

Going Glocal

Putting the Local onto the Global Stage

By MIKE LEWIS

Pardon me? Going Glocal? Yep, another new acronym, one that compels us to rethink the work of development, whether we're "in the trenches" revitalizing the local neighbourhood or trying to change the rules that shape the global marketplace.

Many of us are familiar with the adage "think globally – act locally." For three decades social justice and environmental movements have challenged Canadians to align our personal and political action in the local arena with a consciousness of its impact at the global level. By so doing, we can better contribute to a more just and sustainable world.

Going Glocal adds to this perspective from a different vantage point; it calls us to think *locally* and act *globally*.

This idea can be interpreted in more than one way. Consider the attitude of most multinational corporations and international institutions such as the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund. They would say that "interconnectedness at the global level" means that each "local" area must determine how best to leverage its assets into a competitive global marketplace. A private sector free of all restrictions in its pursuit of profitable trade and the highest return on its capital will create economic benefits within those locales that get aligned with a global perspective.

This is not what I mean by Going Glocal. Rather, it concerns the importance of local identities and cultures, the local environment, the diversity and richness of local communities, in and of themselves. It asserts that citizens who are active participants in their own development are a critical ingredient in transitioning the globe towards a sustainable future. It asserts that local production and innovation can and must become linked to alternative global markets and institutions that draw our conception and practice of development onto a more sustainable path.

Going Glocal rejects the premise that a deregulated global marketplace is the harbinger of global prosperity. The results of the last 30 years of accelerating free trade and capital mobility –

deepened global poverty and increased global inequity for the majority – are hardly a recommendation for more of the same. Rather, the power and role of markets and economics need to be re-rooted in the social context within which human beings live out their lives.

The notion of solidarity, of imbuing our economic transactions and market transactions with values of fairness, respect for human life and dignity, and stewardship of the natural environment upon which life depends – these are what Going Glocal is about.

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An Example from Senegal

In December 2002, at a meeting in Dakar, Senegal of the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social Solidarity Economy (more on this organization later), I visited a variety of rural development projects. It was a real eye-opener.

Senegal is a country where the male Islamic religious leadership has an inside track on land ownership and water rights, most of which they devote to agricultural production for overseas commodity markets. This kind of model was represented in a farm I visited where the owner/religious leader/boss paid his workers in kind with housing, food, and religious instruction for their boys. His vegetables were destined for the markets in Europe. He complained bitterly about low prices, the high costs of feeding and housing his workers, and increasing production costs, including the cost of the chemicals that unprotected workers sprayed by hand on his crops.

In contrast to this seemingly hopeless situation, agriculture practices in other parts of the same rural district were inspiring,

For 20 years a community-based approach to rural economic and social development has been gaining momentum across Senegal. It is a brilliant example of the importance of making the connections between local thinking and global action.

Women are at the core of the strategy. The aim is to make them landowners and producers (a rarity 20 years ago). They own the land collectively in groups of five or six called *Groupements de production féminin* (Female Production Groups) or GPFs.

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In the GPF we visited, five women own seven hectares on which they raise a variety of vegetables and beef cattle (primarily organic) for local and export markets. Trees planted around their fields conserve water and create micro-climates that improve production. They are also a source of livestock feed and marketable firewood.

A key partner of the GPF is the *Système intégré de production agricole* (SIPA) an organization that provides training and direction on ecological and agricultural practices. As well, in return for a commercial marketing fee, the SIPA markets GPF produce into Germany, the Netherlands, and Great Britain. These are specialized niche markets, built by socially conscious

Europeans for sustainably produced agricultural products. It is an example of fair trade in action. For the GPF owners, the prices they received at the farm gate were then averaging 20-25% higher than those at the clergy-owned farm an hour down the road. For the consumers, the fair trade label guarantees that the produce is organic, and cultivated justly and sustainably.

Microcredit for GPFs is the responsibility of the *Groupe d'action pour le développement local* (GADEL). Through the GPFs and other village organizations, GADEL helps organize stakeholders in the areas of literacy, health, child care and, more generally, training in sustainable development practices.

Labour is another big issue for GPFs. The national network of GPFs, *Femmes dans développement rural intégré* (FEDRI), help organize thousands of seasonal workers for GPF farms during harvest seasons. But they do more. Workers are required to save part of their earnings so they have equity to invest in improving their life circumstances – including co-operative investments in land in order to start new GPFs. In short, FEDRI and its like are creating the financial base for transforming seasonal workers into owners and producers. (In the last 20 years, 5,000 GPFs have been formed in Senegal.)

This is the solidarity economy at work. Contrast it with the “other globalization,” so well represented in spirit and operation by our GPF’s strange clerical neighbour, trapped in a global market ignorant of its effect on local social and environmental practices. (For more information on Senegal, see *Making Waves*, Spring 2003, 14,1:17-19.)

How is it then that this Senegalese innovation and success, and hundreds of others like it, have yet to achieve global presence or recognition? All too often, those laying the cornerstones of an economy rooted in the moral and practical necessity of human solidarity remain discounted, relegated to the margins of the “real economy,” irrelevant to the “real market place.”

The North American Network for the Solidarity Economy

The Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social Solidarity Economy (INPSSE) views the creation of continental networks as being a special, complementary contribution to the blossoming of a different kind of globalization.

This approach to organizing can provide important opportunities for Canadian and U.S. practitioners to continue three decades of collaboration. Canadians have been greatly inspired and informed by American innovations in policy and practice. Canada’s first community development corporation, New Dawn Enterprises in Cape Breton (1976) owed much to the U.S. experience, as did community organizers in southwest

Montréal in the early 1980s. One of the first meetings to discuss collaboration between Canadian and American practitioners was organized by the Centre for Community Enterprise in 1988, at the annual conference of the National Economic Development and Law Center in Chicago. The relationships formed there still have impact today.

Three North Americans sitting on INPSSE’s International Liaison Commission – Dan Swinney, Nancy Neamtan, and Mike Lewis – have committed to strengthening the Canada-U.S. exchange as part of their responsibilities. It has been decided to begin building a membership-based network called

the North American Network for the Solidarity Economy (NANSE). Its basic agenda is to create avenues through which practitioners in both countries can learn, reflect, and act with each other to strengthen the solidarity economy.

The CCEDNet national conference in Trois-Rivières, Québec (May 18-22, 2004) includes international guests on the agenda for the first time. West Africa, Latin America, and the U.S. will be represented as well as INPSSE. Nancy, Dan, and Mike will facilitate a session on NANSE aimed at defining the opportunities that will meaningfully engage practitioners in learning, reflection, and action. ■

True, progress has been made. Canadian Prime Minister Martin is taking notice. President Lulu of Brazil rode to power on the crest of citizen movements demanding a different development model. And there is a "Minister of Social Economy" in France and Belgium.

How then do we accelerate and elevate the idea and practice of a solidarity economy?

Local action, like that in Senegal, is inspiring. But is it realistic to think that local action by itself can shift the private market dynamic that so dominates global commerce? On the other hand, consider some of today's global movements concerning social justice, environmental protection, and, the reform of international financial institutions. Can these movements by themselves guarantee equitable and sustainable development in the places where people live out their lives?

Gaining Global Presence

It seems obvious to me that action on several levels is needed. Yes, resistance to a market-only perspective is necessary, as are thoughtful global and national policy alternatives. But so is the burgeoning cauldron of innovation in local communities and within the social economy. The challenge is how to link these efforts into a mutually reinforcing, conscious capacity to think and act locally and globally.

That gathering I attended in Dakar took a tiny step forward in building such a capacity. Dakar was preparation for the Third International Meeting on the Globalization of Solidarity to be held in that city in November 2005. The first International Meeting, held in 1997 in Lima, Peru, drew people from 20 countries. Over 400 people from 37 countries attended the second in Québec City in 2001. Despite huge financial challenges, interest in this forum had advanced to the point that it

officially named itself the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social Solidarity Economy (INPSSE) in 2002.

If Dakar 2005 is going to significantly advance the concept of thinking locally and acting globally, then we must first make some strategic choices. Which global networks and movements are the best bets as allies in building a solidarity economy? With whom should we begin to build linkages and dialogue? I see five.

First, we must act as a local economic voice in the World Social Forum and other such networks. The last two years have seen over 100,000 people attend this global happening of resistance and discussion of macro-alternatives to the current structures of globalization. Trade, debt, the environment, democracy – these are critical issues that are vitally important to humanity. But economic alternatives must not only be *advocated*, they must be *built* right where people live. The macro and the micro are both of strategic importance.

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Second, the movements relating to women, labour, and co-operatives may be naturally predisposed to the agenda of community-based development and the social economy. Their interests may be organized on a sector basis, but their members live in communities; their historical roots and contemporary

The Community & Local Economic Development International Network

Knowledge just for the sake of knowledge is unaffordable in today's world. The Community and Local Economic Development International Network (CLEDINet) is an initiative in knowledge sharing and capacity building that aims to improve the quality of life of disadvantaged communities in the Americas.

Exchanges, meetings, tool-building and other activities on a regional, national, or continental basis will enhance the ability of organizations promoting local economic solutions to increase employment, income, assets, and well-being in poor households.

The Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO) and the Carleton Centre

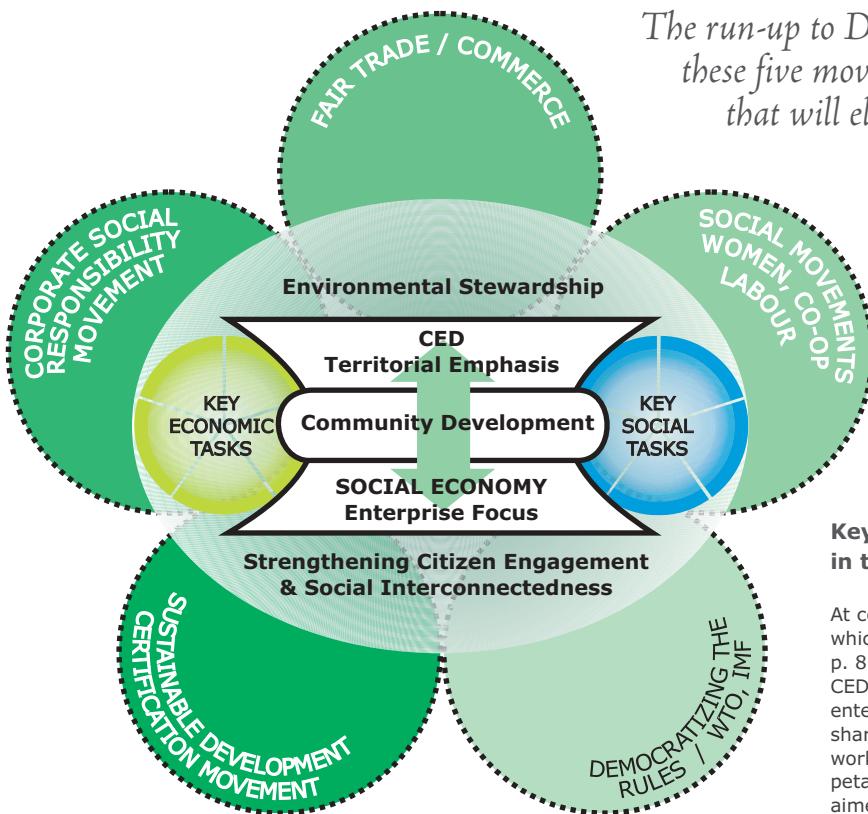
for Community Innovation initiated the CLEDINet at a workshop in February 2002 in San José, Costa Rica. This event brought together CED organizations from Chile, Peru, El Salvador, Guatemala, Canada, and Costa Rica. Following this meeting, a feasibility study established the goals of the CLEDINet and a plan for its implementation.

The CLEDINet will

- strengthen the organizational capacity of members to design and implement successful local economic development initiatives.
- promote public policies that create conditions for local economic development.

- develop alternative visions, concepts, and methods of local economic development.
- systematize and disseminate local economic development experiences and best practices.
- forge broad and diverse alliances to facilitate local economic development processes in the region.
- manage resources to sustain the network and its activities.

The CLEDINet will achieve these objectives by creating a transnational space and national forum for dialogue and exchanges through an on-line network, national events, and international encounters. 



The run-up to Dakar 2005 is an opportunity to interconnect these five movements into a dynamic of dialogue & action that will elevate the local voice to a global level.

Key Concepts & Linkages in the Social Solidarity Economy

At center are the two wheels of key economic and social tasks which together strengthen "community development" (see also p. 8). CED and the Social Economy intersect with these tasks, CED with its territorial emphasis and the social economy with its enterprise emphasis. The economic agenda of each is framed by shared social and environmental values that are integral to their work at the local level. To complete this "blossom" are five petals, representing potential partners in a strategic alliance aimed at growing an alternative kind of globalization.

priorities include a local face; and they are often integral to community-based development and the social economy, as is so evident in the case of RESO in southwest Montréal.

Third, the fair trade markets being developed in Europe and North America are a crucial to building another kind of globalization. While still minuscule in the overall scheme of world trade, significant progress has been made. Without fair prices that allow people to survive with a modicum of dignity, to feed, clothe, and educate their children, no real development is possible.

Fourth, I would argue that the corporate social responsibility movement must be invited to the table. Can we afford to ignore the dramatic efforts underway to set some of the world's largest businesses on a more sustainable path? Getting them to the table to discuss the role of social solidarity in large, transnational business is a worthy undertaking.

Fifth, the environmental movement is a strategic, although not always a comfortable ally. Tension occurs when local people and communities are ignored or compromised by distant "green campaigns" disconnected from local reality. Nevertheless, there should be special attention paid to those engaged in certification schemes that encourage market recognition for sustainable products.

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We cannot accomplish all of this prior to November 2005, but we must make progress. We need to articulate the burgeoning local experience across the globe much more effectively. We need to elevate the promising results being achieved. We need to think through the linkages and the tensions of doing this work and how it can blossom more broadly and deeply through changes to global policies and structures.

In the process, I have little doubt that it will assist us in very real and concrete ways to advance our work here, right at home, wherever that may be.

"To be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing."

Raymond Williams, Welsh novelist & cultural theorist (1921-1988)

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