

A GROUNDSWELL OF BUSINESSES AND COMMUNITIES BASED ON CARING, SHARING AND COOPERATION PROPELLING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Often overshadowed by social atrocities, natural disasters and economic crises, a powerful groundswell is emerging in our midst, based on caring, sharing, community and cooperation. Its various aspects are referred to as *cooperatives, commons, collaborative or solidarity economies and shared societies*. It is developing societal and business forms and other wherewithal well suited to an interdependent, sustainable world. It is doing so for free or financed through a combination of barter, alternative and hard currencies.

Governments are gradually becoming a part of this movement. The more they access this momentous resource the more they can help it develop and ensure no one is left behind. In so doing, they will partake of a very much broader concept of financing.

Here is a brief overview of some of its components and ways in which Governments can harness its full support for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the development of an effective Post 2015 agenda for sustainable development.

The overview of the components of this movement is followed by 10 suggestions made by 90-odd formerly democratically elected Heads of State and Government (Members of the Club of Madrid) who are proponents of this movement. These suggestions are elaborated on by the United Nations Major Group Commons Cluster, a network of individuals and representatives of UN ECOSOC accredited NGOs who are dedicated to enabling collaboration between this movement and Governments via the UN.

COOPERATIVES—Businesses that reinvest in their communities including globally

There are 2.6 million cooperative enterprises worldwide, which, like other businesses, are profit-based and contribute to the building of economies at all levels. They provide 250 million jobs (12% of jobs in the G20 countries). With (according to UN statistics) one billion members worldwide, they have annual revenues of USD 250 trillion—the equivalent of the 7th largest economy in the world.

Their Cooperative Identity is based on the principle of cooperation, expressed as follows:

- ***Cooperation between their members*** Since they are managed by their workers (i.e. owner-operated) profits are shared democratically among all involved, thereby creating a sense of cohesiveness among members as well as an ethic of hard work. They tend to do well even in times of economic downturn.
- ***Cooperation and solidarity with the communities in which they are active.*** Since most cooperatives belong also to international associations, a part of their profits go to the development of those in need locally, nationally and also internationally.
- ***Care for the environment.***

Because of these characteristics, they weave together the social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainable development in their daily activities.

COMMONS tend to focus on accessibility rather than ownership.

Commons, like its business arm, *cooperatives*, are characterized by democratic decision making processes that are inclusive, transparent and fair, care for the resources they manage/steward and the equitable sharing of benefits. They are interested in providing accessibility to goods and services rather than ownership. On the Internet alone it is estimated that commons provide the equivalent of USD 1.3 trillion in Intellectual Property Rights *for free*, many under innovative commons-based licenses, such as Open Source, General Public Licensing or Copyleft.

COOPERATIVES AND COMMONS exist at every level of society worldwide.

These communities based on caring, sharing and cooperation have existed since time immemorial and are still a way of life for many Indigenous communities. Commons and cooperatives can consist of a few people or they can be huge national even global institutions. Examples of commons include: thousands of Ecovillages, Transition Towns, Sarvodaya communities globally; community-based rehydration and forest management initiatives, local currencies to reinvigorate flagging local economies; bicycle or car sharing. The Internet is a commons which contains many commons within it: gratis education in every conceivable field and at every level, including Harvard professors lecturing to 10s of 1000s of students worldwide. All of MIT's coursework is available free of charge on line. There are blueprints for technology transfer that can be developed on line, including for renewable energy, that once developed would provide energy practically for free.

Examples of cooperatives include a few medical professionals sharing a common practice, farmers and fisherman sharing tools and voluntarily curbing their activities globally to regenerate species, land or water quality. Schools, universities, insurance companies, banks—businesses in every possible field are being run as cooperatives, including Des Jardins, the largest bank in Canada, Migros the huge Swiss supermarket chain, and HMOs in the USA. Agricultural products are the largest Danish export and these are produced almost exclusively by cooperatives.

GOVERNMENTS often play a key role in these so-called “solidarity economies”.

They can support their development, use and implementation. Examples include trade unions, workman's compensation, national health systems, the Norwegian Pension Fund and Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal. Senegal has an Ecovillage Ministry. Governments via the UN administer Global Commons, including Antarctica, Outer Space and the Sea-bed Outside of National Jurisdiction.

COMMUNITIES OF CARING, SHARING AND COOPERATION HAVE COMMON CHARACTERISTICS that go to the very heart of today's sustainable development efforts.

Here are just a few;

1. They empower people to take responsibility for those resources and aspects of their lives that most contribute to the development of their individual potential;
2. Each member, be they an individual, organization or nation, is recognized for his/her/its individuality; diversity is seen as a means to strengthen the bonds that unite them.
3. All participants are seen as equal in terms of decision making. This empowers all individually and increases their motivation to contribute to their common endeavours.
4. All participants benefit from collective successes. This causes them to work hard, so that commons and cooperatives tend to do well even in times of economic downturn.
5. These communities are inclusive, empower all stakeholders and leave no one behind.
6. They are dedicated to the three pillars of sustainable development and naturally integrate these in their activities, thus overcoming the silo effect.
7. They take good care of the natural and social resources and foster social cohesiveness.
8. Together they dispose over huge financial assets and other invaluable resources that they share both internally and with the communities in which they are active.
9. They have become powerful engines for sustainable development worldwide.
10. Individual people, organizations and nations are increasingly members of multiple sharing communities, each person forming a node in a growing network of caring, sharing and cooperation that through its many inter-linkages unites people across national and other borders in a multiplicity of activities dedicated to sharing and sustainability.

Ethan Miller, founding member of the U.S. Solidarity Economy Network (www.ussen.org) writes: *"The core idea is simple: alternatives are everywhere and our task is to identify them and connect them in ways that build a coherent and powerful social movement for another economy. In this way, solidarity economy is not so much a model of economic organization as it is a process of economic organizing; it is not a vision, but an active process of collective visioning."*

OVER 90 DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED FORMER PRESIDENTS AND PRIME MINISTERS coined the phrase "Shared Societies" in 2007 to describe this phenomenon.

They had formed the "Club of Madrid" because they wanted to make their experience and expertise available to current leaders facing the major challenges of today. They agreed that the concept of shared societies would be underpinned by four key principles:

1. Respect for the dignity of the individual and his or her community,
2. Absence of discrimination,
3. Protection of his or her human rights;
4. The opportunity to participate, ideally, but not exclusively through a democratic process...(See also: www.clubmadrid.org/en/programme/the_shared_societies_project)

The Club of Madrid agreed on 10 Commitments—*aspects of policy and inter-group relations that are key to achieving a Shared Society*. The **Comments** come from members of the United Nations Major Group Commons Cluster (an integral part of this movement) www.CommonsActionfortheUnitedNations.org). These point both to how Governments can tap into the finances and other wherewithal within shared societies and harness them

for implementation of the Post 2015 agenda, while building stronger bonds for collaboration. The original wording of the Commitments is in italics¹.

HOW GOVERNMENTS CAN CREATE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT TO UNLEASH THE FULL POTENTIAL AND SUPPORT INHERENT IN THIS GROUNDSWELL OF CARING, SHARING AND COOPERATIVE RELATIONS

Commitment I: *Locate responsibility to ensure the promotion of social cohesion clearly within government structures*

Comment: This means cohesion between all facets of government, ***including with governments' representatives in their UN Missions***, for these are in the best position to foster strong bonds with relevant global facets of Shared Society. There must also be feedback loops between representatives of Shared Society and relevant government structures for only then can governments tap into this huge resource.

Commitment II. *Create opportunities for minorities and marginalized groups and communities to be consulted about their needs and their perception of the responsiveness of state and community structures to meet those needs.*

Comment: The United Nations has made a remarkable start in involving these in global consultations (be it via email, NGOs in the field, UNDP or other UN agencies.); and summarizing the input received. If this process is to flourish and no one is to be left behind then it is critical that Governments both read the input received from the grassroots and ***respond to it*** in such a way that their citizens know they are being heard. Otherwise inevitable apathy and resentment will build against Governments and the UN and the latter will have lost contact with the very section of society they must reach for their poverty alleviation efforts.

Commitment III. *Ensure that social cohesion is considered in devising governance structures, policy formulation and policy implementation and establish procedures and mechanisms to ensure this is achieved and to reconcile divergent positions between sectional interests.*

Commitment IV. *Ensure that the legal framework protects the rights of the individual and prohibits discrimination based on ethnic, religious, gender, or cultural difference.*

Comments on III and IV: Important tools include (1) A full human-rights approach to empower all individually and in their community relations. This will go to a root cause of many conflicts. (2) Ongoing communication between people and their governments at all levels through the implementation of Rio Principle 10; and regular global and nationwide consultations; (3.) Education in and practice of peaceful conflict resolution starting with 8 year olds (as is already being done in a number of schools around the world); and the implementation of Eight Action Areas of the Culture of Peace..

Commitment V. *Take steps to deal with economic disadvantages faced by sections of society who are discriminated against, and ensure equal access to opportunities and resources.*

¹ The information on the Club of Madrid is taken from a side event at the United Nations on Oct. 8, 2014. organized by the Club of Madrid and sponsored by Italy and Slovenia; and the magazine Development that was passed out there: Development. Shared Societies, Volume 57.Number 7.2014.

Comment:1. Providing access to the Internet and all of the many free and inexpensive resources this provides is a powerful tool to empower **all** people to develop their **individual** potential and to dip into the fount of creativity that exists within each. ODA can usefully be applied to this relatively inexpensive way of unleashing individual potential at every level of society, including among the most marginalized. Internet access can be facilitated to whole communities where there are computers with broadband Internet connections available to all residents, as well as facilitators who can access the Internet for those who are (IT) illiterate.

Comment 2. It is essential there should be a level playing field for cooperatives. There should be no limits to cooperative activity; indivisible reserves should not be considered as income by the tax system, as it is not possible to make any kind of individual appropriation; accounting standards should recognize cooperative members' shares as equity and not liability even if the members have an unconditional right of withdrawal; they should not be made to carry more administrative burdens and costs than other types of companies (e.g. capital requirements, auditing)

Commitment VI. Ensure that physical environments create opportunities for, rather than discourage, social interaction.

Comment: Given the creativity of people, it would be helpful to ensure the Implementing Article 20 (1) of the UNDHR at all levels of society: Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, as also access to modern communications technology. See also above comments.

Commitment VII. Ensure an education system that offers equal opportunity for developing the knowledge skills, capacities and networks necessary for children to become productive, engaged members of society and that demonstrates a commitment to a shared society and educates children to understand and respect others.

Comment: This should enable them to become accountable for their impact on the Earth System, (e.g. through constant awareness of their individual global footprints.); as well as of the positive contributions they are making to sustainable development. All above Commitments and Comments will promote this.

Commitment VIII. Initiate the process to encourage the creation of a shared vision of society at local and national level.

Comment: (1) In shared societies the shared vision is a **living process** and requires people to have complete freedom to interact with others so that the vision can be adjusted fluidly as new challenges and opportunities emerge. as they see fit (See above comments). (2) Shared vision must be based on the well being of the whole inextricably interconnected Earth System, consisting of all people and nature. It must clarify opportunities and limits. Thus the vision must be accompanied by metrics such as global, water, carbon, biodiversity and ecological footprints; as well as ways of measuring and reinforcing positive contributions by individual, businesses, communities and nations; and ways of learning from one another.

Commitment IX. Promote respect, understanding and appreciation of cultural, religious and ethnic diversity and support local communities in exploring their identity, sharing their experiences with other identity groups and working together with those groups on common concerns. (See all above Comments)

Commitment X. Take steps to reduce tensions and hostility between communities and ensure members of all communities are protected from abuse, intimidation and violence.

Comment. Legal structures must be strengthened at all levels and further developed at the global level to safely steward the Earth's resources; ensure their fair use; and to bring to justice those who harm the Earth System, including their fellow human beings. Proposals include that Ecocide is proclaimed and treated as a Crime Against Peace; the creation of an Environmental Court; the governance of the Earth System via the UN with input from all people globally, possibly by expanding the mandate of the Trusteeship Council. The use of citizens peacekeeping initiatives; and reconciliation courts using the UBUNTU approach which stresses the unity between all. (See also Comments under III)

BUILDING A SHARED FUTURE: Throughout the Final Agreement of the June 2012 Rio Summit, ***The Future We Want***, UN Member States agreed that the full participation of all stakeholders was vital to a sustainable future. Within 6 months, the UN Secretariat had involved one billion people, including the poorest and most marginalized, in outlining for Governments what would be necessary and then discussing it with one another. In October, 2014, this number had grown (according to UNDP) to 6 billion 300 people and organizations. These global consultations are creating an important globally unifying field that capitalizes on people's diversity.

The Commons Cluster is dedicated to empowering people to play a proactive role in stewarding society at all levels and sharing best practices. Our main objective is helping to build a commons-based society at all levels centred on the well-being of all people and nature.

Compiled by Dr. Lisinka Ulatowska (commonsActionUN@gmail.com), coordinator of the UN Major Group Commons Cluster, a network of UN ECOSOC accredited Civil Society Organizations and individuals that advocates commons-based approaches to sustainable develop at the UN. See also www.commonSACTIONfortheUnitedNations.org.