

Sustainable development and democracy in the megacities

Jaime Joseph

In looking at sustainable development from the perspective of the cities of the South, we shall focus on Lima. We believe that the megacities in the Third World are a thorn in the side of strategies for building democracy and sustainable, human development. Indeed, the development occurring in these megacities seems the least human and sustainable. What can 'sustainable' mean in such a context? Our concern here is to find ways in which community-based organisations (CBOs) can continue to respond to basic material needs, but in such a way that their efforts are part of sustainable and integrated development processes and not limited to poverty relief and environmental clean-up projects. This concern is at once a social, political, and an ethical enterprise.¹

The first part of this paper reflects on the concepts and theoretical framework for 'sustainable' development in the contemporary world, particularly in the light of the impact of neo-liberalism and poverty on the minds and hearts of people who live in Southern megacities. We argue that democracy and development must be inseparable if development is to be sustainable and fully human.

In the second part, we suggest that a central problem in the search for human sustainable development is *fragmentation*, as people's capacities and needs are treated as separate and unrelated issues. Moreover, we argue that, in the megacities, a democratic approach to development must be decentralised to the areas where most of the urban poor actually live. We end by reviewing some initiatives in Lima that might well inform strategies which would allow us to break out of our crisis and to promote and sustain processes of democratisation and development.

Sustainable: for whom and how?

The concept of sustainability as applied to development has a history. In 1983 the General Assembly of the United Nations set up the World

Commission on Environment and Development. Four years later, under the presidency of Gro Harlem Brundtland, the Commission published *Our Common Future*, which defined sustainable development as 'a development which satisfies the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their own necessities'. The essence of 'sustainable' seems to be to limit development. Instead of 'more is better', a slogan was launched claiming that 'sufficient is better'. What was not clear was what mechanisms – who and how – should be used to 'limit' development. This is not principally a technical question but rather an ethical and a political problem that still remains unsolved.

The 1992 Earth Summit was organised as alarms were going off – and they continue to sound – all of them telling the planet that resources are limited, especially the resources that underpin our present model of development. What is even more alarming is that we may destroy the very conditions necessary for human life even before the resources run out. Global warming, holes in the ozone layer, and overpopulation are a threat to life in general. At the Earth Summit, 179 countries, North and South, made a commitment to construct their own Agenda 21 for sustainable development. And since then, 1300 local authorities have responded by designing their own action plans (ICLEI 1996).

The First World seems to be pressuring the Third World to do the limiting: reduce population, preserve rain forests, conserve water, etc.. It is not easy, then, to reflect on *sustainability* from the perspective of the urban poor who make up a large part of Southern megacities and for whom many basic needs remain unmet. There is in fact some discomfort with the topic, as 'sustainability' is in many ways an induced concern in urban poor communities who are struggling to satisfy the basic material needs essential to their own personal and social development.

'Environment and sustainability' are two of the many urgent issues or concerns that have sprung up in the North and have migrated to the South. In addition to environment, we have become aware of gender, human rights, especially those of children, citizens' rights, workers' rights, the freedom of sexual preferences. All of these, which indeed are essential and urgent world concerns, have become part of an agenda in the particular historical context of free-market, capitalist development in the West. Without denying their importance, we must ask ourselves if these issues mean the same in the South as in the North.

This precaution perhaps appears mistaken when environment and the limits of our planet are such universal concerns. However, it was not so long ago that the countries in the South were described as 'underdeveloped', and it then seemed quite obvious that they had to make efforts to move ahead on the same development road the North had followed. Today, we want to make sure that sustainability is an essential component of our development process and not either an add-on or a limiting factor.

It is difficult to imagine that the West could have achieved its own capitalist economic development if from the outset the emerging productive, financial, and commercial classes had been obliged to limit their use of natural resources, avoid pollution, pay just wages, provide safe and healthy working conditions, respect the rights of women and children, and not exploit foreign workers or workers from particular ethnic groups. The Third World peoples, trying to move ahead on the road to development, are being asked to carry the additional load of these major issues. This apparently puts the Southern countries, and especially their cities, in a bind: either we must accept our 'under'-development and deprive ourselves of the goods which other societies enjoy in excess, or we will inevitably bring about the destruction of the planet. Obviously we must find a third option.

This special issue of *Development in Practice* is dedicated to reflecting on this 'gap' between the accepted meanings of sustainable development in cities, both in the North and in the South. This gap does not reside principally in differences of definition but rather in the different contexts, processes, and systems in the North and the South.

Change the terms of reference: a new and ethical approach to development

It is now clear that the neo-liberal model of economic development is creating more poverty and widening the poverty gap, as well as proving incapable of curbing the overexploitation of the planet and its resources. The UNDP 1996 *Human Development Report* tells us that 89 countries are worse off economically than they were a decade earlier. The *New York Times* article on that report (dated 15 July 1996) headlined its story: 'UN Survey Finds World Rich-Poor Gap Widening' (Morris 1996).

In the face of this undeniable reality, a new item was tacked on to the neo-liberal model: poverty relief and redistribution measures. It might even be argued that the nation-state, so weakened by transnational

economics and globalisation, has survived and even prospered in its ability to relate to (or manipulate) the growing numbers of poor populations in Third World countries thanks to its role in administering these programmes. For example, in September 1996, the head of the Inter-American Development Bank organised a forum to study the Washington Consensus in which its author, John Williamson, recognised that the measures had often been applied too strictly as if following a neo-liberal bible. He underlined the importance of the state in providing technological support, credit, information, and, above all, redistribution.

Grassroots organisations have been quite successful in reducing the negative effects of the neo-liberal model and the structural adjustments which have been imposed on all countries to put them on the 'reductionist' development track. 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'. Unfortunately, 'structural adjustment with a human face' implies that rapid GNP per capita growth remains the basic objective, and social improvement must be a by-product. If development is to enhance human well-being, it must be designed in such a way that improvements that raise the quality of life indicators are actively interacting with, even driving, the strategy for economic growth. We would add that it is not enough to add the adjective 'sustainable' to the same 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. Denis Goulet (1995) is one of the recent pioneers in this field. In South America, Manfred 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 being). 'Development refers to persons not to objects ... The best development process will be that which permits raising the quality of life of the persons' (Max-Neef *et al.* 1986: 25, author's translation).

Amartya Sen also centred the strategies of human development in the development of the human capacities, freely determined (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 (1997) has stressed that ethical principles and human values are essential for development, pointing out that while Adam Smith argued that self-interest was behind the motivation for interchange, he never said this interest was enough. Confidence, interest and concern for others, what Smith called 'sympathy', 'generosity', and 'public spirit', were also essential. Sen (1997: 2) goes on to argue that, 'Capitalism could not have survived on seeking personal benefits alone.' Values are essential to the process from the very beginning.

Ethical and human concerns often enter the scene after the event; once structural adjustment has happened and the damage in terms of poverty and marginalisation has been done. We do not want an approach to development and ethics that is hemmed in by the very ideology that is at the basis of the crisis itself, for this will inevitably mean that ethics and human values only enter the scene at the end of the process. They will be used to give a facelift to and to curb neo-liberalism's chain of negative effects: poverty and inequality, unemployment, environmental destruction, exclusion, violence, *anomie*, and authoritarianism. Our question is whether and how ethical principles can help us break out of the ideological chains in which we have wrapped our approach to development, and replace this with new, effective, and sustainable approaches.

Democracy and development

'Sustainable for whom?' is a question not so much about what type or model of development is pursued, but how development decisions are made and who makes them. We understand 'sustainable' as comprising more than the environmental goals. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as 'capable of being upheld or defended'. So, how can development – which must be 'freely determined', as Sen says – be upheld in a diverse and conflict-ridden urban society? According to Marcuse (1998: 105):

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.

'Sustainability', like 'participation', can be a camouflaged trap. Both terms – highly respectable – can be used to maintain the status quo, focusing on particular 'issues' and covering up deep-rooted, structural

problems. When 'sustainability' is applied as a limiting principle, and 'participation' is limited to poverty relief programmes, these concepts can hide the authoritarian hands and the power behind the control of major decisions in development, and cover up the real nature of the model itself.

The megacity as a scenario for sustainable development

From my own point of view – both personal and professional – one of the important positive results of the Earth Summit has been to place cities, especially Third World cities, back on the agendas of nation-states and multilateral agencies. In the 'Manual for Local Planning of Agenda 21, 1996' of the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), Elizabeth Dowdeswell, then Executive Director of the UN Programme for Environment, pointed out that there are 213 cities in the Third World with more than one million inhabitants. 'The future of cities', she says, 'will increasingly determine not only the destiny of the nations but also of the planet.' (ICLEI 1996: iii)

This is an important change since the main concentrations of people in the Third World, especially the megacities, that had been pushed to the margins of national and international concerns, are getting back on to the agenda. This is not so much owing to a concern for the massive and endemic poverty and injustice present in these cities. Unfortunately, there has been a common 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.² Our cities are receiving attention now because they are a threat to the planet. Their demands for services are a threat to sustainability and therefore we need an 'approach entirely different for planning and providing services' (ICLEI 1996). We might say that the urban poor are getting on to the agenda through the back door but, whatever the reason, it is important that they be on that agenda. However, we would argue for a more positive view of the megacities, a view grounded in the potential and the practices of the urban poor.

Maurice Strong, president of the Earth Council, expresses a more positive approach to our Third World cities. '[U]rban 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) He refers to social, economic, and environmental

problems, but does not mention the essential and key aspect, which is building democratic politics.³ Our argument here follows a simple but solid logic. First, it will only be possible to attend to the needs and demands of poor people with justice and equality if ethical values predominate in the basic decision-making process. Second, that in our complex modern societies, the only way in which ethical principles can be the foundation of decision making is through democratic politics.

Yet, nowhere in the Third World has the social and political basis for sustainable development been so weakened as in our megacities. For instance, in Lima, especially in the low-income areas, development initiatives are reduced to survival tactics: nutrition, employment at any cost, health, and security in the face of violence and delinquency. Thus, extreme individualism tends to override the ethical considerations such as justice and equality and respect for cultural values, especially solidarity, that were always an essential element of community-based organisations (CBOs). Furthermore, the direct intervention of central government agencies and the overt manipulation of poor people in poverty relief programmes are undermining the basis for democratic politics.

Fragmented dreams and fragmented people in the megacity

We would argue that *fragmentation* is a growing problem for human sustainable development and for the democratic political systems that can make such development possible (Joseph 2000). Our concern is therefore with the scenarios and practices that can help to overcome the widespread fragmentation that we find even in our own strategies and programmes. For example, the survival of small businesses often depends on child labour, the denial of social benefits, and extremely long hours. Programmes devoted to building citizenship and promoting 'civic participation' or 'local democracy' often leave aside the concern for the *contents* of the decisions made (Joseph 2000). Such compartmentalisation has fragmented these issues and closed them off from any possibility of more synergetic strategies. In so doing, it has also closed them off from integral and sustainable approaches.

Of even greater concern is that this fragmentation of issues affects the social actors themselves. Each group or organisation, often each person, has their own specific area of interest, and this has seriously weakened the urban popular organisations. By focusing on a single issue and not trying to build common interests and goals, CBOs are less likely to interact and enter into dialogue with organisations which have different, and perhaps conflicting, interests. Such an outlook

leads to conflict, distrust, and a zero-sum logic. In addition, issue-centred programmes tend to be confined to the short term, in an immediate response to essential needs. The longer or wider perspective that is necessary for development to be sustainable is therefore lost. The resulting sensation of being 'defeated' weakens the vision and the will on which sustainable development strategies depend.

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

However, grassroots organisations have lost much of their capacity to relate to and co-ordinate with different sectors. In the past, various CBOs in Lima were co-ordinated through the central 'Neighborhood Committee'. 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 the democratic political systems, CBOs no longer work together in the same way. They have lost the common ground – explicit paradigms and political scenarios – upon which common proposals, common interests, and common values and principles can be built. They have also lost their power to influence public opinion and political decisions.

NGOs have also been part of this fragmentation of issues and actors, partly in response to accusations of being merely the tool of radical political groups (Joseph 2000). Let us mention just a few of the problems and traps that NGO strategies must grapple with. For one, we must address the basic question posed by contributors to this special issue: *whose* sustainable development? In other words, is it possible democratically to build a common ethical basis for human development when dealing with such diverse cultures, ethnic groups, and religions? This is a classic problem in modern ethics and political philosophy. The most effective form of ethical domination today is the imposition of the one-thought world, the *pensée unique* that has been spread around the globe (Joseph 2000). The increasing respect for

individual freedoms and rights to choice seems to be leading to chaos, violence, and anomie. However, on the other end of the ethical spectrum, the greater risk is that ethical principles, values, and norms are imposed on people along with the common good supposedly represented by neo-liberalism. Or, where the neo-liberal model has not been fully successful, authoritarian or fundamentalist regimes are trying to impose their own 'alternative' ethical systems. Is there a real basis for building a common good that can avoid the risks of anomie, imposition by the powerful, or the tyranny of the majority in a democratic system, as was feared by so many liberal thinkers?

A second major trap – this one more on the political level – is often found in strategies designed to approach poverty relief and environmental programmes through different forms of 'participatory democracy' for local development. On the social level we face other problems as we seek to establish a more global strategy of development and democracy. Increasing, massive, and prolonged poverty as well as the widening gap between rich and poor, tend to weaken people's moral fibre and to encourage a savage individualism. The poor, especially those living in the megacities, have absorbed much of this neo-liberal discourse. At the same time, however, they 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 the people, and their political and social organisations, were then on the rise, were building their cities, and were part of a social and political movement that sought to change the world. Today, much of this vital force has been lost, and there is a growing feeling of defeat, of the sheer impossibility of getting out of this hole 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 face in order to move ahead towards sustainable human development. But how and in what scenarios can ethical principles be discussed and developed in such a way that they can guide the development process? How can this be done in a democratic system so that the tyranny of the majority or the manipulation by powerful minorities can be checked and overcome? How can a planned process of human development be made to work in an adverse economic and political context? In particular, how and in what scenarios can people who are immersed in poverty and excluded from most forms of power

in an increasingly unequal and unjust social system become vigorous social and political actors? We are faced with a triple task: to consolidate the individuals and their organisations, which are the point of departure and the goal of 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 Third World megacity.

Megacities of the South

‘Megacity’ is a concept that can be understood in different ways. From the European context, Peter Hall defines it as an urban agglomeration of ten or more millions of inhabitants, and points out that the megacity is growing in importance in developing countries (Hall 1998). In 1960, only 9 of the 19 megacities were in developing countries. Now, this is where 50 of the world’s 60 megacities are to be found. However, although the number of inhabitants is an important factor in the definition, we believe that it is neither the only one, nor the most important. The megacity draws our attention because of its impact on society, development, and the state.

There is another important difference between most of the megacities in Third World countries and the modern megacity. Modernity has not only produced globalised cities linked through the highways of information networks (Castells 1996), but a different type of megacity has started to appear, which is more an *urban agglomerate* than a *city*. These agglomerates do not integrate the urban population, but are instead a physical expression of exclusion and disintegration. Such disintegrated and segregated cities are more common in poor countries, though there are growing indications that the megacities in the North are facing similar problems that weaken the possibilities of consolidating a democratic political system at the service of development.

Some analysts go further, and feel that we are witnessing the death of the city as defined by Jordi Borja:

... that physical, political and cultural complex, European and Mediterranean, but also American and Asian, which we have characterised in our ideology and in our values as a concentration of population and activity, a social and functional mixture, the ability of self-government and a place of symbolic identification and civic participation. City as encounter, exchange, city that means culture and commerce. City as a place and not a simple space for flows (of traffic and people). (Borja 1997: 2, author’s translation)

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 concentrates a large population in both relative and absolute terms. It has over 7 million inhabitants, representing one third of Peru's total population and 44 per cent of its urban population. It also concentrates economic powers (production, finance, commerce), information, and political powers, something that had increased over the ten years of the authoritarian régime of Fujimori. However, in comparison with modern megacities in the North, or the global megacities, Lima is not an urban centre that links and integrates either its own population or that of the other regions of Peru. This is an important factor in explaining why the movements for decentralisation have anti-Lima overtones and often are explicitly opposed to the megacity.

CBOs and sustainable development

The question about 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 Third World countries, of structural adjustment and the one-thought world, our NGO *Centro Alternativa* focused its strategies on the popular urban CBOs. It is well known that Lima's urban poor have organised and found solutions – even if at the survival level – to their basic material needs. In a real sense, the inhabitants of Lima's *barriadas*, or poor neighbourhoods, have built their city.

However, the situation in the megacities in the Third World has changed, as has the reality of the popular urban organisations. These changes are what led the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) to ask us to participate in a study of the situation of the CBOs in the megacities. The purpose was to evaluate CBOs' potential for participating with local governments in integral, sustainable development processes.

Our study (Joseph 1999) confirmed our basic strategy (and option) to work with the urban CBOs and enabled us to fine-tune our strategies for moving towards sustainable development in Lima, building on the strengths of the people and their organisations, but not ignoring the increasing obstacles to reaching our goals. We are currently trying to refine a decentralised approach to development and government in the megacity.

Here we can only briefly summarise the positive aspects of the urban organisations, which 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’ – north, east, and south. The urban squatters organised every stage in developing their habitat: invasion, urban design, basic services, and legalisation. There has been much praise, and rightly so, of the solidarity and co-operation which made this achievement possible. In these scenarios, women began to play a central role in community life and later in political life. Women’s organisations, even more than the family, were the starting point for addressing gender issues in a comprehensive manner.

The following decades (1960–80) were also very vibrant in both the social and political arenas. The workers’ movements grew in number and strength due to industrial expansion and to the support initially given by the military dictatorship to labour unions between 1968 and 1975. The peasant movement experienced similar growth and strengthening when the takeovers of land from the *haciendas* (large land-holdings) were followed by the agrarian reform. The popular urban organisations were also federated in Lima and at a national level. All of these social movements were part of a growing political activity, especially on the part of left and popular parties such as the various Marxist groups and the APRA party. The popular organisations seemed to be part of a movement that would lead to a more just model of human development, based on one or another form of socialism.

From 1980, this reality changed radically. For the purposes of this discussion, we would highlight structural adjustment which began in Peru in more subtle forms from 1975, the beginning of the second phase of the military government. The Fujimori government, which assumed power in 1990, later applied the mandates of the Washington Consensus ‘without anaesthesia’, as has been said. This meant a tremendous reduction in the purchasing power of the poorer urban families, and job losses in factories and public institutions. The loss of jobs also meant the loss of social benefits, especially in healthcare.

As mentioned above, the urban poor responded to the new situation with the same strategies and mechanisms that they had used to build their habitat: courage, creativity, organisation, solidarity, and a sense of justice and dignity. However, if we step back and take a broader look at what has taken place, especially in the last two decades, we find that

not only have the grassroots urban organisations dropped off the news agenda but also the worker and peasant movements have been greatly weakened. This is due in part to structural adjustment in which labour laws have been made 'more flexible' in order to cut production costs and reduce government spending. Any union leader who becomes a nuisance can be quickly thrown into the growing ranks of the unemployed. And the peasant movement has been hard hit 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 neo-liberalism and a strictly market-driven agricultural strategy.

Nor are CBOs a profitable commodity in the market-driven mass media. A good scandal, the more sordid the better, has much more chance of making the news than does the fact that hundreds of thousands of urban poor defy social statistics and are not only surviving, but becoming involved in alternative development processes. The problem is not just the media, for these are essentially a barometer of what is happening in society. In terms of politics, for instance, often 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 use all possible means to get press coverage. Issues of substance have been pushed off the media agenda.

Our approach to sustainable development has gone, and has had to go, far beyond the simple conservation of natural resources. We believe that the conservation of the planet depends not so much on limiting – cutting back on – the use of natural resources, especially in countries where basic material needs are still unsatisfied; rather, it depends on adopting a new, ethical approach to development, in which the economic dimensions and material aspects – the 'having' – are seen as means to 'being', to a high quality of life, to the unlimited expansion of our individual and social capacities. And we need to build a political system that makes such development possible. We have come to understand that in complex modern societies that are built on individual freedoms, ethics can only be brought into development through democratic politics.

A stable structure for sustainability

It is increasingly clear that achieving 'stability' in terms of integral human development is a complex challenge and must be seen as a social (especially educational), political, and economic process. Even if we were to limit the scope of 'sustainable' to the environmental aspects,

it is obvious that without a democratic political system concerns about our planet and its limited resources will have no effect on the decisions taken. We would summarise the different aspects to be taken into account as follows:

Social level

Our point of departure and return in the development process is people and their communities. Development is concerned, as many have said, with people's needs and capacities, and with building communities which permit the highest quality of life. In the urban areas where poor people 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 capacities. This goes beyond mere survival tactics to ensuring that programmes for poverty relief and attention to basic human needs are seen as part of an integral development process. Obviously, this also covers initiatives to improve environmental living conditions in urban areas, such as water supply, solid waste management, and parks and green areas.

Integral development

Efforts to relieve poverty and protect the environment cannot remain at the level of ensuring basic survival. It is also becoming clear that with the levels of massive poverty and the prolonged economic crisis brought about by the application of neo-liberal policies, redistribution measures are even more necessary, but in themselves are not sufficient. It is also plain – and please excuse the repetition – that redistribution, poverty relief, and environmental programmes must be part of an integrated developmental strategy. Development will not be sustainable if this is not achieved.

We must also understand the context in which we are approaching integral and sustainable development, or we run the risk of promoting oversimplified solutions. An example of this is the importance now given to the *informal* economic sector. There has been much emphasis placed on small or micro-enterprises as the magic solution in offering economic development for the urban poor. Our work over the last 20 years with small businesses, which are multiplying in the megacity, shows that most of them are simply survival tactics with little or no chance for accumulation. Larger enterprises have more possibility for growth, but their markets are limited and increasingly invaded by cheap imports.

If we look at the purchasing power of the inhabitants of the northern cone of Lima, however, we do find 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 means furniture, building materials, medicines (natural medicines), and services such as education and recreation, nutrition ... the list is very long. It is not unrealistic to project that local producers could satisfy up to 80 per cent of these demands. However, the monopolistic and transnational production system, the concentration of commerce in a few shopping malls, a financial system which siphons out the savings of poor people, and a free-market policy which offers no protection for emerging enterprises, conspire against the economic dimension of a sustainable development strategy.

Political level

Democratic politics is essential for sustainable development. All our strategies and programmes with the urban poor must be evaluated in relation to their impact on building a democratic, institutionalised (sustainable) political system, which people regard as their principal instrument for moving towards human development. This is another gigantic and 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' that was designed for other realities and other tasks. We need a state that can make development sustainable for the people in poor urban areas. It must do more than 'level' the playing field. It must strengthen the players, give them the tools they need and, especially while they begin to grow, protect them from other oversized players who invade their pitch.

Second, the complex societies of the Third World need much more than simple referendum or plebiscite democracies. 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 an 'independent' government we are becoming aware that without professional political actors, the aspirations and proposals of the people cannot be translated into viable political proposals. Rather, 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 Peru, after an electoral process whose validity was questioned the world over, there will be a swing back to party politics.

The question is how this process will take place and what types of political parties will result.

A third and central aspect concerning the political level, and the one which is closest to our work and concern, is the building of a solid civil society and strengthening of citizens who have a positive approach to politics and a will to participate. Much effort and many resources have been dedicated to programmes – mostly educational – designed to build citizenship and to strengthen ‘civil society’ (Joseph 2000). However, our strategy must centre principally on actors and processes at the sub-national level. In the megacities this means decentralised strategies; so, in the case of metropolitan Lima, for example, we are working on ways to surround the ‘cones’. Within that sub-national urban context, we have focused on what might be called emerging ‘public scenarios’ or ‘public spaces’ where, we believe, conditions are developing for building a new political and popular elite and new forms of linking democracy to development.

‘Public spaces’: a decentralised approach to development and democracy in the megacity

In the UNRISD and UNV study (Joseph 1999), we examined the evolving experience of *concertación* which is occurring in the popular neighbourhoods and 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 does not exactly mean debate, discussion, or consultation, although it includes all of these practices. In a process of *concertación*, different – often conflicting – actors and interest groups sit at the planning table, analyse problems, design solutions, and, when possible, participate in putting these plans into practice. According to Grompone and Mejía, *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 recognised as a legitimate social and political actor (Grompone and Mejía 1995: 217). In these processes and scenarios the actors and institutions involved must be open to making compromises and concessions.

Concertación is taking place in public spaces in which organisations of different natures, with different and often opposing interests, are learning to recognise the others at the table as persons and social players with legitimate rights and interests. They are learning to plan together, to build common interest, and, we believe, to incorporate ethical values and cultural principles into the development planning process, which is essential if development is to be human as well as sustainable. Our major hypothesis, which is also a strategy, is that in these experiences we can find the seeds and ideas for a new democratic system that is an instrument for sustainable development.

This hypothesis is based on the positive aspects we find in the following experiences:

- The new experiences create favourable conditions for discussing development and for broadening the interests of the popular organisations. They also allow concrete demands and needs to be linked in synergetic strategies, and enable people to look beyond the short term to medium- and long-term planning. The process leads to a more integral and human focus on development.
- Through interchange and discussion in the planning processes, the social actors learn to do more than express demands for the things they *lack*. In so doing, they become more aware of their capacities, needs, and interests and they learn to express and defend these in dialogue with others. This self-recognition of interests and aspirations helps the participants to recognise the legitimacy of others' interests, which is essential for building a shared solution.
- In these public spaces it is possible openly to discuss ethical principles and values and to incorporate these in the planning process. It is also possible to broaden and strengthen the basis of trust and solidarity that are essential for building a democratic political system and for development. It is becoming evident that the 'post-material' values can be important factors and may be incorporated into development planning even when the actors are faced with crucial material deficits.
- In these public spaces the social actors begin to value and appreciate the dignity and role of democratic politics, understood as a human activity that is based not only on power but also on discourse, i.e. systems, symbols, and common values.
- A new understanding of, and new relations with, public agencies and local governments are established, thus overcoming the exclusively conflictual relations that tend to predominate.

These are the reasons why we are betting on a strategy that is centred on the strengthening of the popular urban actors, CBOs, and local government and in consolidating the public spaces for *concertación*. In Peru and many other Third World countries, these 'participatory planning' processes, or 'concertations' have drawn a lot of attention and raised considerable expectations, although we are also aware of the need for caution in this regard (Joseph 2000).

Political culture and development

Within the new experiences of 'concertation' that are occurring in these emerging urban public spaces we have begun to focus on the social actors themselves, especially the community leaders, the grassroots urban élite. This is not out of any wish to leave aside the other actors such as local government, political parties, NGOs, and foreign development agencies. Nor do we mean to ignore the adverse economic and political context. We are focusing on the social actors, especially the popular urban leaders, because successes in the other areas depend primarily on these people (Joseph 2000).

Our research into the 'political culture for development' will be based on interviews, focus-group discussions, and direct observation. Our questions and findings fall into three central categories:

- individual and community;
- vision of development; and
- vision of politics.

The first category is the study of grassroots leaders and is centred on the process by which people perceive themselves as individuals. What we are finding is a positive correlation between self-esteem and self-awareness and respect for others and for political processes (Joseph 2000). The converse is that when people and communities have low self-esteem, their values of solidarity and confidence are usually restricted to primary relations (e.g. family, place of origin, religious faith). It is obvious that in planning and evaluating our involvement with the urban communities we must include actions to strengthen individuals and the kinds of relationships and values at work in the community. Likewise, we should include indicators that measure progress or regression in this regard.

The second category includes the working vision of development found in the leaders, assessing whether this is merely short term in focus or more inclusive and long term. We are also seeking to

establish how far social actors appreciate the role of community in achieving personal and community development, or whether progress is understood as being only the result of personal endeavour and competitiveness (Joseph 2000).

The third category of ideas encompasses the political perspective and the construction of 'public spaces'. As we see it, opportunities for reconstructing the 'public domain' and a democratic political system exist primarily at the sub-national or regional level and not only in the megacity (Joseph 2000). We are finding that there is a correlation between the vision of development – more or less human and integral – and the will to participate in the emerging forms of democratic politics.

We would insist, therefore, that these topics – individual and community, sustainable human development, and democratic politics – become part of our common agenda, North and South. We need to do and share more research on the social and political actors, especially in the urban 'public spaces'. Such research needs to be linked to our own work in promoting sustainable development and, in a context such as that of Peru, also linked to promoting good governance within a decentralised strategy.

One final thought is to say that we would do a great disservice to the urban poor communities and leaders if we were to motivate them to participate in the complex processes of democratisation and development without also offering them the opportunities for the kind of education these processes demand. It is not enough simply to 'train' people in techniques for addressing isolated needs and *issues*. They also need the theoretical tools which will allow them to understand themselves, their organisations, democracy, ethics, and development, and the importance of these to sustainable development practices and planning. For this reason, we are also beginning to take on the shared task of building educational opportunities, methods, and materials the leaders require. But telling that story will have to wait for another occasion.

Notes

- 1 This article is based on the paper presented at the May 2000 conference: 'Cities of the South, Sustainable for Whom?' hosted by UNRISD, N-AERUS, and the Federal Polytechnic of Lausanne. It also draws heavily on a paper published in *Development in Practice* (Joseph 2000), and reprinted in Deborah Eade (ed.) (2001) *Debating Development: The Future of NGOs*, Oxford: Oxfam.
- 2 For example, in Peru the 'Cities for Life Forum' prides itself on 'not giving priority to Lima ... [in order] to contribute to the strengthening of the capacities of those who really need them most' (Miranda and Hordijk 1998).
- 3 Not to have sewerage, water, or streetlights is quite a different thing in a shantytown compared with a rural area. If we included quality-of-life indicators such as the number of persons who were victims of violence or robbery, pollution levels, and so on in the last six months, the poverty maps of the megacities would be quite different.

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