

Solidary Governance for Creating Inclusive Societies

A contribution to the Expert Group Meeting “Creating Inclusive Society: Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration”, September 10 to 13 2007, Paris

Cezar Busatto

Deputy Secretary of Political
Coordination and Local Governance – Porto Alegre

Introduction

We are currently living in a period of immense challenges. Current patterns of development have been unable to assure dignified living conditions for many people, while at the same time have produced social and environmental imbalance which is putting the actual sustainability of the planet at risk. It has to be faced that the distribution levels of development factors (income, wealth, knowledge and power) have been insufficient to guarantee democracy and quality in social relations. The accumulation of economic capital into unprecedented levels of concentration, on the other hand, has generated such a volume of volatile wealth circulating on the world financial markets, becoming one more source of imbalance to threaten national societies. This concentration demands and seeks new paradigms. The promotion of a new standard for sustainable human and social development is therefore a matter of the survival of humankind itself.

The new knowledge society, with its information and communication networks daily impacting on each of its six and a half billion people, stimulating their wisdom, skills, creativity and spirituality, and producing intelligent citizens on a global scale, is generating the conditions for the social changes needed.

The challenge we face at this current moment in history is to put this huge collective intelligence to the service of humankind and the planet. As citizens of the world, as members of humankind, as inhabitants of the planet, we feel linked to each other, to our neighbors, and to other human beings because we necessarily share a common present and future.

When more than half the world's population is urban, the city becomes definitively the place where people feel part of a whole. On the one hand the city is a manifestation of the great contradictions in the world today, with inhuman social polarization, growing violence and environmental degradation. Yet in the same way, the local-global space of the city brings people together, facilitates the creation of ties, stimulates the feeling of belonging, and promotes solidarity, creating essential preconditions for weaving social networks of cooperation able to mobilize and articulate all knowledge for sustainable human and social development.

The creation of spaces for dialogue and interaction based on the city, promoting relationships of trust, cooperation and solidarity, stimulating volunteer culture and social and environmental responsibility, strengthening the civic spirit and engagement, weaving social networks between governments, business, civil society and citizens seems to be the path we need to take for creating a sustainable society in the 21st century.

This has been the experience of Porto Alegre, based on examples of other local governments that have been trying to break with the old political practices of centralism,

clientelism, and welfare, and opening itself to society, democratizing public administration and stimulating social networks of cooperation intended to allow the collective intelligence of governments, civil society, business and citizens to be applied to improving the life and relationship of people in society.

1. On the Concept of Inclusive Society.

The concept of inclusive society refers to the notion of social inclusion, that has so far mainly been approached from two standpoints:

a) Inclusion operated by the dynamics of a market society, referring to individual and collective ability to acquire the necessary income for appropriate insertion into the consumer market of goods and services; and

b) Inclusion promoted by public policies for inclusion, focusing on those who are unable to be included through the dynamics of the economy (including here those excluded for reasons that are not directly economic: race, ethnicity or color, gender, nationality, language, faith, culture etc., or some physical or psychological condition requiring special needs and being generally associated with different access to goods and services).

The first standpoint, of economic inclusion, inclusion by increased income, sometimes refers to macroeconomic policies able to produce a growth in high levels for a sufficient period for this to overflow into society, and sometimes to compensatory policies of income transfer or distribution. Macroeconomic growth policies are attempts to increase per capita GDP. Compensatory policies are so called because they intend to compensate the discrepancies of inserting those who have not managed to be included through intra-economic dynamics (via market), by direct or indirect income distribution.

The second standpoint, of inclusion through public policies (here generally taken to be exclusively or predominantly governmental policies) encompasses a huge range of inclusion programs (from urban policies intended to assure rights to the city, through programs for promoting specific sectors – such as affirmative quota policies – to the classic social welfare programs).

It is possible, however, to consider the issue from another standpoint: that of sustainable human and social development, which materializes through investment in social capital for promoting community development.

From this angle, the traditional agenda for social inclusion through so-called public social policies present some problems.

The first problem is that an agenda for social inclusion needs to consider the multiple dimensions of life in society, encompassing not only the factors necessary for providing individuals with good living conditions, but also those factors responsible for good conditions of social existence in community.

So, part of an agenda of social inclusion should be the factors that go towards forming human capital (being the ability to create and recreate the conditions for adequate individual existence – involving education, health, food and nutrition, culture and research, and several other fields, especially entrepreneurship) and social capital (being the patterns of organization, network connection and democratic regulation of society, involving the levels of association, trust and cooperation achieved by a

democratic society organized from the civic and citizen point of view and its relationships with good governance and economic prosperity).

The second problem is the way in which, in general, this agenda of social inclusion can be faced. It is often thought that it can be faced by compensatory policies or welfare provided by the state. They clearly cannot. The resources for doing this from public funds are not available to the governments of the vast majority of countries today. And even if they were, policies based on a pattern of supply do not take account of leveraging up social development if they are not combined with policies for investment in human and social assets.

Those included on the list of beneficiaries from state-provided programs are excluded by the simple fact of being included in such lists. When included in such lists, (or registers) they become part of the “stock of the poor”, receiving compensatory assistance, a stock which is functional for maintaining a political system that removes its legitimacy and sucks the vital energy from those forms – generally centralist, assistential and clientelist – of relationship between state and society.

Dependence on these programs is a form of non-inclusion; or rather, as long as they remain dependent on these programs – not being encouraged to stand on their own feet, face their own problems and benefit from opportunities as they arise – populations will not in fact be included in the development process.

2. Only Human Societies Can Include Human Beings

From the point of view of local sustainable human and social development, therefore, a minimum agenda of social assistance should and must be assumed by the communities themselves.

Communities can and should form pacts of cooperation for development which feature collective commitment to such items as:

- a) eradication of youth illiteracy (age 14 to 24);
- b) reduction of adult illiteracy;
- c) full vaccination coverage (by age six);
- d) reduction of primary school failure rates (reducing the age/grade imbalance by 80%)
- e) eradication of child labor (up to age 16);
- f) eradication of slave labor;
- g) reduction in infant mortality through undernourishment or malnutrition (aiming to reach figures close to those of so-called developed countries).

To all this should be added inclusion of the excluded: the destitute and poor in general, but also (in addition to children, the elderly and people with special needs) young people, the sick, women victims of violence (especially domestic violence) and social minorities suffering from some form of discrimination or prejudice due to race, color, creed, gender, learning, nationality, culture, faith, etc., indigenous peoples, the landless and people from slave settlements, alcoholics, drug dependents etc.

When the community takes responsibility for a minimum agenda such as this it is very different from it all becoming the duty of the state, removing responsibility from

the community. By assuming these responsibilities the community is including its excluded in its future plans; people who are excluded mostly because they have so far played no part in any project that concerns them. On becoming part of the plans for the future of the community, the excluded become included. Because only human communities can really include human beings.

This is a different idea of inclusion (and exclusion). Inclusion is communion. No one becomes included by receiving handouts, even if these handouts are given by public bodies and with public resources. No one becomes included by being treated by a program in which he or she is no more than a number or a statistic. Inclusion is connection to the network of community development, it is to become a link, to have a forename and surname, with one's own distinctive features, skills and abilities, able to receive and give stimulus, to imitate and be imitated, to participate in a process of changing one's own life and collective life.

As Humberto Maturana argues, "A human grouping that does not incorporate the conservation of life of its members as part of its operating definition as a system does not constitute a social system." In other words, a social system preserves the lives of its members, and there are no superfluous members in a social system. This may not apply to mass societies in our nation states today, but should certainly apply for project communities.

Community commitment to preserving the lives of its members expresses high standards of sociability, which cannot generally be achieved by societies with a low stock of social capital. Development strategies based on investment in social capital should therefore stimulate the construction of social tasks taken on by the community itself.

3. Local Solidary Governance For Creating Inclusive Societies

Below, we present a synthesis of the main directives for constructing solidary governance networks focused on the development of the city, its neighbors and regions, based on the experience of local government in Porto Alegre.

1. Constitution of networks of cooperation between government, civil society, business and citizens committed to strengthening a democratic culture in everyday life of people and institutions of society, based on the values of dialog, pluralism and respect for diversity, mutual trust, solidarity, rights and responsibilities and the civic engagement of all for sustainable human and social development;
2. Local governments setting up networks of cooperation with the other spheres of regional and national government, civil society, business and citizens, focused on strengthening democracy at the base of society and in the everyday life of the citizen and fostering development of the city;
3. Networks of cooperation between governments, civil society, business and citizens promoting a broad process of democratization of governmental administration, strengthening the practice of participative budgets and planning, linking them with the agenda for local development, transparent accountability and social control over public policy;
4. Networks of cooperation between governments, civil society, business and citizens constructing a vision of the future and common objectives for development, setting the targets to be reached, planning how to reach them and defining the indicators for monitoring them;

5. Networks of cooperation between governments, civil society, business and citizens promoting equal opportunities and universal access to essential public services;
6. Networks of cooperation between governments, civil society, business and citizens guaranteeing special attention to investments in the human and social capital of the most fragile and vulnerable social groups;
7. Networks of cooperation between governments, civil society, business and citizens promoting education based on the values of dialog, pluralism and respect for diversity, mutual trust, solidarity, the rights and responsibilities of all, entrepreneurship, cooperation and solidarity;
8. Networks of cooperation between governments, civil society, business and citizens providing wide access to public information, creating a range of channels of accountability to citizens, and using all the available means of communication and information to this end;
9. Networks of cooperation between governments, civil society, business and citizens making intense efforts towards educating public servants, businesspeople and citizens in the values and practices of dialog and pluralism, respect for diversity, social and environmental responsibility, cooperation, solidarity and entrepreneurship;
10. Establishing relationships of cooperation between governments, civil society, business and citizens at all levels, from neighborhoods and cities to regional and national levels, forming project communities focused on sustainable human and social development.

Porto Alegre, August 2007.