have long-term negative effects. While identifying the strengths of these initiatives, therefore, their serious limitations should not be overlooked.

Political culture and development

There follows a look at the social actors in urban development themselves, especially the community leaders or the grassroots urban elite. Direct work with the urban CBOs in these scenarios and on-going research on “political culture for development” has provided some preliminary findings. These findings provide topics and themes for those interested in understanding better the urban grassroots actors and their role in the progression toward sustainable development.

They are organized into three categories: (i) individual and community; (ii) the vision of development; and (iii) the vision of politics. These categories are not new, and all of them have been the subjects of many research projects. What is new is the effort made to understand the links between the different pairs of categories. This is proving helpful, both for designing better promotion strategies, and for building indicators to evaluate progress.

Individual and community

Through focus groups, interviews and direct observation, attempts have been made to determine the values to which the community leaders subscribe, and their capacity to use this value system as a basis for argument and discussion, as well as for making decisions. This is known to be closely related to the values expressed within the community.

What is often found is that an individual leader with a high degree of self-esteem, and a clear awareness of his or her own potential and needs, is better able to relate to other individuals within the same organization or in other organizations participating in the public spaces. We are also finding that in individuals and communities where there is a high degree of self-esteem, more importance is given to ethical principles and cultural values. There is also a broader understanding of what is meant by development. Finally, there is a greater willingness to participate in processes of *concertación* and in political scenarios in general.

The converse also appears to be true. When leaders and community have low self-esteem, they tend to build vertical relations, and use authoritarian methods. In such situations, the values of solidarity and confidence are usually restricted to primary relations: with family or persons from the same place, ethnic background and religion. However, we are finding that these same values do not come into play in more complex scenarios and communities, such as the public spaces and the processes of *concertación*, to plan long-term development strategies.

It is, therefore, important in planning our work and programmes with urban communities to include measures that aim to strengthen individuals in the community. Likewise, we should include, in our evaluation, indicators that measure progress or regression in this category.

The vision of development

The second category is to identify the scope and content of this vision among community members. The study tries to capture the way the leaders define their needs, abilities and interests, and their practical approach to development. We want to ascertain whether the individual and organizational actors share an integral vision of development, and if that vision is discussed and elaborated with the participation of all the members, or imposed by leaders and external parties. It is also important to know to what extent the actors appreciate the role of community action in achieving personal and community development.

We are finding that if the actors are simply aware of what they *lack* and do not consciously express their own interests and rights, they usually do not arrive at an integral strategy for development. Likewise, where there is a low level of awareness of interests and rights, solidarity and confidence are rarely extended outside the individual's immediate circle—except in emergency situations, for example, in the face of a natural disaster or sickness.

These findings are already helping us to redesign our forms and methods of intervention, both in poverty relief work and in promoting sustainable development. NGOs and other bodies that intervene in the urban problem areas can have an important influence on the vision of development that results from their work. For example, in planning strategies our objective in different programmes with the urban poor must be not only to achieve the concrete results in poverty relief, environmental protection or defence of human rights. We must try to include these programmes in a more integral perspective of development. This integration can be practical, involving synergetic interventions, which link problems, actors, solutions and cultures. Participating actors should identify themselves with their cone, and understand better the common interests and structural objectives shared by other actors in the same scenario. And all must agree that the satisfaction of basic human necessities is an essential condition and starting point for participating in, and sustaining, processes of human development.

The vision of politics

The third category of ideas encompasses the task of strengthening democracy with the construction of public spaces. Findings indicate that the more integral and human the approach to development, the more willing the people are to participate in democratic procedures. Research also shows, however, that community leaders tend to relegate development on the macro or national level to external actors: central government, private enterprises and foreign investors. More understanding is needed of the factors and practices that can better motivate social leaders to participate in participatory planning processes. The best possibilities for rebuilding democratic processes and institutions are found in the emerging public spaces, not only in the megacity, but on the sub-national level in all regions throughout the country.

The more positive the vision of development, the stronger the will to participate in the emerging new forms of democratic politics. Social organizations, therefore, should view democracy as a process that incorporates dialogue, tolerance of other viewpoints and co-operation. It is only through this democratic process that a representative system—a “common good”—can be established without the imposition of any particular set of values, or coercion by any powerful interest group.

Conclusion

The approach we are proposing is based on the vital interrelationships between the individual, the community, politics and development. Although these are certainly not the only aspects to be considered, any attempt that does not place the social and political actors at the centre of strategies for sustainable development in megacities of the South is doomed to fail. We would insist, therefore, that these issues become part of a common North-South agenda. More research is needed on the social and political actors participating in urban public spaces. Such research ought to be linked to existing work on promoting sustainable development and good governance within a decentralized strategy.

Finally, we would do a great disservice to urban community leaders if we were to motivate them to participate in the complex processes of democratization and development without also offering them the opportunities for the kind of education these processes demand. It is not enough to simply train people in techniques for addressing certain issues. They also need the theoretical tools that

will allow them to understand the wider context of sustainable development practices and planning. Providing the educational opportunities, training and information community leaders require is a task that, if shared, may well pave the way for success in the future.

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