

# **The Next Thousand Years: Taking Responsibility for Our Behavior and Its Impact on Future Generations**

by Jeffrey Barber, Integrative Strategies Forum

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## **The Next Thousand Years: Taking Responsibility for Our Behavior and Its Impact on Future Generations**

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*Time is the old justice that examines all offenders.*  
- Shakespeare

*More and more I find I want to be living in a Big Here and a Long Now.*  
- Brian Eno

More often than not, the topic of the distant future is readily dismissed as irrelevant to the day-to-day concerns of realistic people. At most, the majority of people may be concerned about what will transpire during their lifetimes, whether they will be able to provide for themselves and their loved ones comfortably. Perhaps they may also think about what kind of world their grandchildren will inherit. Rarely do more than a handful of people on the planet actively concern themselves with the fate of future generations. Even more rare are those people acknowledging and taking responsibility for the impacts of their current behavior and decisions on those future generations.

### **Another thousand years?**

On January 1, 2000, the world celebrated the "new millennium" marking another thousand years of human history and the beginning of a new cycle. According to most accounts, human civilization is about 10,000 years old. At this point in time, 400 generations ago, the Neolithic period began. After a slow evolution through two million years of the ice-age ridden Pleistocene as hunters and gatherers wandering across the globe to the current, warmer Holocene era, our ancient ancestors took part in humanity's first great transition. This was the revolutionary technological and social leap to **agricultural society** -- making pottery, domesticating animals, cultivating land, and living in settled communities. At this time the total human population was no more than four million.

One thousand years ago the world's population was 265 million people. Empires and civilizations were rising and falling:

- Byzantium kept trying to maintain its power against its Bulgar and Seljuk Turk neighbors;
- within Islam, factions continued to reconfigure their power;

- in India, the Hindu kingdoms faced incursions of Muslim Turks and Afghans, who eventually annexed the Punjab in 1022;
- Western Christianity after Charlemagne began gearing up for the crusades;
- the Normans moved up into England;
- the Vikings who had dominated England moved west, colonized Iceland and discovered America;
- the Mayan confederation celebrated a renaissance in art and architecture after a thousand years of civilization in Central America;
- the Fujiwara family bureaucracy ruled Japan from their capital in Kyoto;
- in China, the Sung dynasty continued their efforts to keep their border enemies at bay -- before Genghis Khan would in the next century unite nomadic Mongols to conquer half the world;
- in Sub-Saharan Africa the state of Ghana, ruling the upper Niger and Senegal river lands, enjoyed centuries of success as a commercial center -- until plundered by northern Berbers in 1087.

Great monuments, artwork, and cities were created honoring gods, kings and ideas; some are remembered, others forgotten.

By 1800, humanity had begun its second great transition, this time to the process and values of **industrial society**, rooted in a fossil-fuel based economy and ideology of limitless growth. The major increases in productivity and resource extraction fed rapidly growing demands of accelerating population growth, which by then was 900 million. In the following two centuries, population, economic growth, resource consumption and pollution would expand at a rapid pace. Just 100 years ago, population reached 1.6 billion, climbing to 2.5 billion by 1950, and more than doubling to over six billion by year 2000. During those two centuries, colonialism gradually placed Europe, North America and Japan in military, economic and political control of most of the world. This cluster of countries, eventually through international institutions directing aid and trade, thus defined the concept and process of "development" for the less-industrialized parts of the world, a process assumed not only desirable but inevitable.

### **Humanity's third transition**

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, signs increasingly appeared of a third great transition to a society qualitatively different from the agricultural and industrial societies preceding it. For some, the nature of this transition would be from an economy based on manufacturing and to an economy focused on the production and use of knowledge – a type of wealth based not on scarcity but on the capacity for limitless reproduction and sharing of information. Others see the transition to an economy wisely using knowledge to balance the economy's fulfillment of human needs with the ecosystem's capacity

to sustain life -- to a **sustainable society**. Some include within this transition the realization of the political promise of democracy.

In 1972, the Club of Rome released their controversial study, *The Limits to Growth*, raising the possibility of industrial and ecological collapse as a result of blind economic growth overshooting the Earth's carrying capacity.<sup>1</sup> Critics blasted the authors as pessimists, harbingers of "doom and gloom" while growth advocates chanted the powers of the deregulated market and free trade as the vehicle for ushering in the expanding harvest of industrial society.<sup>2</sup> Gro Brundtland, Prime Minister of Norway, described the "moods of reaction and isolation" characterizing the 1970s and 1980s as part of a "retreat from social concerns." In the Foreword to *Our Common Future*, the report by the World Commission on Environment and Development, Brundtland explains:<sup>3</sup>

Scientists bring to our attention urgent but complex problems bearing on our very survival: a warming globe, threats to the Earth's ozone layers, deserts consuming agricultural land. We respond by demanding more details, and by assigning the problems to institutions ill equipped to cope with them. Environmental degradation, first seen as mainly a problem of the rich nations and a side effect of industrial wealth, has become a survival issue for developing nations. It is part of the downward spiral of linked ecological and economic decline in which many of the poorest nations are trapped. Despite official hope expressed on all sides, no trends identifiable today, no programmes or policies, offer any real hope of narrowing the growing gap between rich and poor nations. And as part of our 'development', we have amassed weapons arsenals capable of diverting the paths that evolution has followed for millions of years and of creating a planet our ancestors would not recognize.

In the years following the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development, a series of international meetings and discussions took place on how world leaders and concerned citizens might realistically and effectively understand and address the environmental, social, cultural, economic and political problems associated with an increasingly "globalizing" world: the UN Conference on Environment and Development (1992, Rio de Janeiro), UN Conference on Human Rights (1993, Vienna), UN Conference on Population and Development (1994, Cairo); World Summit on Social Development (1995, Copenhagen), International Conference on Women (1995, Beijing), Conference on Human Settlements (1996, Istanbul), World Food Summit (1997, Rome), among others.

However, while experts and politicians continue to debate these issues, an important question is to what degree average citizens are adequately informed and educated about the nature and implications of these problems? Also, what role do citizens have in these issues? What responsibility do they have as citizens to participate in the discussion and the decisions affecting "our common future?"

## **To boldly go**

As a matter of course, the news media relegates the topic of the distant future to the realm of entertainment or occasionally to "science news." In the entertainment realm, television, film and novels readily offer their visions of the future, but too often with familiar formulas and stereotypes. In science fiction, the future is usually portrayed as variations of a high-tech universe of starships and techno-magic (where needs are fulfilled by simple requests to the computer) and apocalyptic wastelands ruled by violent postmodern barbarians. Aliens and future humans may appear physically different from present-day humans, but they are more likely to think, talk and act like familiar

characters from our human history, literature and mythology. The vast majority of stories replay popular and classic plots and personalities clothed in futuristic garb rather than imaginatively project the evolutionary struggle of our species and civilization toward qualitatively higher stages of human development. Rarely do works of popular science fiction film or television reveal significant efforts to envision believable solutions to the problems of global poverty and war or to imagine the next and higher stage of what we now call "democracy." Although many of the people committing their lives towards solving these problems have presented practical proposals, plans and recommendations addressing these challenges, too rarely are these visions incorporated by popular creative artists in projects requiring financing from Hollywood or other mass media decision making centers. The entertainment media instead saturates its audiences with endless productions of laser-sword wielding Jedi knights and space cowboys battling spaceship-riding Mongol hordes (e.g., *Star Trek's* Klingons), or celebrates *Road Warrior* survivalists against post-WWIII bullies.

As for the news media, the topic of the next hundred years, much less the next thousand years, tends to be treated as science fiction. Despite the fact that it is the behavior and choices of people now that will determine the direction and shape of life in the coming decades and centuries, this fact and its implications for each member of the media audience is downplayed and often ignored. The critical international debates about sustainability and economic growth, except as a byline in stories about violent street protests, seem to be weeded out, screened by a dominant journalistic taboo. This minimal to absent attention by the news media to what the World Commission described as "our threatened future" is ironically justified by journalists and media corporations by claiming minimal or absent demand by media audiences for this information. However, if citizens do not receive an adequate education or information about these issues, if audiences do not understand the implications to themselves, their children and grandchildren, and especially if the news media treats them as non-issues, there will indeed be little demand for information. As to the future, it will be viewed not as a responsibility of citizenship but as science fiction fare for a particular consumer market niche.

### **Time to think ahead**

Visualizing how the world and people's lives might change over the coming centuries is a daunting challenge to anyone's imaginative powers. However, if there was ever a time to challenge and engage the best minds of the world to share their opinions about humanity's progress and future, this was it. This was the moment for citizens and world leaders to not just watch fireworks and drink champagne, but to reflect upon the lessons of the past and consider what kinds of future are possible and desirable. It was the time for scholars and experts as well as the common person to share their insights and views about the forces shaping humanity's evolution, with special attention to the impact of the choices and actions by today's citizens on the lives of future generations.

It was also a time to admit mistakes, regrets and fears, for journalists, politicians, artists, community leaders and others to reflect on the paradox of a world of increasing wealth and technological achievements in the midst of deepening global poverty and ecosystem collapse. This was a time like no other to consider what, as global citizens, their responsibility might be and what resolution they would make for this New Era.

## Clouding the bright promise

Ignored by most of the mass media and politicians, others outside the mainstream nevertheless struggled to get their fellow citizens to pay attention beyond the beautiful fireworks to the less amusing reality of social and environmental time bombs. Three years earlier the United Nations General Assembly, reviewing the world's progress in addressing the problems of a deteriorating global environment and deepening poverty, lamented that "the trends are worsening" and called for a renewed effort to address this situation.<sup>4</sup> In *State of the World 2000*, a report "on progress toward a sustainable society," the Worldwatch Institute warned that "the bright promise of a new millennium is now clouded by unprecedented threats to humanity's future." Among some of the prominent crises facing humanity at the turn of the millennium are as follows:

**Climate change.** The Centre for Science and Environment explains the threat of climate change as one of the key issues of our time:

A world heavily dependent on carbon-based fuels for economic growth finds that their use causes a build-up of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, which heats up the planet like a garden greenhouse. As the Earth's surface temperature increases, weather patterns change, resulting in frequent storms and hurricanes. Polar ice melts as a result of the rising temperature and, combined with the thermal expansion of seawater, causes oceans to slowly creep up and swallow low-lying islands. Scientists predict worse if concentrations of greenhouse gases, mostly carbon dioxide but also methane, nitrous oxide and chlorofluorocarbons, continue to build up in the Earth's atmosphere.

While scientists say prevention requires reducing emissions by 50-70 percent below 1990 levels by reducing use of carbon-based fuels, action towards this goal is bogged down in political debates, influenced by powerful corporate lobbies. Although the scientists such as those on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change continue affirming further evidence that "man-made pollution has 'contributed substantially' to global warming and the Earth is likely to get hotter than previously predicted," this news does not have sufficient impact among politicians to keep international negotiations from stalemate or collapse.<sup>5</sup> As the year 2000 neared its end, the *Washington Post* reported how "a three-year effort to conclude an international treaty on global warming collapsed...when the United States and the European Union failed to resolve a dispute over how to curb the release of greenhouse gases that scientists say pose one of the gravest threats to the world's environment."<sup>6</sup> This news then faded into concerns about the slowdown of economic growth and whether consumer demand and purchases would sufficiently increase in the Christmas shopping season.

**Species extinction.** Biologists have been trying to get the public to realize we are now in a period of mass extinction of species -- the largest since the time of the dinosaurs. According to the World Conservation Union (IUCN), "one quarter of the world's mammal species are threatened with extinction, as are nearly 13 percent of plant species."<sup>7</sup>

**Deforestation.** Since pre-agricultural society, 20 to 50 percent of the world's forests have disappeared, leaving forests about 25 percent of the current land surface.<sup>8</sup> In addition to providing a

home to two-thirds of the world's known living species, forests help maintain clean air by absorbing carbon dioxide (storing almost 40 percent of all carbon held by terrestrial systems), and maintain clean water by filtering freshwater and reducing soil erosion and sedimentation. Because of strong demand for wood and paper products and for agricultural land, countries with forests experience increasing pressure to export timber, convert forests to farmland, and to replace old forest with tree plantations. Estimates of deforestation rates vary from 50,000 km to 170,000 km per year.<sup>9</sup> In contrast to the world's forests acting as the "lungs of the planet," conversion of forests through burning and other methods contributes to carbon emissions and climate change. Loss of forest land, which houses two-thirds of the world's known species, also has a direct impact on biodiversity loss, increasing the extinction rate and contributing to new migrations of pests and diseases.

**Food insecurity.** In 1974 the UN World Food Conference set a goal of eradicating hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition within the decade.<sup>10</sup> By the end of the century, however, and despite various international efforts to end hunger, 800 million people remain hungry or starving. The World Health Organization describes this situation as "a travesty" considering it takes place "in a world that has both the resources and knowledge to end this catastrophe."<sup>11</sup> Food insecurity is especially increasing in sub-Saharan Africa, where between 1969-71 and 1995-97 the number of undernourished people doubled, from 89 million to 180 million.<sup>12</sup>

**Land degradation.** Research in 1990 revealed that since World War II agricultural mismanagement had damaged 552 million hectares, 38 percent of today's global cultivated area. At this rate, "47 million hectares will be lost by 2020."<sup>13</sup> After 10,000 years of agriculture, about 11 percent of the world's surface is now used for growing crops and there is little land left suitable for agriculture.<sup>14</sup> Desertification is a particular problem affecting 41 percent of the total land area on earth and more than 900 million people. Southern countries, especially those in Africa, are hit the hardest by desertification. Causes may be from overgrazing, deforestation, and unsustainable agricultural practices. However, Southern countries also blame international trade practices, encouraging intensive land cultivation for export purposes by heavily indebted dryland countries. "When prices of primary commodities exported by the countries drop," explains the Centre for Science and Environment, "the need to exploit more land increases, leading to further land degradation."<sup>15</sup>

**Fresh water shortages.** As more land is irrigated to meet growing demand for food, farmers and others have been pumping water out of the ground faster than it can be replenished by rainfall. As water tables drop, deeper wells are dug and larger pumps are built. Increasingly, water shortages risk conflict between countries. "Groundwater overpumping ranks among the most serious threats to the world's food supply," states Sandra Postel, "yet no government has made a concerted effort to curtail the practice."<sup>16</sup> In the year 2000, 28 percent, or as many as 1.7 billion people lack access to clean drinking water. Furthermore, five million people die each year because of polluted drinking water and poor sanitation. Part of this situation is due to the fact that 90 percent of urban sewage in the developing world is discharged untreated into rivers, lakes and coastal waters. By contrast, in 1997 consumers spent \$42 billion was on bottled water.<sup>17</sup> By the year 2025, says UNEP (1999), two-thirds

of the world's population will live in water stressed conditions. Water shortages and control over water supplies will increasingly be the basis of future international conflicts.

**Population growth.** At the end of the last Ice Age, four million humans wandered the globe. Today, 80 million people are added to the world population each year. In the past 50 years the world's population increased from 2.5 billion to 6.1 billion and in the next 50 years is expected to grow to 8.9 billion. While the number of people expands, the Earth's resources will not. "As population grows," Lester Brown points out, "the shrinking per capita supply of each of these natural resources threatens not only the quality of life but, in some situations, even life itself."<sup>18</sup> Fertility rates are directly correlated with economic prosperity; people blessed with economic security are less inclined toward large families than are people with little support other than from the children they raise. Thus, the main solution to the problem of population growth, aside from access to family planning methods, is the elimination of poverty. Unfortunately, neither poverty eradication or the population rank high on most governments' policy agenda.

**Widening poverty gap.** As the global economy expands, over one billion people are forced to live on incomes less than one dollar a day. By contrast, the world's 225 richest people have a combined wealth of over \$1 trillion. This amount is equal to the total income of almost half (47%) the world's population.<sup>19</sup> According to the UN Development Program (UNDP), "the world has more than enough resources . . . to eradicate the worst forms of poverty from the planet." UNDP estimates that "the total additional yearly investment required to achieve universal access to basic social services would be roughly \$40 billion, 0.1% of world income." This amount, less than annual spending on cigarettes in Europe and a drop in the yearly world military budget (\$780 billion), would pay for basic education, health, nutrition, reproductive health, family planning and safe water and sanitation for all. For the world's 225 richest people, this would amount to only 4% of their combined wealth. Current total overseas development assistance (ODA) is about \$55 billion (1998) -- 0.25% of the world's total GNP of \$22 trillion.<sup>20</sup> Rather than increasing enough to reach UNDP's recommended target, ODA has been continuously shrinking. Unsurprisingly, economic inequality is increasing. In 1820, per capita income differences were no more than three to one. Over the 19th and early 20th centuries, these differences slowly grew, accelerating after World War Two.<sup>21</sup> By 1960, the richest 20% of the world's people had 30 times the income of the poorest; in 1990, the difference was 60 to one; and by 1995 the top fifth collected 82 times as much.<sup>22</sup>

These are all serious obstacles to humanity achieving and sustaining a higher quality of life in the new millennium.

The promise of a sustainable world is obscured not simply by the social, environmental and economic crises themselves, but by the resistance and denial of world leaders and the mass media. While the means to overcome these crises -- or at least lessen their impact -- exists, the denial of their significance and urgency risks eventually the collapse of the social and natural systems upon which humanity depends.

## Agenda 21: News too big to print?

As the millennium and 20th century drew to a close, these and several other crises stood out as obstacles to humanity achieving a higher quality of life for everyone. Critical but neglected questions included:

- How did we get into this situation? What forces are driving these problems?
- What steps are being taken by government and corporate leaders, institutions, and citizens to address these global threats?
- Are the actions being taken adequate?
- If not, what are the obstacles and what is being done to overcome these obstacles?
- Why are citizens not adequately informed?

While steps *are* being taken to address these threats, they are not considered very newsworthy, even on the eve of the millennium. Although an extraordinary moment, the news media and world leaders behaved as usual, focusing their attention on immediate, sensationalist concerns such as potential airline crashes and communications meltdown that might come from the Y2K computer bug or possible terrorist bombings by doomsday cultists to steal the spotlight. Imaginary catastrophes received widespread focus while the actual and ongoing crises went unmentioned. As several newscasters later put it, the big story was a non-story. Coverage of the fireworks in different cities was clearly easier and more entertaining than visions and plans for the next century.

Unfortunately, the world's journalists failed to give even token attention to what the world's leaders are doing to implement the Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century they agreed to in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Nicknamed "Agenda 21," this is the strategic plan to create a global partnership to effectively address the world's crises. Agenda 21 was and remains the set of resolutions for the next century to promote sustainable development as a framework for addressing the *real* global crises. While almost everyone in the industrialized world were repeatedly warned about the infamous Y2K bug, by the end of the year 2000 the majority of the world's citizens had still not heard of Agenda 21 and have no idea what "sustainable development" is or means to their lives. Although some may remember the Earth Summit, that it took place, few know of the agreements and promises made by their governments to ensure a future world that is sustainable.

In September 2000, at the United Nation's Millennium Summit, the UN Secretary-General announced to the world's leaders "you have the authority to speak for, and the ability to transform the lives of six billion people." As the *New York Times* described it, the Millennium Summit was "a gamble, organized not to celebrate a new page on the calendar but to look ahead at what kind of a global society the leaders hope to achieve in this century, if not the millennium to come."<sup>23</sup> However, most of the news coverage focused on President Clinton's efforts at the meeting to renew peace negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians. Little attention was given to the momentum of

international dialogue and efforts through the series of world summits<sup>24</sup> to forge agreement on among the world's nations on policies and actions to implement the Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, not to mention acknowledging the important goal of sustainability or the controversy over globalization.

Just weeks later, however, drawn to the drama of 8,000 protesters from around the world clashing with police in Prague, the news media reported on a meeting there of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. In addition to stories about the anti-globalization protests, which attracted so much attention the previous year against the World Trade Organization's meeting in Seattle, the *Washington Post* carried an article in the business section titled "A new politics born of globalization."<sup>25</sup> In that article, billionaire George Soros warned political leaders that "it is in our enlightened self-interest to make sure that the losers in this global system—and right now there are billions of them—get a chance to participate." Soros clearly explained the increasing attention being paid by national governments and UN agencies in past years: "Because otherwise the people who are disadvantaged will use their political clout to capture the system."<sup>26</sup> As usual for the mass news media, this article did not mention any connection between globalization and sustainable development, nor did it give much space exploring the protesters' criticisms of globalization. Instead, it focused mostly on the opinions of those being criticized, calling attention to "the first, fuzzy outlines of an emerging consensus" among world leaders in the infancy of this "global politics," and pointing out "the need for new global rules and regulations to tame the excesses of global capitalism." The article also cited former Czech president Vaclav Havel's call for "a restructuring of the entire system of values which forms the basis of our civilization today." While such stories do sometimes appear in the news media, they are quickly forgotten beneath the flood of higher-status news, such as the presidential election struggle between George Bush, Jr. and Al Gore, which dominated the news in the following months.

Typically, both presidential candidates in America's "Election 2000" referred to economic growth and free trade as national priorities, while neither even mentioned sustainable development as an issue. Economic globalization, a direct consequence of economic growth and free trade policies, was clearly accepted by both candidates and political parties as an overall positive force, needing only a few adjustments in trade rules to provide the necessary minimal environmental and labor safeguards. Neither candidates nor news media ever once raised the issue of the United States' commitment to the Agenda for the 21st Century or its implementation.

### **Globalization: When borders vanish**

*Globalization*, gradually becoming a household term among those regularly exposed to television and global mass advertising, covers a range of phenomena involved in the growing interconnection of nations and peoples, information, money and goods. The term especially refers to the break-down of national economic and cultural barriers and the build-up of multinational corporate networks and the diffusion of consumer ideology through mass media. Globalization takes several forms: technological, cultural, financial, economic, environmental and political.

**Technological globalization.** The rise and spread of new technologies is a favorite theme of the media. For many, the global reach of new technology is positive news, representing a sharing of knowledge and improvement in people's standard of living. News media continually celebrate the accelerating rate of change due to innovation and diffusion of information technology (IT) -- microprocessors in household appliances, communications satellites and private TV receiver dishes, fiber optics, the Internet, not to mention television and personal computers. As symbolized by the "replicator" computer in *Star Trek*, which appears to create food, tools and seemingly anything from thin air, technology is optimistically viewed as the most likely solution to most of the environmental and social problems we now face. According to the *Star Trek* vision, technology will eliminate hunger, poverty and war on earth. This is the myth of the techno-fix and the ultimate justification for spreading technological innovations throughout the globe.

More immediately, in the mass media's coverage of the millennium, the growing popularity of the internet and especially the success of the new "e-commerce" entrepreneurs captured the primary spotlight on future trends. For example, in "The World in 2000," a special publication of *The Economist*, the editor claimed "the Internet will become the language of the world" and that "many of the gloomy predictions--and gloomy realities--of the 20th century will be happily left behind."<sup>27</sup> Peter Drucker likens the significance of e-commerce in the Knowledge Revolution to that of the railroad in the Industrial Revolution: "In the new mental geography created by the railroad, humanity mastered distance. In the mental geography of e-commerce, distance has been eliminated," Drucker says. "There is only one economy and only one market."<sup>28</sup>

The almost religious faith in technology and globalization, expressed by *The Economist* and many others, reveals the ideological dogma guiding much of the mass media as well as current political decision-making. For the promoters of 21st century capitalism and Western consumer culture, the only alternatives are the "gloomy realities" of authoritarian and feudalistic poverty (i.e., "under-development.") Such faith in the religion of globalization ignores suggestions by writers such as Herman Daly and John Cobb that we should be focusing on economic alternatives which move beyond the industrialist obsession with growth held in common by both capitalism and communism.<sup>29</sup> As if a deadly taboo, the concept of a *sustainable economy* is unhappily left unmentioned as a relevant consideration. Presumably, technology will be invented to take care of any problems.

**Cultural globalization.** In general, the globalization of media, information and the market tends to be portrayed as not only a positive force in the world, but passionately welcome. In many ways, the message of cultural globalization is of the welcome triumph of capitalism and the commercialization of daily life. Humorous television advertisements conveying the image of smiling African bushmen, nomadic Arab shepherders, and Tibetan monks cherishing their computers, video games and cell phones are now commonplace. The message clearly states that the globalization of Western consumer culture is happily embraced by the world -- including the very poor, who in real life could not possibly afford the computers and stereos they are seen setting up in their thatched hut or tree house.

The destructiveness of these commercial values, for example replacing traditional family and community ties with symbolic ties to a global teen consumer culture, is played down, as is the reality

of the one billion people excluded from the global market by their poverty. For these people, the image of global consumer culture add shame and insecurity to their poverty. Adding further insult, the religious and political leaders criticizing the "evils" of "Western society" are typically portrayed as reactionary extremists trying to keep their peoples trapped in medieval ignorance.

**Financial globalization.** Advertisers of investment services frequently portray the clever customer of their services sitting comfortably, making wireless financial transactions from a small laptop, removed from the madding crowd on the beach of a tropical island, in the sunset-hued desert looking down into a vast, majestic canyon, or on a bench surrounded by pigeons in front of the cathedral of San Marco in Venice, quietly getting rich. The instantaneous transmission and reception of financial data creates what Hazel Henderson describes as the "global casino," encouraging so-called investors to play the exchange rates and gamble with the financial stability of nations. The growth of IT also encourages the growth and influence of multinational corporations, providing more efficient communications and distant management, while contributing to the efficiency of company mergers and acquisitions. Investment decisions once based on first-hand knowledge and experience of a company and its products is being replaced by quick assessments and actions regarding financial performance and stock value.

**Economic globalization** refers to the international economic influence and impacts by transnational corporations (TNCs), in particular through the growing web of mergers and acquisitions, global trade and foreign investment, export-oriented production and import-oriented consumption. This influence has been deliberately expanded through the policies of international agencies such as the World Bank and World Trade Organization, as well as national finance and trade ministers promoting deregulation and "free trade" as priorities. The result is the development and strengthening of a global economic system. According to Herman Daly,<sup>30</sup>

Globalization refers to global economic integration of many formerly national economies into one global economy, by free trade and especially by free capital mobility, and also, as a distant but increasingly important third, by easy or uncontrolled migration. Globalization is the effective erasure of national boundaries for economic purposes. . . . In sum globalization is fundamentally the economic integration of the globe.

Hilary French warns us that "the world economy and the natural world that it relies on are both in precarious states as we enter the new millennium, provoking fears that an era of global instability looms on the horizon."<sup>31</sup> For example, one impact of economic globalization is the increase of companies able and quite willing to blackmail local communities by threatening to relocate to other more "agreeable" countries -- unless local government lessens the "burden" of environmental and labor regulations, taxes, and other "disincentives." Another result of globalization is the growing economic power of transnational corporations, having budgets larger than those of many countries and the ability to replace local businesses and economies with global franchise chains and cheaper, imported goods. Herman Daly points out four negative consequences of economic globalization:<sup>32</sup>

1. standards-lowering competition to externalize social and environmental costs to achieve comparative advantage -- the race to the bottom in terms of both efficiency in cost accounting and equity in income distribution;
2. increased tolerance of mergers and monopoly power in domestic markets in order to compete internationally;

3. more intense national specialization according to the dictates of competitive advantage with the consequence of reducing the range of choice of ways to earn a livelihood, and increasing dependence on other countries;
4. promotion of a muddled and self-serving doctrine of 'trade-related intellectual property rights' in direct contradiction to Thomas Jefferson's dictum that 'knowledge is the common property of mankind.'

**Environmental globalization.** "The major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment," Agenda 21 announces, "is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries." Considering the priority of free trade, the elimination of market barriers, and the promotion of economic growth at the heart of economic globalization, it is not surprising that global environmental trends are getting worse. Global warming and climate change is the most obvious global environmental problem which appears to be moving beyond the abilities of current political bodies to stem, due to the strong resistance to changing our current dependence on consuming fossil fuels. However, one of the goals of economic globalization is to increase not decrease consumption and production of goods and services. Increasing consumption and production is one of the major goals of the G77 countries, not to mention other countries. For the most part, environmental protection is perceived as a secondary concern. Some view it as a luxury that can only be afforded after sufficient growth and affluence.

"Given the unequal distribution of the world's wealth and power that has evolved in the last five hundred years," Clive Ponting explains in his book *A Green History of the World*, "it is extremely difficult to deal with problems that cut across national boundaries and with those that entail significant financial and social costs."

The effects of the various pressures on the world (whether they are interpreted as evidence of growing global breakdown or not) have been, and will continue to be, experienced by different countries and different regions in radically different ways, thus reinforcing the difficulties inherent in evolving coherent international strategies or even compatible national ones. Past experience suggests that these pressures will continue to be felt in four main areas -- growing strains on resources, unequal development and distribution of food and wealth, a growing weight of numbers and the threat from the outputs of industrial society in the form of pollution. In each of these areas the shadow of the past falls across all modern societies as they try to find solutions.

Writing about the negotiation of global environmental agreements, Lawrence Susskind says the task of addressing global environmental problems is impossible for single countries, that the solutions require intergovernmental consensus and cooperation, not to mention funding.

Global environmental threats are of growing concern to a broad cross-section of groups within each country as well as to a growing number of countries. Transboundary environmental problems like climate change, the preservation of biodiversity, protection of the oceans, decisions about how best to manage shared resources like Antarctica, or the difficult task of promoting sustainable development go well beyond anything one country or even a group of countries can accomplish on its own.

However, while international bodies such as the World Trade Organization have the legally-binding means to enforce economic agreements, no international body yet exists with the power to enforce environmental agreements. "Unlike economic globalization, policed by the all-powerful World Trade Organization (WTO)," explains the Centre for Science and Environment, an environmental citizens

organization in India, "management of environmental globalization is the responsibility of several independent convention secretariats and multilateral agencies." <sup>33</sup>

In the post-Rio world, while green concerns have gained strength, institutions that govern global environmental concerns have lost ground. The institutional framework for global environmental governance has taken the shape of different convention secretariats -- on climate, biodiversity, hazardous waste, ozone layer protection, desertification, to name but a few. Each secretariat has become an independent organization -- making the framework dispersed and leaderless. The geographical scattering of the institutions has weakened its organizational framework.

Thus, environmental globalization -- the expansion of global environmental deterioration -- represents one of the major impacts of economic globalization and arguments against its underlying rosy vision of limitless growth.

**Political globalization.** As transnational corporations grow in political influence, the sovereignty of national governments shrinks. International governance structures such as the United Nations, the OECD and others essentially fumble with the gigantic task of coordinating these different national and international bodies toward coherent collective global policies, agreements and implementation. The notion of a world government or parliament with legally-binding powers to enforce global law remains a fantasy. However, at this same time a new entity, without physical or political center continues to emerge, in another type of globalization fueled by the internet and other forms of global communication. This entity is what is being called "civil society."

While ignored by mass media, the vision of sustainable communities and societies lies at the heart of the political globalization now taking place, the growth of an international civil society, building cross-border alliances in response to the destructive impacts of economic and cultural globalization. This new player, civil society, emerges on the global stage next to the expanding network of multinational corporations and the shrinking sovereignty of national governments. Like TNCs, the citizens groups and NGOs of civil society have taken advantage of the Internet and other products of technological globalization. These groups are using the internet and other technologies to create coalitions between NGOs, women, indigenous people and others, of affluent and poor regions, linking struggles for healthcare, environmental protection, economic security and social justice. Slowly these efforts are contributing to a worldwide movement for change without any central organizing committee or party in charge.

### **Sustainability: Linking economics, environment and social well-being**

One of the laudable aims of a society is to improve the quality of life for all its citizens. In the past decade *sustainable development* -- a framework balancing economic development, social development and environmental protection -- has been increasingly recognized as the primary means for achieving this aim. Highlighted in 1973 by the Brundtland Commission, <sup>34</sup> sustainable development became the central organizing concept behind the 1992 UN Agenda for the 21st Century. <sup>35</sup> One reason for the wide support for the phrase "sustainable development," former World Bank economist Herman Daly explains, is that "it has been left rather vague -- development is not

distinguished from growth in the Brundtland Report, nor is there any distinction between strong and weak sustainability.<sup>136</sup> According to Daly, this was politically wise as they "managed to put high on the international agenda a concept whose unstated implications were too radical for consensus at the time. But in doing so they have guaranteed eventual discussion of these radical implications."<sup>137</sup>

As to implementing Agenda 21's vision of sustainable development, the principles expressed in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development spell out more specifically key national priorities for the coming century, for example:

- States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem. (Principle 7)
- Environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it. (Principle 4)
- All States and all people shall cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. (Principle 5)
- The special situation and needs of developing countries, particularly the least developed and those most environmentally vulnerable, shall be given special priority. (Principle 6)
- To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States shall reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. (Principle 8)
- States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. (Principle 10)
- National authorities should endeavor to promote the internalization of environmental costs . . . taking into account the approach that the polluter should . . . bear the cost of pollution. (Principle 16)

Perhaps the more sustainable development is discussed as not just a concept but a political and social vision, the more its "radical implications" are being recognized -- frightening the mass news media and politicians into silence. Of the many words exchanged during the new millennium celebration *sustainability* and *sustainable development* were significantly absent. This silence is more than ironic, knowing that sustainability is about the impact of current actions on future generations. As we began our movement into the next thousand years, little serious thought was expressed as to the quality of life of these future generations -- except by the advertisers promoting their products. Likewise, virtually none of the world's leaders, celebrities, or news reporters mentioned Agenda 21, the sustainability plan for the planet to eradicate poverty, prevent environmental destruction, and provide a higher quality of life for everyone. Finally, little attention was given to the responsibility connecting citizens today to those future generations, one of the uncomfortable messages at the heart of sustainability, and perhaps a reason it was set aside.

One of the chief obstacles to achieving sustainability is lack of public awareness of the concept and significance of sustainability, not to mention minimal understanding of the crises and efforts to address those crises. One reason for this unawareness is not so much the public's inherent lack of interest in such information, as some journalists and politicians suggest. The advertising and entertainment industries have effectively demonstrated their ability to arouse interest in a wide variety of otherwise unknown and frequently irrelevant stories and items, especially by announcing they are "in fashion." Many people are strongly driven to quickly learn about news items they believe their peers are already knowledgeable about. Media researchers such as Ben Bagdikian point out the "truism among political scientists that while it is not possible for the media to tell the public what to think, they do tell the public what to think about."<sup>38</sup>

While the public is blamed for their disinterest, Bagdikian highlights the fact that "more than any other single private source and more than any governmental source, the fifty dominant media corporations can set the national agenda."<sup>39</sup> These companies bear responsibility for the fact that citizens know more about consumer brand names and the lives of celebrities than how their current consumption behavior may undermine the health of their grandchildren. Greater attention should focus on this resistance by the mass media as well as politicians to adequately inform and educate citizens about the need to put sustainability on the agenda for their communities and the nation.

## **A grave disconnect**

In his book *The Clock of the Long Now*, Stewart Brand points out that "a grave disconnect is in progress," one in which "our ever-hastier decisions and actions do not respond to our long-term understanding, or to the gravity of responsibility we bear."<sup>40</sup> According to Brand

Civilization is revving itself into a pathologically short attention span. The trend might be coming from the acceleration of technology, the short-horizon perspective of market-driven economics, the next-election perspective of democracies, or the distractions of personal multitasking. All are on the increase. Some sort of balancing corrective to the short-sightedness is needed. . .<sup>41</sup>

Over 25 years ago, the Club of Rome identified the perceptual difficulty in addressing the world's interrelated crises as being "the predicament of mankind."<sup>42</sup> Humanity has the means to perceive the problems yet with all our knowledge and skills somehow cannot understand their "origins, significance and interrelationships" and is thus unable to effectively respond. "This failure occurs," the authors explain, "because we continue to examine single items in the problematique without understanding that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, that change in one element means change in the others."<sup>43</sup>

The storm of fierce political criticism and opposition to the Club of Rome was, however, not in response its critique of reductionism (which tended to be ignored), but to the concept of ecological limits and the need for constraint. Some of the "limits to growth" ideas were taken up in the Global 2000 report by President Carter's Council on Environmental Quality. These ideas and policies were aggressively attacked by the succeeding Reagan Administration and its followers in the 1980s, who

trashed the concept of ecological limits and carrying capacity as examples of the "doom and gloom" ideology of "bleeding-heart liberals" to be readily dismissed if not severely ridiculed.

However, by the end of the 1990s writers such as Lamont Hempel warn us that the problems addressed in the Club of Rome and Global 2000 reports have not disappeared. Rather, they remind us that "we have arrived at the millennium with the means to remake ourselves and the world but without the ecological wisdom to do so safely and sustainably."<sup>44</sup> Hempel also notes that the media, far from attempting the kind of holistic understanding urged by the Club of Rome, tends to emphasize catastrophic events, controversial individuals, or interest-group conflict. "Dramatic events always appear more interesting than the complex forces and institutions that give rise to them," Hempel observes. "Open and effective governance, however, requires that people connect events with driving forces, policy content with process, and individual opinion leaders with institutions."<sup>45</sup>

### **Reductionism: Method of decreasing returns**

Implementing sustainable development, achieving widespread understanding and institutionalization of the values and priorities of sustainability requires a different kind of thinking from the reductionism and narrow specialization dominating mainstream policy decision-making in business and government.

As Buckminster Fuller put it a quarter century ago,<sup>46</sup>

Our failures are a consequence of many factors, but possibly one of the most important is the fact that society operates on the theory that specialization is the key to success, not realizing that specialization precludes comprehensive thinking. This means that the potentially integratable techno-economic advantages accruing to society from the myriad specializations are not comprehended integratively and therefore are not realized, or they are realized only in negative ways . . .

For business, the complexities of decisions concerning the social, environmental and economic impacts of its products and practices ultimately are reduced to the bottomline simplicity of company profits and financial return to shareholders. Within government, the perceptions and value judgements shaping policy decisions also tend to be governed by a reductionist logic assessing social, environmental and economic concerns according to the political bottomline of impact on elections and the public opinion governing those elections.<sup>47</sup> For citizens, policy questions concerning social, environmental and economic issues, especially when defined by the mass media, are far too often reduced to the notion of individual self-interest -- "what's in it for me?" No time is permitted to consider the long-term impacts of those decisions on future generations.

Sustainable development, on the other hand, requires a more integrative understanding by business, government and citizens of the interconnection of interests in social, environmental and economic concerns, especially considering the impacts on future generations. During the last few decades of this century emerged a new awareness of the world and the threats to those living on it. One key insight is of the *interdependency* of social, environmental, economic, political and cultural processes. As we face complex new and old crises such as global warming, population growth and the increasing

gap between rich and poor we learn the old "solutions" do not work, nor do the institutions designed to apply those solutions. Instead, as writers such as Fritjof Capra stress, we first need to "understand the principles of organization that ecosystems have developed to sustain the web of life." This means learning to "think systemically -- in terms of connectedness, context, and processes."<sup>48</sup>

Unfortunately, the media we use to inform ourselves about the world also helps shape our perceptions and thinking patterns in ways that ignore such systemic principles. Instead of the scientific principles of interdependency we are endlessly drilled in the rhetorical art of sound bytes. We and our children are indoctrinated into the logic of the 60 minute, three-act problem, reversal and solution, as well as the theatrical pleasures of *justifiable* violence and vengeance. We are taught to feel public shame for our insufficient consumption, to calmly accept the endless sensory siege by commercial propaganda, and to believe in the illusion that the daily news keeps us informed about what is important. Television's dominant role in people's lives reinforces reductionist thinking. "Part of our inability to come to terms with institutional systems failure," David Korten points out, "stems from the fact that television reduces political discourse to sound bites and academia organizes intellectual inquiry into narrowly specialized disciplines."<sup>49</sup>

Consequently, we become accustomed to dealing with complex issues in fragmented bits and pieces. Yet we live in a complex world in which nearly every aspect of our lives is connected in some way with every other aspect. When we limit ourselves to fragmented approaches to dealing with systemic problems, it is not surprising that our solutions prove inadequate. If our species is to survive the predicaments we have created for ourselves, we must develop a capacity for whole-systems thought and action.

Because the mass media gives so little coverage to sustainability concepts and issues -- quickly claiming there is no "demand" for such news coverage -- the public has little opportunity to become familiar with these ideas or their significance. This is a vicious circle, in which discussion of the sustainable development challenge is essentially suppressed. To a large extent, discussion of "sustainability" and the global condition which it seeks to address is stifled by a virtual media taboo. Public awareness of the challenge and promise of sustainable development is ultimately subverted by a handful of media executives primarily concerned with selling advertisements.

Justification given for the absence of reporting on sustainable development is that it is too complicated, too difficult for mass media audiences to easily grasp or consume. Furthermore, there is the suspicion that such "holistic" approaches are nothing more than New Age eccentricities. Worse, we are told that such stories are "boring" because of their linkage to the tedious bureaucracy of the United Nations. Most of the time, sustainable development news is automatically categorized under "environment," to be spoken about by environmental experts or concerned celebrities.

Another source of resistance to recognizing and acting on the global threats is the individual reductionism rooted in our human brain and nervous system -- which have not evolved fast enough to instinctively sense the danger and find a way out of the trap. Instead, the vast majority of people attend to the immediate pressures of daily life -- job, family, bills, health, and friends.

This political and cultural stalemate cannot be overcome through the standard methods of analytic reductionism. This is especially the case when analysis is subordinated to administrative rationality, by which important questions are channeled into departmental, bureaucratic obscurity, their disappearance later rationalized away by public relations rhetoric. However, while the discussion and ideas may be pushed out of sight, the accumulating momentum of the world's crises does not disappear but simply builds.

### **Integrative strategies: Making the right connections**

The goal of the Earth Summit, assigned by the UN General Assembly in 1989, was "to devise integrated strategies that would halt and reverse the negative impact of human behaviour on the physical environment and promote environmentally sustainable economic development in all countries."<sup>60</sup> Integrative strategies are thus recognized, presumably by the 178 governments adopting Agenda 21, as key to achieving sustainability and a higher quality of life for all.

The concept of *integrative strategies* is intuitively simple. First, in order to address issues involving many levels of complexity, such as economic globalization, climate change, corporate accountability, or democracy-building we need to think about these things in a way that integrates or synthesizes different levels of analysis: scientific,<sup>51</sup> political,<sup>52</sup> economic,<sup>53</sup> and cultural.<sup>54</sup> Secondly, this thinking needs to translate into practical, effective action. Thirdly, to be effective such action often needs to be collaborative, engaging a range of different players and requiring creative dialogue taking into account possibly different values and perceptions, these rooted in different geographies, cultures, political situations and philosophies. Fourthly, integrative strategies require a large time frame, taking into account the needs of future generations and the impacts of current behavior on that future.

Integrative thinking is not an alternative to reductionism but rather locates analytic insights within their systemic context, moving from analysis to synthesis. While specialized, disciplinary knowledge is necessary, knowledge of the dynamic interrelationships spanning those disciplines is also necessary. For problems such as climate change, a scientific understanding of the chemistry and physics of atmosphere is important, but so is the political science of energy and transportation policymaking and an understanding of the political influence of the oil and automobile corporations on those policies. Significantly reducing carbon emissions requires not only interagency coordination within governments (e.g., ministries of environment, transportation, foreign affairs, finance, trade, agriculture) but intergovernmental coordination among nations (e.g., the United States, European Union and G77, particularly OPEC members). No single disciplinary expertise can unravel the knot now preventing movement towards solving this growing crisis.

As with other sustainable development issues, interdisciplinary and interagency dialogue is mandatory not just to understand the problem and options for a solution, but to clarify responsibilities. In addition to historical knowledge of the factors contributing to the problem, an appreciation of the possible impacts of current behavior on the future is essential to the solution.

Furthermore, governments and academic experts cannot by themselves solve global problems such as climate change, food insecurity and poverty, and human rights abuses. The solution to these problems also requires active participation by a wide range of other players, especially those suffering the direct consequences of these problems. Integrative thinking takes into account not only the scientific analysis and the dynamics of governmental policymaking, but also the behavior, priorities and perspectives within the corporate, trade union and civil society sectors, as well as those groups within the public most directly involved or affected.

Governments and intergovernmental organizations are increasingly recognizing the need for dialogue among "stakeholders." For some time, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an important intergovernmental policymaking institution among the industrialized countries has sought input from corporations (Business and Industry Advisory Committee) and trade unions (Trade Union Advisory Committee), and have more recently invited inputs from nongovernmental organizations (such as ISF).<sup>55</sup> "Transparency" and "public participation" are now more actively prioritized by OECD, the United Nations, and other such bodies. This attention has become especially pronounced since the scandal and failure of the OECD's secretive Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) in 1996<sup>56</sup> and with the subsequent series of international protests of the WTO, World Bank, and IMF.

Even business associations such as the World Business Council on Sustainable Development stress the need for "a process that brings the different stakeholders, governments, business and civil society together in further defining the options to improve our global governance."<sup>57</sup> As they point out, "a blue print of global governance from business only would be about as welcome and credible as a reform of corporate governance from non-governmental organizations only."<sup>58</sup>

While such multi-stakeholder dialogues can be an important element in integrative strategies and solutions, civil society organizations are quite familiar with the tendency of industry associations and other corporate lobbyists to use the multi-stakeholder concept as a public relations tool. In this usage, the objective of the dialogue is more towards improving corporate image than actual behavior.<sup>59</sup> While associations such as the World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD) highlight their efforts in promoting "corporate social responsibility,"<sup>60</sup> corporate lobbyists such those in the Global Climate Coalition and other groups aggressively demonstrate their commitment to undermining progress towards sustainability, such as the agreement on climate change. Business associations such as the WBCSD and the International Chamber of Commerce, according to citizen groups such as Corporate Europe Observatory, display a "mastery of the doctrine of corporate environmentalism." Using a strategy portraying corporations as part of the solution and not the problem, these corporate groups "have co-opted the debate in such a way that there is now general acceptance among many governments, the public, and even several environmental groups that any realistic solutions to global environmental problems have to avoid regulations and trust the market to deliver the right responses."<sup>61</sup>

The problem is clearly not simply a matter being properly informed and acting on that understanding. The situation demands action addressing the powerful institutional resistance against structural change

and redistribution of power. "The paradox," Hempel explains, "is that as the need for global cooperation grows stronger, so does the power to prevent it." While scientists, public interest advocates and informed citizens increasingly recognize the need for institutional and cultural change to meet the global challenge, those in comfortable positions of power and privilege are unsurprisingly using their position to stall the process. The circle returns to self-interested individuals shaped and motivated by flawed social structures, defending the system which they believe benefits them, hardened to the pain and the damage it causes to others. Hempel describes the situation thus:

Despite the new ecological and political realities, the search for cooperation is thwarted at every turn by interests and institutions that benefit from the accelerating struggle for advantage in material wealth and power. The world's most educated societies continue to invest their best minds in the pursuit of quarterly profits, legal sufficiency, military supremacy, and technological innovations that cater to instant gratification. Unfortunately, the priorities that guide this use of human resources, and the related consumption of natural resources, are premised on an unsustainable vision of economic growth that fails to distinguish adequately between quantitative and qualitative indicators of value. What makes the vision unsustainable is the presence of ecological limits; what perpetuates it for the time being is excessive faith in technology and the fact that ecological limits will impinge on future generations much more than they do on the present, thus shifting the burden of adjustment or deprivation to those who are now politically powerless.

Given the economists' penchant for discounting the future, the engrossment of businessmen with quarterly earnings, and politicians' preoccupation with the next election cycle, it is not surprising that modern societies are ill-prepared to resolve environmental problems that unfold over decades and even centuries.<sup>62</sup>

While holistic understanding and changed perceptions and values may be necessary for decision-makers to effect necessary institutional changes, many of these decision-makers do not want to give up their privileges in reaping the short-term material and psychological benefits. Unfortunately, as Andy Schmockler points out in his book *Parable of the Tribes*, the evolution of civilization has been "a dialectic between the systematic selection for power and the human striving for a human world."<sup>63</sup> When power is valued for itself, understanding may be viewed as a threat.

"We are experiencing a global epidemic of institutional failure that knows no bounds," says Dee Hock, the founder of Visa. "We must seriously question the concepts underlying the current structures of organization and whether they are suitable to the management of accelerating societal and environmental problems -- and, even beyond that, we must seriously consider whether they are the primary cause of those problems."<sup>64</sup>

This next decade in particular represents a turning point for our species. Resistance to this realization can be found throughout society: from entrenched political leaders defending their turf; from business leaders concerned more about expanding corporate rights and reach than taking responsibility; from career academics tied to old paradigms; from overworked employees who do not have the time or energy for "politics;" from uninformed shareholders thinking only about returns and not the impacts of their investments; from rigid institutional hierarchies enforcing adherence to obsolete policies; from schools, universities, and research institutions driven more by their budgets than their mission; from an advertisement-driven news and entertainment media concerned more with winning market share

than educating their audience. For these different entities and many more it is difficult enough to see the current danger facing our species much less organize a rescue effort.

### **Taking responsibility: Three integrative strategies**

**NGO Taskforce on Business and Industry.** One integrative strategy for addressing the challenge of moving the corporate sector towards more environmentally and socially responsible policies and behavior was to create the NGO Taskforce on Business and Industry (ToBI).<sup>65</sup> This coalition was created to establish a strong, cohesive and critical civil society presence addressing the 1997 UN General Assembly's review of progress on sustainable development since the Earth Summit. One of ToBI's objectives was to emphasize to government delegations the distinction between corporate *responsibility* and corporate *accountability*, that both are necessary for sustainable development.<sup>66</sup> In its collective statement by over 70 civil society organizations, ToBI argued that

Just as individuals in society require both morals and laws to guide their behavior, responsibility and accountability are both necessary to guide corporate conduct. While corporate responsibility is behavior that is encouraged, corporate accountability is behavior that is required. Thus, corporate responsibility is a choice of business; corporate accountability is an obligation of government and civil society.

In this strategy, ToBI represents a collective vehicle by which civil society organizations clearly articulate a set of perspectives and policy priorities regarding corporate behavior and globalization. This was intended to sharpen and clarify the debate over the *voluntary approach* to corporate change pushed by the industry associations and the argument for more effective regulations and enforcement of transnational corporate conduct. Keeping in mind the long view, ToBI recognizes that corporations and their associations need to do a lot more than improve the ecoefficiency of their production processes or the sophistication of their ecological rhetoric.<sup>67</sup>

**SP&C Watch.** Another integrative strategy used by civil society groups to influence government policymakers in moving forward the sustainability agenda is the SP&C Watch initiative, an international collaboration to monitor progress towards sustainable production and consumption (SP&C) policy and practices.<sup>68</sup> SP&C Watch starts from the premise established in Agenda 21 stating that "the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries."<sup>69</sup> This premise highlights the importance for governments to "develop a domestic policy framework that will encourage a shift to more sustainable patterns of production and consumption" as agreed in the Agenda 21 plan.<sup>70</sup> This civil society monitoring of progress in establishing and implementing national SP&C policy frameworks provides a way of bringing out the reductionist interpretation of sustainable development by governments, which regularly prioritize liberalized trade, deregulation and economic growth over sustainable production and consumption policies.<sup>71</sup> Considering the fact that trade is in reality a subset of marketing and sales, in turn a subset of product distribution, the subordination and neglect of production and consumption policies is stark.

While in some ways, SP&C Watch's objective of lobbying for national SP&C policy frameworks might be seen as a "losing battle," it serves the strategic objective of focusing attention and effort on

the larger task of developing an alternative to the current economic system. SPAC Watch presents a schema by which consumption, investment, production and distribution are each evaluated according to their impact on sustainability and the goal of improving the quality of life for all. This schema is deliberately in contrast to the current practice of evaluating policies and behavior according to their contribution to economic growth.

**International Sustainable Communities Forum.** A third integrative strategy developed by civil society groups is the International Sustainable Communities Forum, a gathering of activists and community organizers from various countries around the world to share their experiences and ideas about developing sustainable communities. "The great challenge of our time," Fritjof Capra announced in *Tikkun's* special issue on the Millennium, "is to build and nurture sustainable communities."<sup>72</sup>

Since its introduction in the early 1980s, the concept of sustainability has often been distorted, co-opted, and even trivialized by being used without the ecological context that gives it its proper meaning. In its correct usage, what is sustained in a sustainable community is not economic growth or development but the entire web of life on which our long-term survival depends. In other words, a sustainable community is designed in such a way that its ways of life, business, economy, physical structures, and technologies do not interfere with nature's inherent ability to sustain life.

The goal of this strategy is to help raise specific issues and prepare the ground for important "inter-local" dialogues on how the communities of the world can share the wealth of local wisdom and support each other in the face of common environmental, social and economic threats.

The first International Sustainable Communities Forum (SusCom 2) was held in New York on April 12-13, 1997, in conjunction with the Fifth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. This gathering was sponsored by three civil society networks: US Citizens Network for Sustainable Development (USA), the Northern Alliance for Sustainability (Netherlands), and the Environmental Liaison Center International (Kenya). The event provided an opportunity for the organizations in these networks and engaged in Local Agenda 21 and other sustainable community initiatives to meet with each other and share their knowledge and skills, concerns and critiques, tools and strategies.

The second Forum is currently being discussed and planned by the three original organizing networks as well as several other civil society networks.

## Shaping the future

While the idea of the millennium may be symbolic, the challenge of transition to a qualitatively different kind of society and way of life is real. In the long run, this challenge has nothing to do with the year 2000 or the completion of the thousand year cycle. It does have to do with the ending of the socio-economic cycle of industrial society and the long history of authoritarian politics, warfare and exploitation. The challenge has to do with a planet that can no longer physically support the institutionalized greed and struggle for power that has motivated hundreds of years of human history. The planet – or rather the human species -- cannot survive a season of nuclear wars and nuclear

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winters; it cannot provide for the wasteful and polluting "American Dream" of expanding consumerism for a multiplying global population.

Humanity cannot sustain its current course of economic growth, social injustice and ecological abuse and still hope to realize the democratic vision of future generations. To overcome these barriers means that each person, each citizen needs to take responsibility for their behavior. They need to learn to think and act qualitatively differently, to aim for more than personal happiness and success but for a higher quality of life for everyone. They need to contribute their part in the development of an economy and society that will sustain that quality of life for both current and future generations.

December 31, 2000  
Washington, D.C.

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<sup>1</sup> Meadows, Donella, et al. *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*. New American Library, New York, 1972.

<sup>2</sup> "Doom and gloom" was a common expression used by the Reagan Administration and its supporters to describe much of the concerns by environmentalists, labor, human rights and other activists about global conditions.

<sup>3</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development. *Our Common Future*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987, p. xi.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, *Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21*, UN General Assembly, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Washington Post. "Global warming theory affirmed." October 26, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Washington Post. "Global warming talks collapse: U.S., EU fail to resolve dispute over curbing emissions." November 26, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> French, Hilary. *Vanishing Borders: Protecting the Planet in the Age of Globalization*. W. W. Norton, New York, 2000, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> World Resources Institute. *World Resources: 2000-2001: People and Ecosystems*. Washington, D.C., 2000, p. 88.

<sup>9</sup> World Resources Institute. *World Resources: 2000-2001: People and Ecosystems*. Washington, D.C., 2000, p. 90.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations. Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition. World Food Conference, Rome, U.N. Doc. E/CONF. 65/20, at 1 (1974).

<sup>11</sup> World Health Organization, "Malnutrition -- the global picture." WHO web site.

<sup>12</sup> Barber, Jeffrey. *The Sustainable Production and Consumption of Food*. Integrative Strategies Forum, April 21, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Gardner, Gary. *Shrinking Fields: Cropland Loss in a World of Eight Billion*, Worldwatch, July 1996.

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<sup>14</sup> Poting, Clive. *A Green History of the World: The Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilizations*. Penguin, London, 1991, p. 404.

<sup>15</sup> Agarwal, Anil; Sunita Narain and Anju Sharma. *Green Politics: Global Environmental Negotiations*. Centre for Science and Environment. New Delhi, India, 1999, p. 163.

<sup>16</sup> Postel, Sandra. "Redesigning irrigated agriculture," in *State of the World 2000*, Worldwatch, p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> World Resources Institute. *World Resources: 2000-2001: People and Ecosystems*. Washington, D.C., 2000, p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, Lester R. , "Challenges of the new century," in *State of the World 2000*, Worldwatch Institute, 2000, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> UN Development Program. *Human Development Report 1998*, p. 30.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.37.

<sup>21</sup> Jolly, Richard. "Global inequality, human rights and the challenge for the 21st century," in *The Creative Society of the 21st Century*. OECD, 2000, p. 79.

<sup>22</sup> UNDP. *Human Development Report 1998*, p. 29.

<sup>23</sup> "The state of the world, and the world to be, in 149 chapters," New York Times, September 7, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> After the Earth Summit, several other UN-sponsored international conferences highlighted in greater detail some of the key themes discussed at Rio: social development, women's rights, human rights, population, human settlements, food security, fresh water, climate change, deforestation, biodiversity.

<sup>25</sup> *Washington Post*. "A new politics born of globalization." October 1, 2000.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Fishburn, Dudley. "The World in 2000," *The Economist*, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Drucker, Peter. "Beyond the information revolution," *Atlantic Monthly*, October 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Daly, Herman and John Cobb. *For the Common Good*. Beacon Press, Boston, 1989.

<sup>30</sup> Remarks by Herman E. Daly on "Globalization" at The Aspen Institute's 50th Anniversary Conference, August 20, 2000.

<sup>31</sup> French, Hilary, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> Remarks by Herman Daly (Aspen lecture.)

<sup>33</sup> Agarwal, Anil; Sunita Narain & Anju Sharma. *Global Environmental Negotiations: Green Politics*. Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, 1999.

<sup>34</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development. *Our Common Future*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987, p. 43.

<sup>35</sup> United Nations. *Agenda 21: Programme of Action for Sustainable Development*. New York, 1992.

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<sup>36</sup> Daly, Herman E. and John B. Cobb, Jr. *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future*. Beacon Press, Boston, 1989, p. 75.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Bagdikian, Ben H. *The Media Monopoly*. Beacon Press, Boston, 2000.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. lv.

<sup>40</sup> Brand, Stewart. *The Clock of the Long Now: Time and Responsibility*, Basic Books, 1999, p.2.

<sup>41</sup> Brand, Stewart.

<sup>42</sup> Meadows, Donella; Dennis Meadows, et al. *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*. New American Library, 1972, p. xi.

<sup>43</sup> Meadows, Donella, et al.

<sup>44</sup> Hempel, Lamont C. *Environmental Governance: The Global Challenge*. Island Press, 1996, p. xi.

<sup>45</sup> Hempel, Lamont C.

<sup>46</sup> Fuller, Buckminster. *Operating Guide for Spaceship Earth*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1969.

<sup>47</sup> Washington Post. "Policy and politics by the numbers," December 3, 2000. The subtitle to this article is "For the President, polls became a defining force in his administration."

<sup>48</sup> Capra, Fritjof. "The challenge of the twenty-first century," *Tikkun*, January/February 2000.

<sup>49</sup> Korten, David. *When Corporations Rule the World*. Kumarian Press, West Hartford, 1995, p.11.

<sup>50</sup> United Nations. "Introduction" to *Agenda 21*. New York, 1992.

<sup>51</sup> For example, Tom Malone's Global Change research, involving the integration of knowledge and cooperation of different scientists in addressing global challenges; E. O. Wilson's concept of "consilience" among the disciplines

<sup>52</sup> For example, an understanding of the power relationships and decision making variables, one of the key points in Andrew Schmookler's Parable of the Tribes, not to mention the tireless public advocacy work of people like Ralph Nader, attempting to counter the endless corruption

<sup>53</sup> The money interests involved, the "costs and benefits" driving much of the decision making, as David Korten, Herman Daly and John Cobb and others have pointed out; warning us of the global tragedy of the commons associated with globalization, Charles Konigsberg, points out that "economic power is at once political-social-ecological and cultural power more so in the modern period than ever before"

<sup>54</sup> The underlying value assumptions involved, how public understanding and perceptions are shaped by media, education system, religion, etc., highlighted by Gregory Bateson, Thomas Berry, Hazel Henderson, Fritjof Capra, among others.

<sup>55</sup> For example, ISF was invited to provide comments in the development of both the OECD's Sustainable Development Initiative and the 2000 revision of the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises.

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<sup>56</sup> The MAI became a scandal when civil society groups uncovered and publicized the attempt by economic and trade ministers, particularly in industrialized countries, sought to quietly negotiate an international agreement giving special rights to corporations which would override national environmental and social regulations. These negotiations were mostly unknown to most environmental and social ministers, as well as the general public.

<sup>57</sup> World Business Council for Sustainable Development. "Designing better governance: an issue in dialogue." 2000.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Note books such as Kenny Bruno's *Greenwashing*, Josh Karliner's *Corporate Planet*, Sharon Beder's *Global Spin: The Corporate Assault on Environmentalism*, John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton's *Toxic Sludge is Good For You!* and many other works documenting industry's twisting of facts and perceptions to disguise corporate abuses and create undeserved positive images for irresponsible companies.

<sup>60</sup> In one WBCSD publication, the authors explain: "Our basic message is very simple. Business is not divorced from the rest of society. Business and society are interdependent and we must ensure, through mutual understanding and responsible behavior, that the role of business in building a better future is recognized and encourage." In *Corporate Social Responsibility: Making Good Business Sense*. WBCSD, January 2000.

<sup>61</sup> Corporate Europe Observatory. *Greenhouse Market Mania: UN Climate Talks Corrupted by Corporate Pseudo-solutions*. Amsterdam, Netherlands, November 2000.

<sup>62</sup> Hempel, Lamont C. p.2.

<sup>63</sup> Schmockler, Andrew Bard. *The Parable of the Tribes: The Problem of Power in Social Evolution*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1984, p. 30.

<sup>64</sup> Hock, Dee. *Birth of the Chaordic Age*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. San Francisco, 1999, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup> See the ToBI website, [www.isforum.org/tobi](http://www.isforum.org/tobi).

<sup>66</sup> NGO Taskforce on Business & Industry. *Minding Our Business: The Role of Accountability in Sustainable Development*. Washington, D.C., March 31, 1997.

<sup>67</sup> NGO Taskforce on Business & Industry. *Can Corporations Be Trusted? Towards Social and Environmental Responsibility and Accountability in the Corporate Sector*. Washington, D.C., February 1999.

<sup>68</sup> See the SP&C Watch website, [www.isforum.org/spac](http://www.isforum.org/spac).

<sup>69</sup> United Nations. *Agenda 21*, Chapter 4, 1992.

<sup>70</sup> United Nations. *Agenda 21*, Chapter 4. 1992.

<sup>71</sup> Barber, Jeffrey. *The Sustainable Production and Consumption of Food: A SPAC Watch Working Paper*. Integrative Strategies Forum, April 21, 2000.

<sup>72</sup> Capra, Fritjof. "The challenge of the twenty-first century." *Tikkun*, January/February 2000.