

Seven visions on green  
**IMAGINING**  
and fair economies from  
**SUSTAINABILITY**  
the global South

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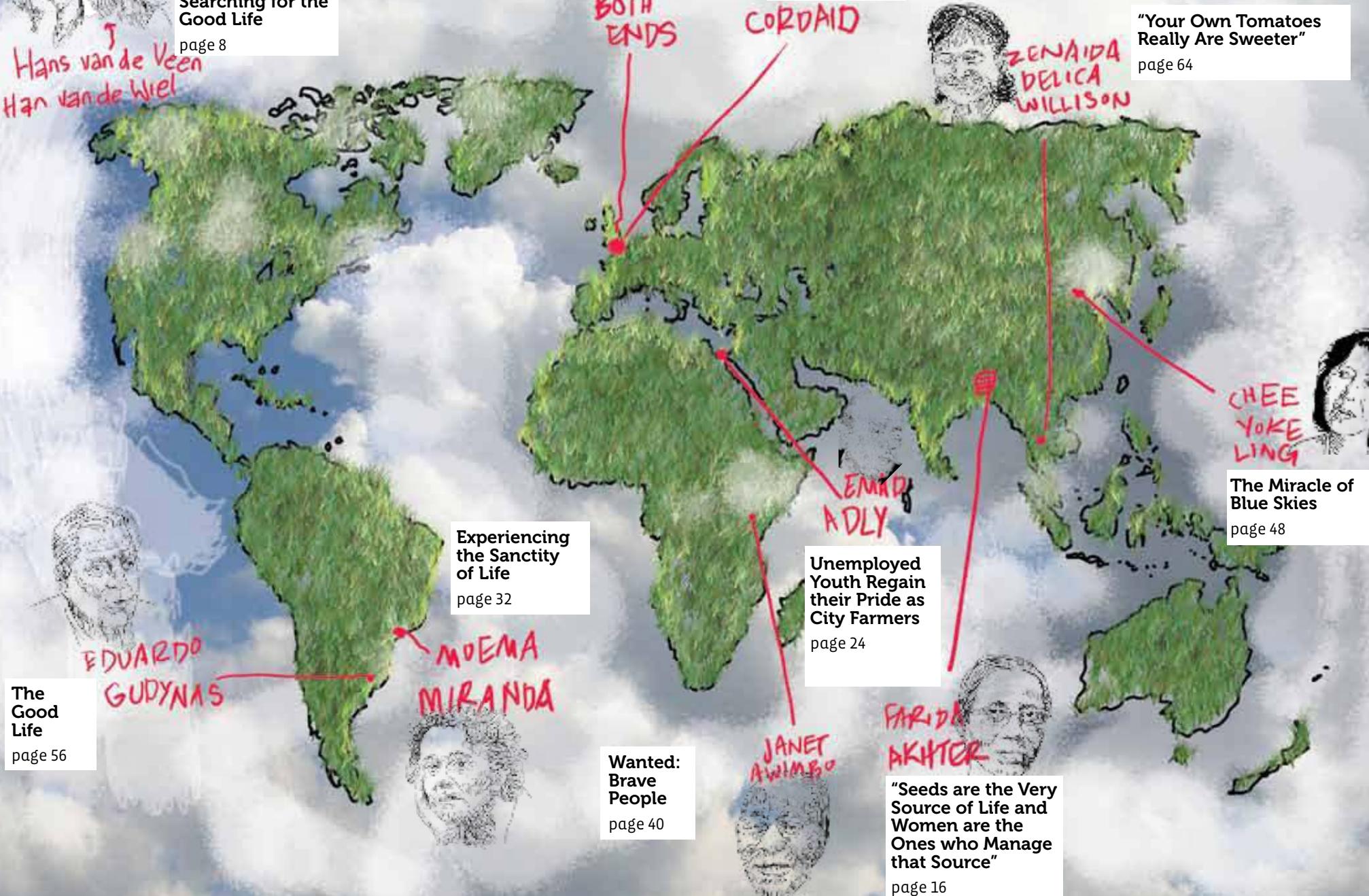
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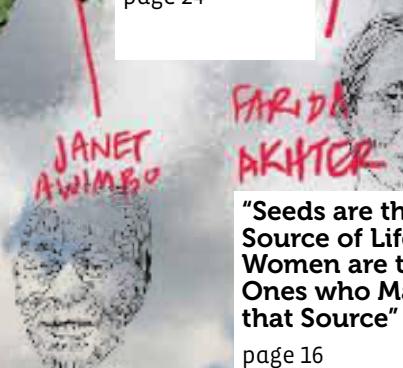
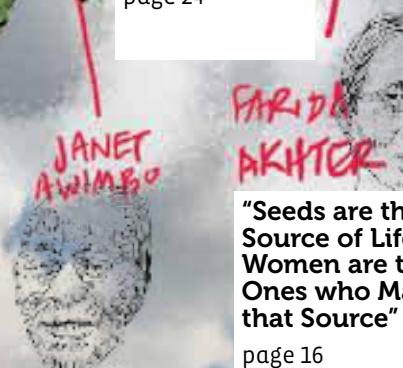
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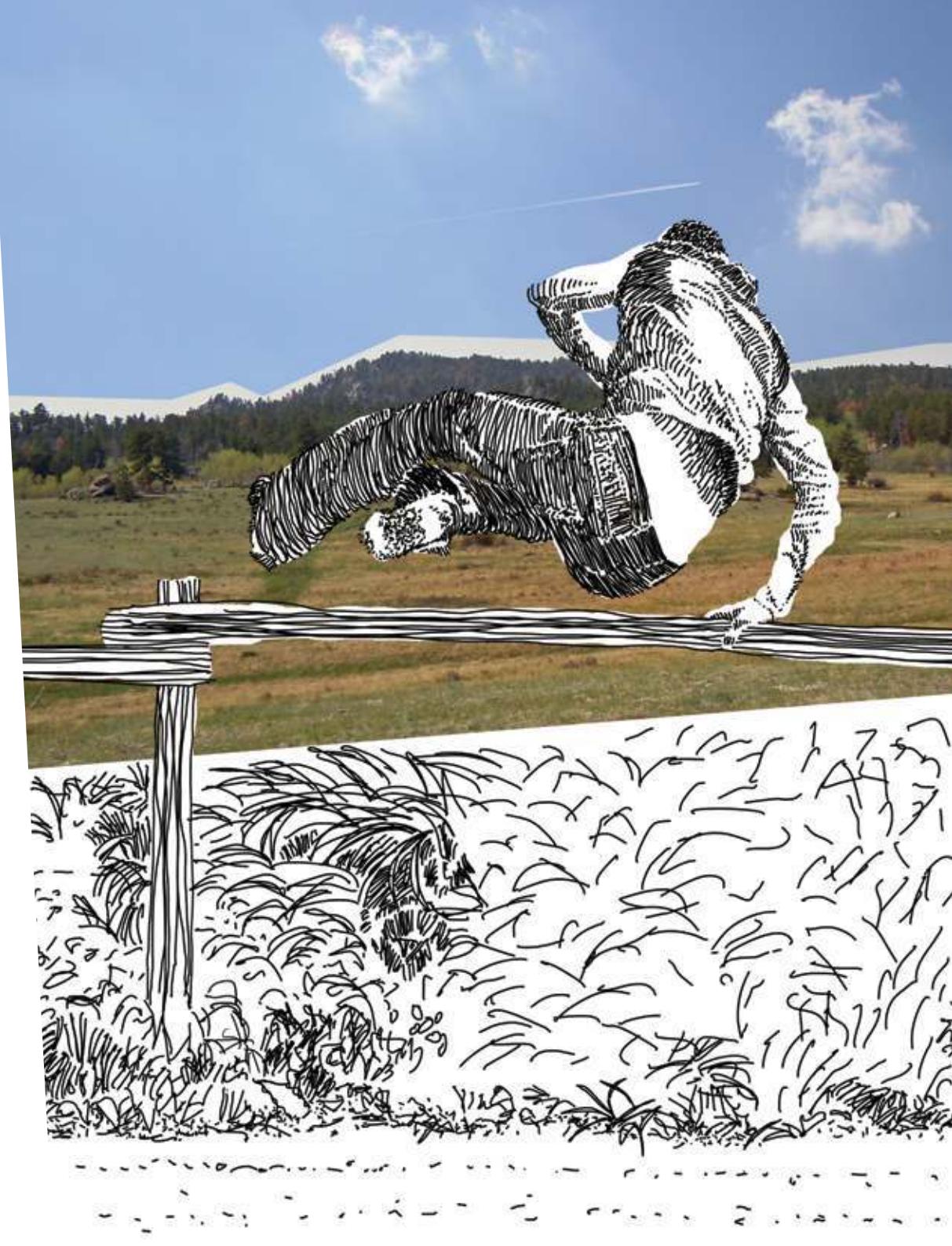
# Imagining Sustainability

Seven visions on green and fair economies  
from the global South

Faced with an accumulation of crises, government leaders, intellectuals, journalists, and CEOs have embarked on a global search for a green and inclusive economy. Simply realising that today's dominant models for economic growth are the problem is not a solution. There is, simply put, no ultimate solution, no blueprint for the future. This is all the more reason to stand aside and give visionaries, prophets and searchers a shot at it. We could definitely use a push at this time to help us escape from all of our acquired habits and ideas and that push will no doubt come from some unexpected corners of the world. When we examine our daily lives, we become inspired by those people who realise their innovative ideas and actually manage to put them into practice. Ideas that combine visions and a realistic estimate of what the current chances of success actually are. These ideas combine knowledge and experience, and are brimming with energy. It is these ideas that allow us to go on dreaming of better ways to organise our lives, our time and our work. They stimulate new ideas about how we can make the world a nicer place.

Cordaid and Both ENDS work with people who are able to bring their visions of a green economy to life. We collected the visions and insights of seven visionaries located in various developing countries. Each one of them has a unique approach to transforming his or her dream into concrete, local initiatives that not only focus on financial considerations but also on ecological values and basic human rights. These visionaries show us that a green and just economy is entirely within the realm of possibility. This collection of remarkable visions from unexpected corners of the world allows us to encourage those who are ready to be inspired in their search for a sustainable world. Anyone who would like to work on these initiatives presented here by our southern visionaries and help in the development of these and other innovative initiatives is invited to contact us.

René Grotenhuis (Cordaid) and  
Daniëlle Hirsch (Both ENDS)





## Searching for the Good Life



photo Doug Wheller; Howard Lake; LamaZone; Step It Up 2007; Dave Sag; 6201135231\_97a3ae6ed8\_o; SEDACMaps; Oxfam International; Bread for the World; Rob Friesel; Oxfam International; Oxfam International; Fibonacci Blue

Images are the engines behind change. Maybe we currently don't have enough images, and so we're unable to progress towards the building of a more sustainable and just world. Attractive ideas abound, but we still lack the vision to set us in motion. Or is our view simply too narrow, too limited? How about the images of people from other parts of the world, the very places where our raw materials and products come from, but too little inspiration? Do the thinkers and doers in other parts of the world have the visions that could help us think out of the box and, in turn, stimulate new ideas that can stir us to action?



Hans van de Veen and Han van de Wiel

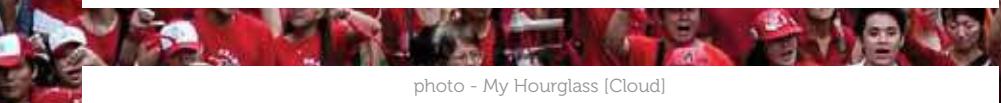


photo - My Hourglass [Cloud]

# The dreams and visions of a different, better society, have always been a source of inspiration.

"I have a dream", declared Rev. Martin Luther King in the 1960's, a quotation that certainly ensured him a place in the history books. His dream of a United States free of racism, where everyone enjoys equal opportunities, became the symbol of one of the largest emancipation movements ever.

The dreams and visions of a different, better society, have always been a source of inspiration. Visionaries have moved the masses throughout history. From Jesus of Nazareth to Karl Marx, Mahatma Gandhi to Nelson Mandela: they've inspired people to take action and did this by coming up with an attractive message: all efforts are worthwhile because God's Kingdom, or a classless, nonviolent and just society, is close at hand.

Are we still dreaming these same dreams today? Are there still visionaries around who can inspire us? There is no single unanimous answer to this question. Visionaries appear regularly and present us with their appealing and inspiring ideas. Think of those people who came up with

the Cradle2Cradle principle, the dream of a world without waste and framed within a perfect closed cycle. Prior to that, new concepts such as sustainable development, corporate social responsibility and, more recently, the Green Economy, were also sources of inspiration. On the other hand, one observes that these visions have not actually managed to mobilise crowds, especially not in the West. We have grown increasingly sceptical, cynical even. Credulous individuals have all too often been disappointed by self proclaimed leaders who promised them paradise. We seldom fall for this type of rhetoric. We also stopped believing in a society that can be transformed. The idea of a group of motivated people realising actual changes has been portrayed as either naive or fanciful. That's why we no longer like talking about visions (let alone dreams); we prefer scenarios, which give us the room to produce the best possible results.

There is also something else: concepts like Cradle2Cradle or the Green Economy are Western visions that originated in North America and Europe, and are chiefly Anglo-American capitalist-based ideas. And so, where are the analyses, experiences, and dreams of non-Western thinkers and doers? While more and more Asian,

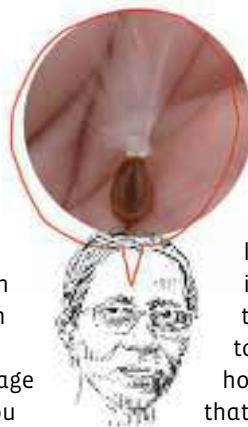
African and Latin American products are reaching our shores; their ideas and visions seldom reach us. Are we not open to them? Are they making too little effort to reach us? In any event, we are depriving ourselves of the visions that originate elsewhere, and with them, potential out-of-the-box ideas from parts of the world we know less about. We need to do something about this situation.

Therefore, prompted by Both ENDS and Cordaid, we, two Dutch journalists, started searching for new, inspiring alternatives from the rest of the world. The following pages include numerous interviews with prominent thinkers, doers and analysts from the South. We would like to make it clear from the start that we do not pretend them to be in any way representative of the entire spectrum of ideas regarding a green economy. We chose from a list of names supplied to us by Both ENDS and Cordaid. This list includes *their* contacts, *their* colleagues in the South. They are people who are familiar with both actual practice and participating in international conferences where they regularly meet one another at venues around the world. They have all been active in the lead-up to the Rio+20 conference, as members of one or more working groups. Some of them, such

as Chee Yoke Ling from Malaysia, have been part of this process for some twenty years or so. She was one of the most prominent spokespersons of the – then still so-called – 'Third World' during the first Earth Summit. All of the interviewed visionaries have strong criticism for how free market thinking and globalisation affect their own societies and the world as a whole. This criticism is nothing new. But what does their ideal society look like? How would things be different if they were in power? These are some of the questions we asked them.

## Dare to Dream

On YouTube there is an interesting film about the Donella Meadows Leadership Fellows (<http://bit.ly/uDyc8w>), entitled *Vision 2050*. Participants were asked to envision the year 2050 and – this is even more difficult! – imagine the planet is all right, everything is going well in 2050! "Now close your eyes. What do you see?" The participants' responses varied: "I see solar panels on every rooftop." "I see people knowing each other's names." "Older people who tell stories that others are listening to



again.” “I see windmills and mini-power plants in the river so that children can study at night with electric lights. The message of the movie is clear: “You can’t make it happen if you can’t even imagine it!”

This may be true, but daring to dream is not all that easy. Who is ready to respond to the questions of what the ideal society will look like? Isn’t it a bit naïve in this day and age to even bother to dream of a better world? And maybe it’s even a bit pretentious to think you have the answers. And yet, another response might be: Isn’t it all kind of trivial to be translating these *grand designs* for a better society into concrete images?

For whatever reason, several can-

lifestyle that is so appealing that everyone wants to adopt it. Then, you have to begin thinking about how to realise this. But that’s a dynamic process, and the outcomes are uncertain. So I will not speculate.”

She is probably right. However, we were looking for something more. Others also politely declined our invitation. There was also a more strategic reason for declining. When you’re continuously struggling with major issues such as uncontrolled globalisation or the unbridled profits of venture capitalism on a daily basis, you often feel you like you are just shedding tears in the middle of a desert. You have identified the problem, you have a potential strategy or solu-

ply: *Which future?* Who dares to dream of a better and more just world these days? And, to make it perfectly clear, it didn’t necessarily need to be a feasible vision of this world or a world you were willing to settle for, but the world you *truly desire*.

Obviously, this vision would use a sustainable world as its starting point, a world in which the planet was no longer headed for inevitable ecological disaster. The major components of a sustainable world are generally agreed upon: using only renewable natural resources, banning waste streams, addressing hunger and extreme poverty, and working towards true democracy, with equal right for one and all. Nice notions, but not exactly what we were looking for either. We wanted the interviewee to actually *envision* an ideal society. What would they change for themselves, for their children and/or grandchildren? What is the first thing they think of when they hear the term “ideal society”? Imagine you are in power, you are the mayor, the governor or even the enlightened dictator: what would you do first? These are the kinds of questions we posed to help clarify our request for the interviewees.



### Blue Skies

Our questions aroused a multitude of images: blue skies over Beijing again – that was Chee Yoke Ling’s dream. She has been living in the Chinese capital for several years now and has not been able to adjust to a state of permanent smog. Meanwhile, Egypt’s Emad Adly dreams about approaching the Cairo of the future in an airplane and seeing an ocean of green rooftops. He also dreams of tens of thousands of unemployed youth being properly trained to become urban farmers. They will lease flat rooftops and supply the city with vegetables and fruit on a daily basis. Farida Akhter from Bangladesh also dreams of vegetables and grains: she envisions the return of forgotten species to the plates of her fellow countrymen. Moreover, she also hopes that Europeans will discover the wonderful flavours of the various kinds of vegetables, rice and lentils that could become plentiful once again. Kenya’s Janet Awimbo envisions new opportunities for an African form of consensus decision mak-

## Who dares to dream of a better and more just world these days?

candidates we approached were all slightly shocked when we asked them to share their dreams with us. Some of them even considered our questions inappropriate. “So sorry, but I’m not a guru,” was the response of Janaki Lenin, an important environmentalist, columnist, and moviemaker in India. “The challenge is to build a sustainable

society but idle dreams of a better society during an interview also has its pitfalls because, before you know it, your opponents will simply dismiss you as a naive dreamer. Fortunately, others were prepared to take up our challenge. Our challenge was inspired by the Rio+20 conference slogan – *The Future We Want*. Our question was sim-

ing – but she is seeking brave citizens willing to take up this effort. Eduardo Gudynas from Uruguay, meanwhile, dreams of unaffordable digital watches that have become the symbol of the increasing consumer desires of the global middle class, which the planet cannot possibly hope to satisfy. A little further inland, Brazilian Moema Miranda wants to ensure that every peasant family has its own parcel of land. She believes that this will benefit the entire country. While Zenaida Delica Willison from the Philippines envisions a world where all live to be as old as her father (who passed away last year at the age of 103), if only we can be convinced to live a healthier lifestyle.

And we eventually discovered the remarkable common thread of all of these dreams: the conviction that there was a significant need to return to the human dimension. One after another, they all advocated smaller, more human cities, combined with a revitalisation of the countryside that so many people have left in their pursuit of a better life. Perhaps the only exception to these modest dreams was Adly, who envisioned radical changes for Cairo. The others prefer shifting the emphasis on large-scale agriculture to supporting the millions of small farmers.

This would also entail choosing for traditional knowledge, respect for nature, and ecologically sound farming methods and *against* large-scale farming, monocropping, and the unlimited use of pesticides and genetically modified seeds. “Large-scale agriculture has saddled us with a climate crisis, a water crisis, and a bee crisis,” Farida Akhter observed. Furthermore, she points out that this type of production method also has a very negative impact on the position of women. Are these the dreams of a handful of greenies or resurrected hippies who reject all progress and deny the reality of a world population that will soon surpass 9 billion people? No way, was their unanimous response. Traditional values and new technologies are wonderfully interlinked, Adly, a Muslim, pointed out. Isn’t it the Koran that inculcates in Muslims the need to spare limited natural resources such as the soil and water? Is it not the same Koran that stated that every Muslim has a duty to learn as much as possible, including from non-Muslim countries? The traditional indigenous vision of the relationship between man and nature is experiencing a revival in South America. The concept of *buen vivir* – loosely translated as the simple



good life – has now even been integrated into the constitutions of both Ecuador and Bolivia. “Even if we switch over to the concept of ‘*buen vivir*’, we’ll still actually need good computers and other equipment,” notes Eduardo Gudynas with a laugh. There is a need for modern technology, to ensure that consumer products last a lot longer than they presently do and also that these products can be easily repaired.

Janet Awimbo advocates the return of the typical African form of decision making, which is based on consensus, the palaver, but this time as applied to new clothing. Young people and women would be able to join the round-table negotiations or simply a discussion under a tall, shady baobab tree. “We no longer want a group of old men making all the decisions,” she emphasises.

Meanwhile, when Farida Akhter works together with Bangladeshi farmers to re-evaluate traditional farming methods and products, she creates a permanent links between this approach and efforts to alter the rigid social structures, such as male-female relations and the caste system. It is no problem, she insists, as long as it is all done with respect, and “taking into ac-



count everyone’s feelings, while still managing to change the system.”

These dreams span the oceans. Akhter in Bangladesh totally agrees with Gudynas in Uruguay, that people can be happy without having to live a life of luxury. Basically everyone wants to live a good life. “That is also what the peasants keep telling us. To be happy, that is what they want. They do not need a big car or a lot of money in the bank. Safe and good food, health for themselves and their children, nature in balance. That is what ordinary people want.”

Over the past two decades, Chee Yoke Ling has seen much of the optimism and hope that characterised the 1992 Earth Summit, go up in smoke. But now, in the period leading up to the Rio+20 conference, she has begun noticing some hopeful developments. “I still dream of social equality, justice, and harmony with nature, and of a lifestyle that fits into this vision. To see that more and more young people are fighting for sustainability and for a different way of life is an enormous source of inspiration to me.”

*Amersfoort, the Netherlands,  
April 2012  
Hans van de Veen and  
Han van de Wiel*

# **“Seeds are the Very Source of Life and Women are the Ones who Manage that Source”**

“More and more people, particularly those who live and work in tall buildings, think that they can dominate nature.” Farida Akhter believes this is a typical male notion. According to Akhter, a women’s rights activist from Bangladesh, women have been traditionally closer to the source of life. They are also the pivot on which small-scale agriculture revolves. Large-scale agribusiness, on the other hand, excludes women and threatens nature at the same time. “Community-based organic agriculture is the only path to a healthy and rich future. Both for us and for the planet.”



**Farida Akhter**

Nayakrishi Andolon (New Agriculture Movement), Bangladesh



When Farida Akhter was gathering material for the book she had long been thinking to write – about the special bond between women and nature – she interviewed an old woman in rural Bangladesh. When asked whether she was going to be able to count on her son when she was no longer be able to work, the answer was "No." "It is the trees, which are more reliable than the sons. If you have a tree you can be sure that at the time of *nidan kal* (the time of death), the funeral cost will be met by the tree."

*Women and Trees*, the book Akhter wrote about her findings, seeks to dispel a popular myth, namely that women are the plunderers of the forest, which is based on the mainstream image of women in poor areas gathering stacks of firewood. Nothing is less true, argues Akhter in her book. Women often have a much more intimate relationship with their surroundings than men. They tend to treat nature carefully and with thriftiness. In rural Asia, men mostly hold the deeds to the land, though it is the women who – besides household work – care for the vegetable garden and the smaller livestock. They also collect the seeds, which they nurture until they become (fruit) trees, and care for their entire lives. Trees provide fuel in the form of leaves and broken branches. And since a felled

tree is worth money, trees are also regarded as a form of life insurance. Besides tree seeds, women in Bangladesh also traditionally collect the seeds of vegetables, grains and rice. As Akhter notes, they thus manage "the very source of life," an essential and valued role in traditional agrarian culture. But this role has come under great pressure. The biggest culprit: the large-scale, often foreign-owned, agri-businesses that force their (genetically modified) seeds upon the farmers. When the farmers switch to the high-tech seeds, the women no longer have the task of collecting and managing seeds and, as a result, rapidly lose their economic power. Their roles are marginalised; and they are left with only housework and child care. Akhter fights against



this evolution through her peasant movement and via international networks. "The

of our crop species diversity has been lost. Sprayed to destruction with pesticides, driven out of the market by the large companies' seeds. Companies like Monsanto

**Agriculture with a focus on nature, which follows the seasons and mainly produces local crops, indeed produces more compared to large scale agriculture.**

Monsantos of this world want to convince us that we need their seeds for increasing production and they take out patents on those seeds. As if you could possibly take out a patent on the source of life!" Monsanto is, after all, the world's number one GM-seed producer. The people of Bangladesh (and elsewhere in Asia) have offered considerable resistance to large-scale agricultural pressures. "By growing monocrops, our soils lose their fertility," points out Akhter. "We have a bee crisis, a climate crisis, and a water crisis. Moreover, in the last 25 years, two-thirds

sell both the genetically modified seeds and the pesticides, so they make money twice. Meanwhile, our farmers become increasingly dependent."

### The Counter-Attack

Resistance to this development is growing. In more and more places in Asia, peasant activists are setting up seed banks where the seeds of traditional crops are stored for future generations. Akhter was one of the pioneers of a peasant movement in Bangladesh that encourages recovering the use of forgotten vegetable and grain species. This is combined with organic agricultural practices and renouncing the use of pesticides and artificial fertilisers. "In the end, the peasants have to decide to stop. We offer the alternatives. And we show that you protect other plants by not spray-

# Don't forget that at one point in history we had 15,000 rice varieties here. Each region had its own varieties

ing. What we call weeds are in fact non-cultivated species, which are traditionally used for a variety of purposes: as fodder, for medicinal use, and many other such things. They are part of our biodiversity. And this should not be lost." The network of Women and Biodiversity is part of the New Agriculture Movement, which is active in two-thirds of the country's districts. In meetings with the population, discussions are held about the role people actually play. Akhter: "People tend to blame problems on things they cannot grasp, such as climate change. But you should realise that you yourself contribute to poisoning the earth when you spray or scatter chemicals. That is our message."



The farmers' organisation has its own centres in rural areas, where interested villagers can follow courses that last several days, and which allow one to address many more topics than merely organic farming. Akhter: "A lot of young people attend. Men and women sit together, they do everything together. The men do the dishes, the women work on the land. Thus, we break through prejudice. We respect social laws and religion, but, at the same time, we fight against traditional concepts of what men can do and what women can do." Akhter's remarkable conclusion is that it's easier to break through social patterns in the countryside than in the city. She believes that this is because in rural areas,

the productive roles of women are clearer. "Everyone knows their significance: in agriculture, within the families, and in the community. Their knowledge and skills are recognised. While in the cities women spend a lot of time in shopping

"Seeds are the Very Source of Life and Women are the Ones who Manage that Source"  
-> Bangladesh

malls, or at home in front of the television set. Unproductive occupations. Therefore, society sees them rather as a burden than as an added value."

Akhter says that rural women are open to new ideas. "As long as this is done in a respectful manner. Taking into account everyone's feelings, while still managing to change the system. In our centres, young female farmers hop on stage to perform. They dress up in men's clothing. They criticise the system. Things they have never done before, yet people accept this." Whenever possible, Akhter also joins them. "I do not love the city, even though I must regularly spend time there. But I always feel tired in the city. And never when I am in the countryside, where we get up when the sun rises, where we work with the peasants, where they learn from us and we learn from them. We discuss crops and the harvest; we distinguish the types that are most suitable for the different seasons. And, over lunch in the field, we try to distinguish the sounds of the birds. I always enjoy this immensely."

## An Arcadian Ideal?

Farida Akhter is convinced that the future belongs to small-scale organic agriculture. The unlimited confidence in the Green

Revolution, the intensified and large-scale operations that are so bad for people and the environment, will come to an end. Even international institutions like the World Bank are starting to recognise the essential role that small-scale farmers play. "In my country, 70 percent of the farmers work on a small scale. If they get organised and receive good agricultural extension services, eventually we will no longer need this extremely large-scale sector."

To sceptical Westerners, this may all sound slightly too-Arcadian or excessively romantic. As if all old things have always been better. Besides, is Akhter's small-scale farmer actually able to feed the rapidly growing population in a country like Bangladesh? "But of course," she reacts. "Agriculture with a focus on nature, which follows the seasons and mainly produces local crops, indeed produces more compared to large-scale agriculture. The few high-yield crops, which the latter produces are extremely sensitive to diseases and pests, and are therefore full of chemical junk. In contrast, our agriculture is based on ancient knowledge. Our seeds do not need chemicals because they are adapted to local circumstances." What is needed is a good government, which stands firmly behind



A women's rights activist

its own farmers, instead of dancing to the tune of the large international companies. They need a government, Akhter adds, that no longer permits the importation of GM-seeds and doesn't sell off valuable arable land for monocropping. This government also needs to make much better plans for the provision of food for the population. It must be able to calculate where and when possible shortages may occur, and respond accordingly. Agrarian research should no longer focus on intensive agriculture but rather on the full range of indigenous species and varieties. "This calls for a different way of thinking, which the large companies want to hinder."

If it chooses to follow this path, Bangladesh will become an agricultural export country, Akhter believes. "Don't forget that at one point in history we had 15,000 rice varieties here. Each region had its own varieties: aromatic, highly productive, with an intense flavour, suitable for certain dishes, and so on. With our peasant movement, we have now been able to recover

and collect some 3,000 types. In the Netherlands, you also eat basmati rice, I hear. If I told you there are many more varieties, each of them with its own taste and aroma, then people would surely be interested, right? And what goes for rice also goes for our lentils."

Women are the ones who have the most to gain from a revaluation of small-scale agriculture. Corporate farming, Akhter emphasises, is a male thing. "Men dominate the markets and capital, decide on the development of seeds, and conduct the research. Women no longer count. This has to stop. Policymakers should listen to the women, and recognise and support their essential role in agriculture. This will also signify a major improvement in yields."

#### Happiness is Everyone's Dream

In the ideal future, says Akhter, our daily plate of food will contain many different types of vegetables. Not only cauliflower or eggplant, for example. Besides, every vegetable has many varieties. They

all have their own unique taste. Besides the greater diversity offered, the food looks colourful and tastes better than what most people eat today. It is free of chemicals and is grown from locally collected seeds. Moreover, the people only eat seasonal vegetables. The seasons are there for a reason, Akhter observes, you have to adapt to them. "That is what your body wants, products of the season. So, avoid eating winter products in spring."

Indeed, Akhter admits that this is traditional knowledge based on what our grandmothers already knew: the types of vegetables and fruits you should eat during certain times of year. For example, because they help people increase their immunity to certain diseases. This type of valuable knowledge is at risk of being lost. She also believes that scientists increasingly recognise that this is a negative development.

The ultimate goal of her efforts is simple, she says: "For people to have a good life. Like our farmers say: to be happy, that is what we want. They do not need a big car or a lot of money in the bank. Safe and good food, health for themselves and their children, nature in balance. That is what ordinary people want."

**Policy makers should listen to the women, recognise and support their essential role in agriculture.**

The acknowledgment of women's rights and the preservation of biodiversity are the topics that Farida Akhter (1953) has been involved in for decades, both in Bangladesh and in the international sphere. She is the director of UBINIG, an activist research institute in Bangladesh, which combines studies on the position of the rural population with political advocacy. Akhter also leads the only feminist publishing house in Bangladesh. And she is one of the founders of Nayakrishi Andolon (New Agriculture Movement), a farmers' organisation that encourages organic agriculture. It does this by distributing educational materials and organising trainings for the inhabitants of rural and urban areas.

Farida Akhter is an active member in numerous regional networks that organise the opposition to genetic modification, domestic violence against women, and coercion in family planning. She has written several books, including *Women and Trees and Seeds of Movement: On Women's Issues in Bangladesh*.

# Unemployed Youth Regain their Pride as City Farmers



**Emad Adly**  
Arab Centre for Environment and Development, Egypt

When you gaze upon the metropolises of Egypt and the rest of the Arab world from above, you see a sea of flat, grey cement rooftops. In the future, these rooftops will be green. Unemployed young people who have been retrained as city farmers are using them to grow vegetables and fruit. The greening of the city is good not only for the city dwellers' pockets, but also for their self-confidence. And life in the city has become much more enjoyable: the green rooftops and the urban gardens cleanse the polluted air and regulate the climate. That is Emad Adly's dream. He was born and raised in Cairo, and he is a doctor but, more than anything else, a restless advocate for a green and sustainable Arab world.

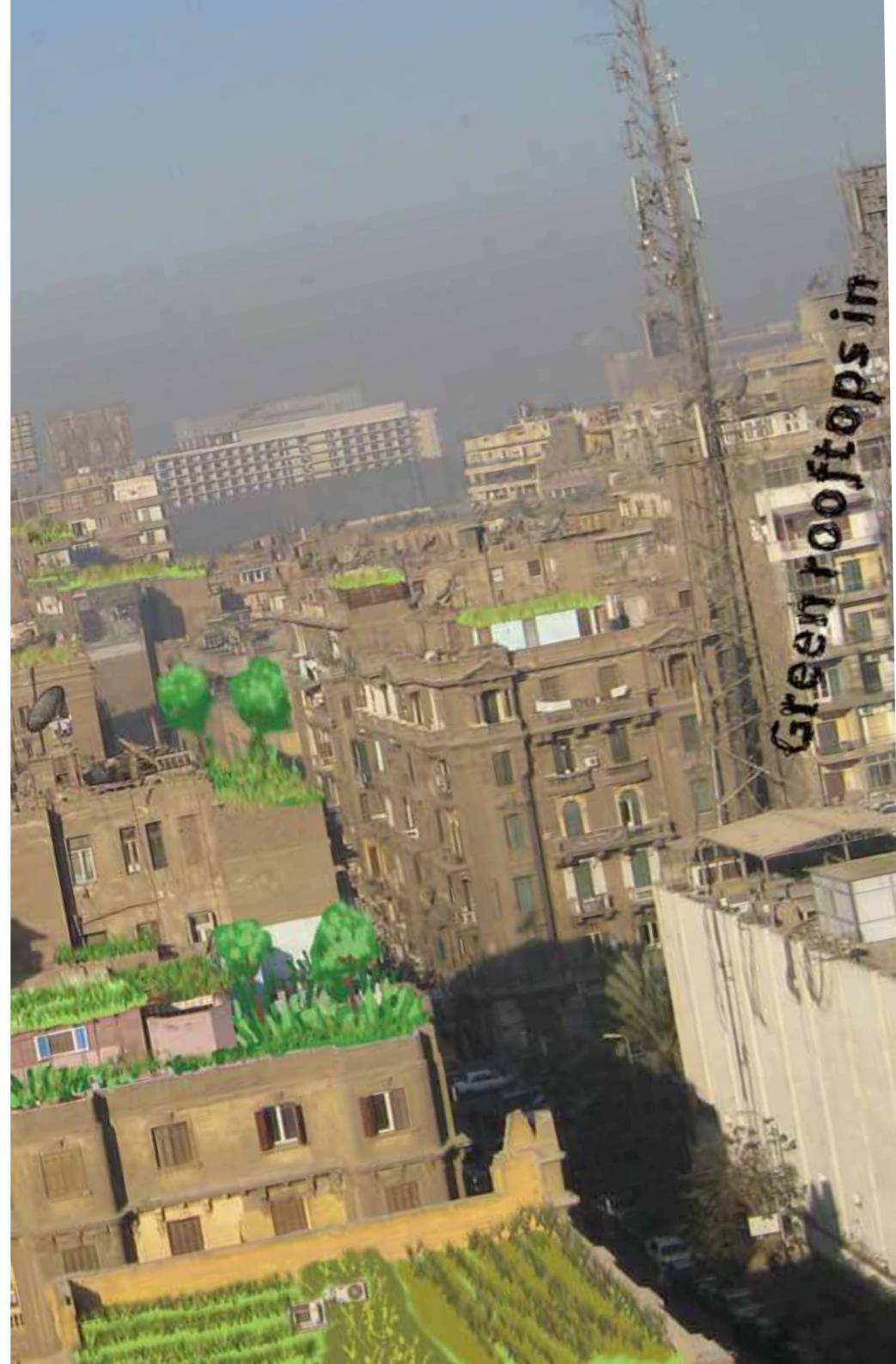
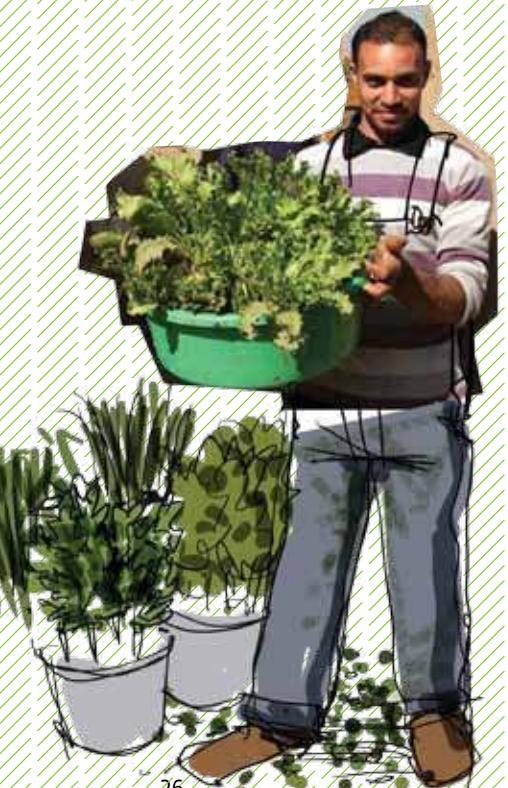


photo Emma Grandt

# The visible result today is that young people have regained their self confidence

The Cairo House, that is Emad Adly's first thought when we ask him about his dreams. A dream that has become a reality, though it was later nipped in the bud by the authorities.

An ecocentre, where Cairo's youth could learn to deal with the urban setting in an environmentally friendly manner. A catalyst for the necessary transformation of Egyptian society in a sustainable direction. That was Adly's aim with the Cairo House. Courses on



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efficient water management, renewable energy and sustainable building; demonstration projects and leadership trainings; debates about the future: it was all going to come together in the new centre. By Western standards, this doesn't sound overly revolutionary, but in the Egypt under the old regime it was. The new building made of sustainable materials was located on the border of the Christian and Jewish neighbourhoods in the old centre. For Adly, the Cairo House symbolised the new Egypt: an inspirational meeting place to build a shared vision of the future. "That is what Egypt needs: a shared dream, a vision of where we want to go. This is how we can step into the future together with the young generations."

Dangerous dreams, the authorities concluded, and they took over the Cairo House before its official inauguration. The centre became part of the Ministry of the Environment and now houses public servants. "It is no longer the ideal place for changes in behaviour and inspiration," says Adly, who claims he has been "literally ill" for a long time because of this state of affairs. A good friend of his who works for the government explained that the independent centre's success posed a threat. People were saying: those activists are doing better

Unemployed Youth Regain their Pride as City Farmers  
-> Egypt

than the government. That was unacceptable, and so the authorities took over. Adly: "I told them: you have to create your own dreams, not take away those of others."

## Effervescent Cairo

To no avail – the Cairo House dream fell apart. Adly found new inspiration in the Egyptian Revolution, the successful uprising of mainly young people. Many changes still need to be made in the country, but the seed of revolution has been planted and will bear fruit. The visible result today is that young people have regained their self-confidence, which had been paralysed until recently by the hopelessness of their situation. Cairo is bubbling with many new initiatives, many of which focus on the introduction of urban agriculture and horticulture in the metropolis. Youth organisation AOYE (Arab Office for Youth and Environment) – which Emad Adly created when he was a student together with some fellow students – is hosting the GEF Small Grants Programme that is experimenting with this initiative and has a couple of demonstration projects. Under the name Food Sovereignty Project, they work with another group of young people to spread knowledge, e.g., through an online platform where aspiring and be-

ginning city farmers can exchange experiences and tips. The goal, they say, is to break through the city dwellers' dependence on the poorly regulated commercial agriculture, horticulture and food industries, and, in turn, to reconnect the people who live in the densely populated city neighbourhoods to Mother Earth.

Greenies, or hippies, yearning for a time that will never return? Not at all, Adly insists. He talks about creative and promising initiatives. In the background stands the debate surrounding food security for the rapidly growing Egyptian population. The country largely depends on one single water source, the Nile River. Adly: "The current situation is that there's not enough water to satisfy the needs of 85 million Egyptians. So what will happen in the future, when there are 100, 120 or even up to 150 million inhabitants? We must get to work at once or things will go terribly wrong." He is looking for solutions in three directions: education, a mix of traditional values and new techniques such as drip irrigation and urban agriculture, and intensive cooperation amongst the Nile governors.

# Balconies, fallow land and neglected parks would be used for productive ends as well.

## A Gift from God

So how will all this pan out in, say, 20 years from now? Adly outlines well-organised societies, based on strong local communities that make optimal use of the natural resources such as water and fertile soils. In the Nile Commission, the river governorates work closely together, following the model of the European Union (Adly adds laughing: "Though without the euro"). 'One Nile, One Family', is their slogan. This strong state community – which cannot be compared to the current, relatively powerless consultative body – shares the Nile water equitably. There is enough for everyone. It is clear that agriculture, which from time immemorial has been using some 80 percent of the available water, can manage with much less. The starting point is to maximise reuse. By applying techniques such as drip irrigation, the farmers no longer waste water. They know that water is a gift from God.

One of the characteristics of the new society is the dominant mix of traditional values and state-of-the-art technologies. They work very well together, says Adly. "There are no contradictions whatsoever between the values and ethics of an Arab Muslim society and new techniques and initiatives. They go hand in hand." Is it not the Koran that stresses the need for carefully managing vulnerable natural re-

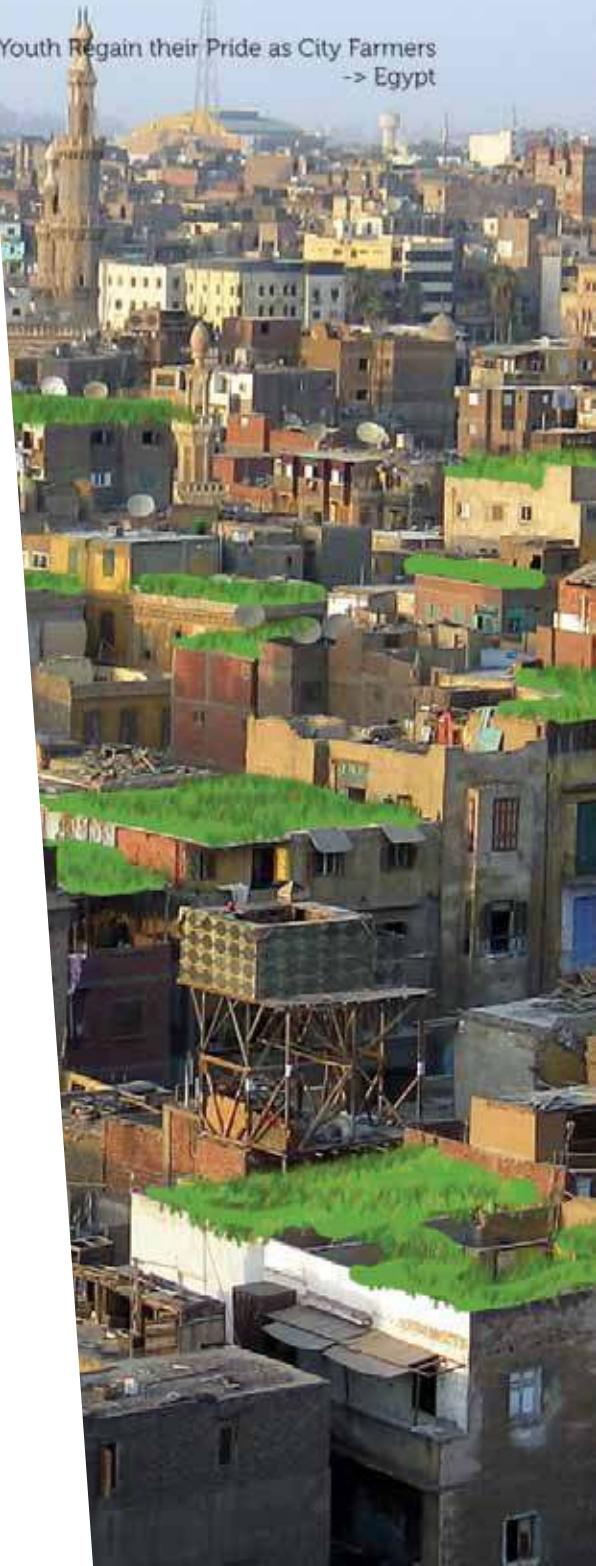
sources such as soil and water, and for sparing nature? And the Holy Book is also clear on the use of new methods. Adly: "The Prophet Mohammed himself said that it is every Muslim's duty to gather new knowledge. Even if it comes from a non-Muslim country such as China. The message, in other words, is to work with everyone. In brief, the Koran can be used perfectly well when one is training local communities and working towards achieving sustainability."

Everyone takes part in the new society, Adly stresses, and everyone will receive his or her fair share. To realise this, however, it is essential that we engage the youth. They are the agents of change, a source of transformation and the engine behind revolutions. Look at the Egyptian Revolution. While it may initially be about more freedom and less corruption, in the future, the youth will fight for a more sustainable society. Their energy and skills are decisive in this struggle to be successful. In the absence of an active government, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) have the important task of educating young people on how to discuss the challenges their country faces and developing a shared vision of the future. Adly: "Instead of being participants in a programme, they then become active players who use their skills to build a better future."

Unemployed Youth Regain their Pride as City Farmers  
-> Egypt

## Small Companies Rent the Rooftops of Buildings

For example, people will rent rooftops as city farmers. In the new Egypt of let's say 20 years from now, young people will have mastered the art of rooftop farming. They have probably learned from young people in Gaza who, forced to do so as a result of the Israeli blockade, have started this initiative some time ago. Through their pioneering work, they have clearly shown that urban agriculture offers great promise for the entire Middle East. There are many other places in the world where people who lack space become creative, and these people also serve as a source of inspiration. Thus, the city-states of Hong Kong and Singapore are already producing 20 percent of all of the meat and vegetables they need to feed their inhabitants. And this percentage will only continue to increase, they believe. In turn, Adly is convinced that urban agriculture and horticulture in Cairo are a potential gold mine. He dreams of thousands of young people setting up small businesses and closing deals with flat owners for leasing their rooftops. Balconies, fallow land and



## Since much fewer trucks are needed to transport fruit and vegetables from rural areas to the city, the suffocating traffic congestion will decrease.

neglected parks would be used for productive ends as well. With limited means but a dynamic exchange of experiences, poor city dwellers would be able to earn an (additional) income from growing vegetables and fruit.

Idealistic trainers from NGOs will discover that it doesn't make much sense to try to convince today's youth of the environmental benefits of urban agriculture, even though there are many.



Poverty amongst the young is such that their main motivation will be earning an income. But, as the success of urban agriculture grows – Adly is convinced that at least one-quarter of the food needed to feed Cairo can be grown in this way in the future – so too will the understanding of the other benefits. The liveability of the city will improve since fewer trucks will be needed to transport fruit and vegetables from rural areas to the city, thus leading to a significant decrease in the suffocating air pollution – which is notorious in big Middle Eastern cities such as Cairo – that is a direct result of the traffic congestion. This will be further curbed by the purifying action of all those new green spaces. Urban agriculture also has a cooling effect during the hot summer days while, during the cold winter months, the

green rooftops will retain the warmth. And, perhaps the most beautiful result, according to Adly, will be the return of the birds, bees and insects that abandoned the city long ago and this will be to the delight of many an inhabitant. Urban agriculture is obviously not the only strategy necessary to solve all of the Middle East's problems, Adly is quick to point out. But it is an important part of the solution. "It helps the cities and their dwellers to become less dependent on industrial food production elsewhere. And it makes them more resilient. This is important, also with regarding climate change. Let's get to work fast, then, so our dream can become reality."

### Emad Adly, doctor and activist

While he was a first-year medical student at Cairo University, Emad Adly (1957) joined the 'medical caravans', an initiative to bring medical services to the city slums. He soon realised that the lack of hygiene and environmental problems were at the root of the most common diseases in the deprived neighbourhoods, which led to his slogan: 'Treat the causes, not the symptoms'. Ever since then, Adly has been active in environmental issues. During his student days, he helped set up the Arab Office for Youth and Environment; more than ten years later, the Arab Network for the Environment and Development followed. In 1996, Adly was one of the founders of the Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development, headquartered in Athens.

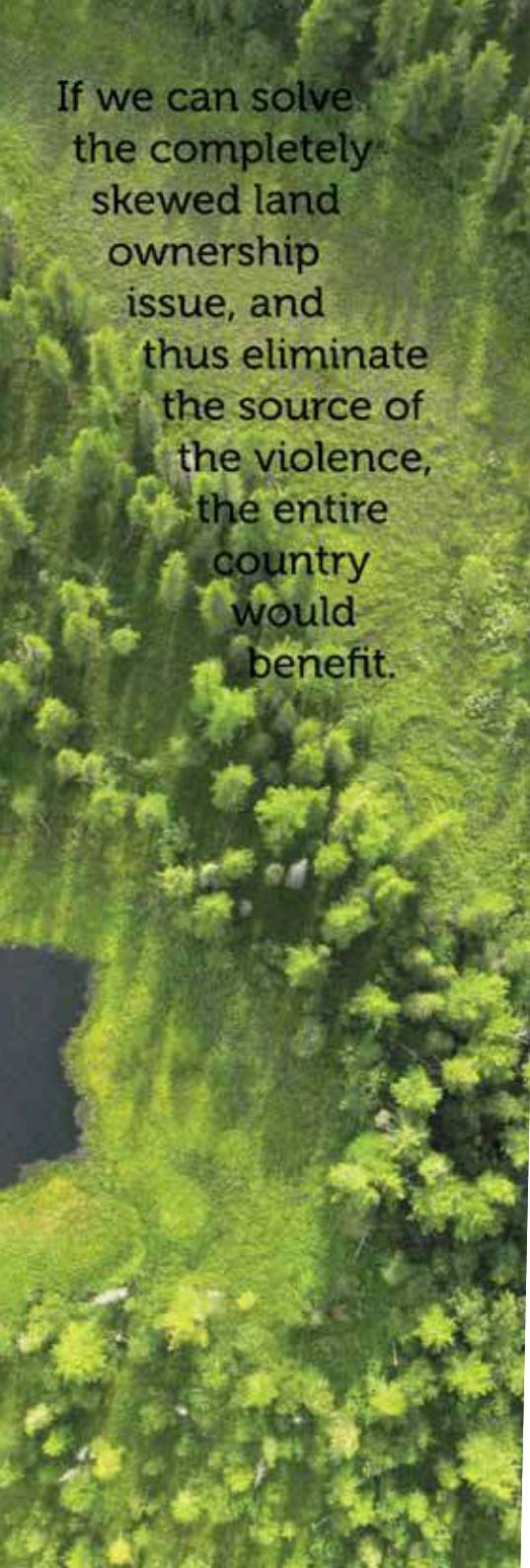
Like all Egyptians, Adly has a special bond with the Nile. He lived for years on the island of Manial, located in the Nile where he set up many environmental and communal projects. In 2001, this led to yet another new organisation, the Nile Basin Discourse Forum, which he has since chaired. Adly is also a member of various national and regional water organisations, and he is the national coordinator of the GEF/UNDP Small Grants Programme and the Local Initiative Facility for Urban Environment. Since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, he has been involved in the international discussions surrounding sustainable development.

Emad Adly has written several books about the environment and sustainable development in Egypt and the Middle East, and he is the editor in chief of *Montada Al Biaa* (Environment Forum Newsletter) and the *Sustainable Mediterranean Newsletter*.

## Experiencing the Sanctity of Life

Moema Miranda  
Ibase, Brazil

A piece of land that is big enough to live off of for every peasant household and every landless peasant, which would lead to an end of the concentration of land in the hands of a small minority. That is the dream of Moema Miranda, the Director of the Brazilian Institute of Social and Economic Analyses (Ibase), a research institute in Rio de Janeiro. A redistribution of the land leads to increased food production for the domestic market. This will make life in the countryside more attractive, which will lead to more people deciding to stay there. "If we solve the problem of skewed land ownership, the whole country will benefit."



If we can solve the completely skewed land ownership issue, and thus eliminate the source of the violence, the entire country would benefit.

“In fact my dream is more like a programme”, Miranda apologises. “I want land reform. That is the solution to several key issues in Brazil: the concentration of land in the hands of a small minority, the need to reinforce food production for the domestic market, and the fragile food sovereignty situation.” Miranda says that the latter refers to the farmers’ right to work the land in a sustainable manner and that the farmers themselves should decide how they wish to do this. “Land reform must respect regional and cultural differences. The indigenous people who live close to the Amazon River farm their land in a way that is different from those who live in one of the hundreds of quilombos in Brazil. They have a different culture and they face unique problems.” The quilombos were originally places where escaped slaves secretly settled. They still live there today in small communities of cooperative farmers. “They are bound by their marginal place in society. They lead a hard life.”

What could these disadvantaged communities of small farmers and indigenous people gain from land reform? “To begin with, they would receive technical and financial assistance from the government. Today, this assistance goes almost

exclusively to large-scale agribusinesses. This means that government technicians and agronomists should assist these small farmers in helping satisfy their wishes. Small farmers don’t want to or cannot, for example, use genetically manipulated seed because that would make them fully dependent on a handful of large companies. They don’t have the money to be constantly applying pesticides. And since they have little money, they are less credit-worthy to the banks. They don’t have much use for large agricultural machinery.” Miranda believes that assisting these smallholders would require Brazil to modify its present agricultural policies. Policymakers currently focus mainly on exporting bulk commodities such as soybeans, coffee, and citrus fruits.

As a result of land reform measures, we see the emergence of stable and peaceful rural communities that produce food for their own regions. Moema Miranda refers to this in the context of philosopher-theologian, Ivan Illich’s concept of conviviality. In simple terms, this means “living together”. But Illich adds political meaning to this term. For him it meant self-determination, which is contrary to current industrial production methods. Illich believed that the

way in which Western economies shape their economies is in direct conflict with this right to self-determination by robbing peasant communities of their vital skills and knowledge. Farmers thus become dependent and grow ever poorer.

### Spiritual Connection

Miranda: “For me, conviviality means that there is an autonomous and creative interaction amongst people, and a responsible interaction with their surroundings. It is also a critique of the belief in progress, of the idea that we can solve every problem through technology and boundless growth.”

Miranda, who describes herself as a devout Christian, discusses the ideas of Francis of Assisi: “He talks about the feeling of being one with the environment, with the universe, instead of being superior to other people. Imagine people no longer living in constant fear and the uncertainty that they may lose their land, people no longer fearing that the construction of a large dam will destroy their farmlands and their entire livelihoods, and wondering whether they will be able to feed their children and send them to school. In this scenario, people may begin gaining a spiritual connection to the sanctity of life. If the tensions in Brazilian society were to subside, we would

# We must opt for small-scale projects and the notion of local power generation.

Experiencing the Sanctity of Life  
-> Brazil

all live happier lives. Not in the sense of more, more, more, but in the sense of a good life."

Farming communities that function well can produce food for local markets. "Thus, the production and transportation lines grow shorter. Today we observe the strange situation that Brazil, for example, has concentrated its dairy production mainly in the South. Milk for the rest of the country must be transported thousands of kilometres. If you produce milk and other agricultural products on a regional level, you could feed the metropolises of Rio and São Paulo with produce grown in the immediate area. This would certainly help lower food prices as a result of the much lower transportation costs, while farmers would end up earning more. If these regions were to develop, living there would become a more attractive option; people would not feel compelled to move to the cities and this would take away part of the burden placed on these urban centres."

Land reform has been a serious topic for a long time in Brazil. The concentration of farmland in the hands of a very small minority is a source of many conflicts in Brazil. Almost half of Brazil's farms are less than 10 hectares and that is

not even enough to make a decent living. This is currently the dominant scenario for some 3 million peasant families. Further estimates show that there are some 4.8 million landless peasant families in Brazil. This means that almost 8 million peasant families cannot, or can barely, make ends meet.

At the other end of the spectrum are the large-scale agribusinesses that often control over 1,000 hectares of farmland where they almost always produce cash crops for export such as soybeans, citrus fruits, coffee, and cocoa. They represent less than 1 percent of the total number of farmers but control 45 percent of the total farmland. This skewed distribution of farmland leads to considerable social tensions. Another factor that leads to increased conflict in rural areas is that 20 percent of Brazil lacks any kind of official land titles. This means that anyone can claim this land, which, in practice, usually means people who do not hesitate to use violence end up claiming the land.

## Mega-Farms

In large parts of Brazil, violence is the norm. Farmland is increasingly being allocated for monocrops such as soybeans. Small peasant

communities without the legal deeds to the land often have to vacate their land and make way for various industrial mega-farming companies. The threatened communities eventually organise and some end up taking radical measures and resist the corporate land grab, which often ends to violence. But, for all their efforts, it usually means the farmers are left holding the short end of the stick. Miranda: "This struggle for land is not new; it is part of the history of the colonisation of our country. If we can solve the completely skewed land ownership issue, and thus eliminate the source of the violence, the entire country would benefit."

Land reform used to be a high priority for the Brazilian Labour Party (PT), although it never really grabbed the bull by the horns, despite the fact that the president has been a member of the same party for ten years by now. Miranda, a former member of the PT, is disappointed. "I will absolutely not minimise the accomplishments of the past ten years. Thanks to, for example, the bolsa familiar, an allowance for households that send their children to school, poverty has been drastically reduced. The indigent have become poor, the poor have joined the middle class. But the rich keep getting richer."

Miranda has her doubts about Brazil's economic miracle. She regrets that the market economy has not been thoroughly reformed over the past 10 years of the PT being in power. And any chances of this occurring remain minimal. "Brazil is euphoric. Many more people can consume, which is mainly the result of the fantastic world market prices that our main export products – mining and agricultural products – command. This is mainly thanks to China. The President says: 'There are still poor people in Brazil, we have to do something about this, we have to grow.' Criticism is difficult amongst all this euphoria. 'Our turn has finally come' is the predominant feeling among many people, 'we also want a car, a house, our holidays. Stop bothering us with your environmental horror stories.' Miranda is convince that this increase in wealth glosses over the fact that the gap between the rich and the poor remains profound and basically unchanged. "We are still among the most economically unequal countries in the world. Addressing inequality should be at the core of everything that the political sector does."

## Decolonisation of the mind

Moema Miranda (1960) grew up in Rio de Janeiro. "My father was an engineer and a communist, my mother a Catholic." Her childhood was marked by the military dictatorship in Brazil that lasted until 1985. "You could be arrested for the smallest things. My father was neither an activist nor a militant, but we lived with the constant worry of what might happen next."

In the mid-seventies, a strong social movement arose in Brazil with representatives from the church (liberation theology), the unions, intellectuals, and grassroots organisations, followed by the *abertura* (openness), a time during which political refugees were allowed to return to the country and political prisoners were released. "An amazing and exciting time. I joined a small organisation and began to teach at a school in one of the Rio slums while I was going to the university."

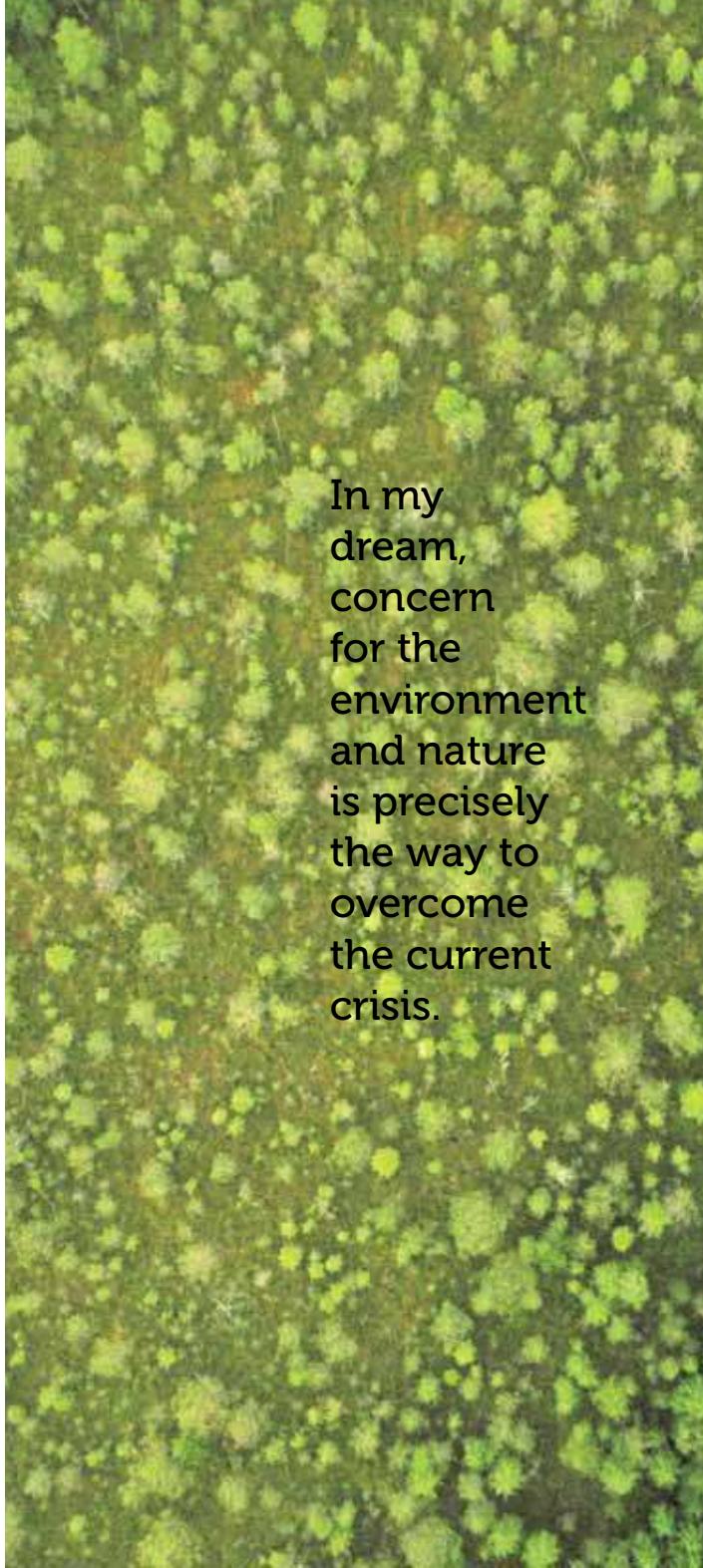
In 1992, Miranda began working for Ibáez, the Brazilian Institute of Social and Economic Analyses, which was established by intellectuals who had returned from exile. Ibáez was one of the initiators of the World Social Forum (Porto Alegre 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2005). "Those forums have been important in the establishment of South-South contacts. Until that time, we always had more contacts with Europe than with other countries in Latin America and Africa. Our mindset was always framed by the language and concepts of Spain and Portugal, the colonisers of our continent. The new South-South contacts have contributed to what we call the 'de-colonisation of the mind'."

### Power Generation

Miranda also dreams of a completely different type of energy. "Presently, our energy needs are met by mega-projects: huge hydroelectric power plants such as Itaipú, Belo Monte, and Tucuruí. The negative impact of the necessary dams – with large parcels of land being flooded and expropriations affecting sometimes tens of thousands of people – comes at the expense of Brazil's neighbours, because many of these dams are built along Brazil's borders. The immediate region around the dams seldom receives any benefits from the energy generated that goes to big cities such as Rio and São Paulo and to large energy-consuming projects such as the mines. We have to end this situation. And we have to get rid of nuclear energy, which is once again being discussed as an option. We must opt for small-scale projects and the notion of local power generation."

In Europe, important social issues such as poverty and unsatisfactory health services for large parts of the population were addressed only after they started to affect the wealthier segments of society. That is how sewers, clean drinking water, toilets, minimum wages, and unemployment benefits came in to being. Miranda: "This is not

how things happen here. Our government puts its faith mainly in economic growth, based on the idea that everyone will then earn more. My question is how long this model will work. How long will China grow and how long will it need our agricultural products and minerals? Petroleum has now been found off the coast of Brazil. What are the risks involved if we become an oil-revenue-dependent country? The socialist parties have never been overly concerned with nature and the environment. On the contrary, they believe that the full exploitation of production is a necessary phase in the transition towards socialism. The environment and sustainability are therefore put on standby. In my dream, concern for the environment and nature is precisely the way to overcome the current crisis. In other words, it is not something we will only do after all the rest has been fixed."

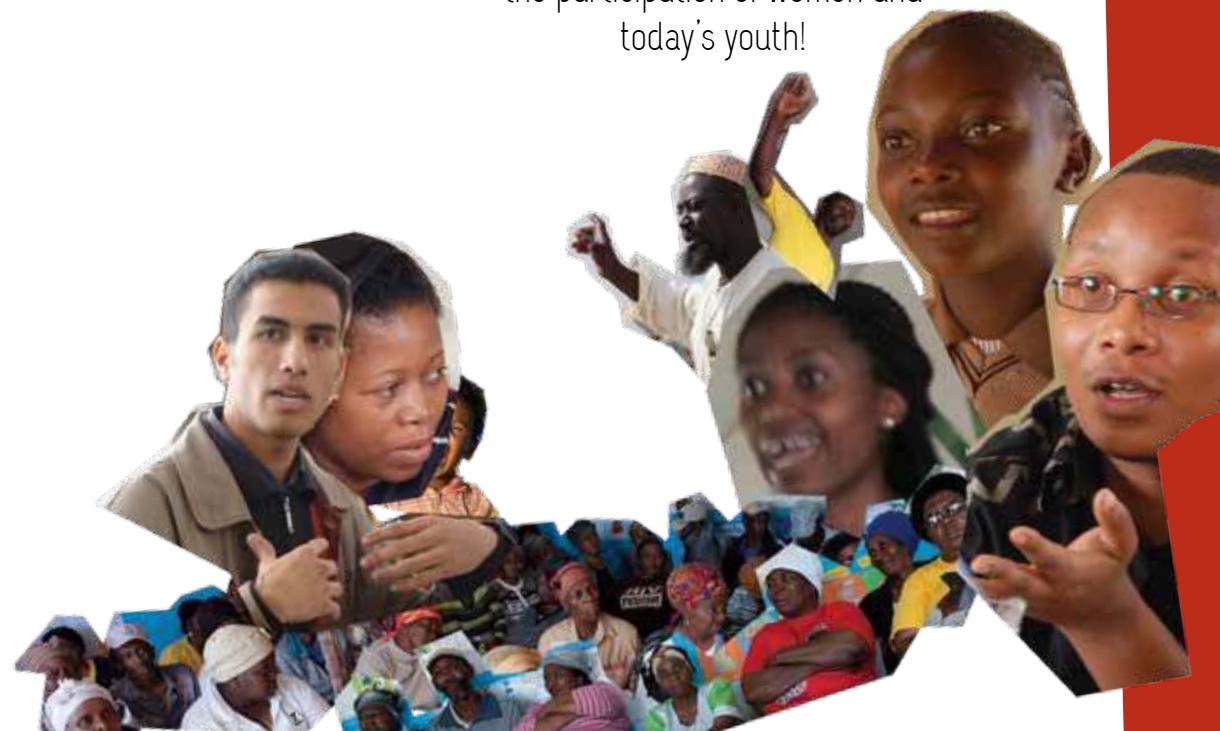


In my dream, concern for the environment and nature is precisely the way to overcome the current crisis.



**Janet Awimbo**  
Ecologist, Kenya

Who's looking for well-informed and engaged citizens? Not many politicians in Africa, in any case. So it takes courage to display one's sense of public responsibility. Janet Awimbo trains citizens and organisations in how to be brave. She believes this is absolutely necessary, because Kenyans who express themselves become creative and take better care of their surroundings. Her dream is to restore the ancient African palaver, but this time with the participation of women and today's youth!



## In a certain sense, I want to recuperate this traditional way of making decisions, with people governing themselves.

Imagine well-informed people, who know how to present their ideas and opinions to others, who actually listen to each other, who balance all their interests and visions and make decisions together. Nobody wins the-winner-takes-all prize, and, meanwhile, everyone is reaching a compromise. Authorities who sponsor 'open day' activities explain how they govern their jurisdictions. For us



in the West, this all doesn't sound so incredible – even though many things still go wrong here as well – but in many parts of the world, this is only a very distant ideal.

When she was dreaming her dreams of a transparent and democratic society, Awimbo deliberately referred back to the ancient African consultation model of the palaver, which is a kind of meeting that often takes place outdoors, in the shade of a tall tree like the baobab, where people keep on

talking as long as necessary until everyone comes to an agreement. The palaver is not hindered by agendas and schedules. The palaver is a typical African method and reflects the African rhythm of life.

The palaver has not disappeared; it is still very alive in rural areas, although the related notion of self-governance has faded into the background. Since the colonial powers began their domination of Africa, the traditional chiefs – as the major consultants – came under government control long ago. Awimbo considers the palaver to be an expression of self-governance. "In a certain sense, I want to recuperate this traditional way of making decisions, with people governing themselves. It's a system that is quite understandable. The elders determined when the seeds were to be planted, and when it was time to harvest the crops, how the harvest was to be divided, and what part of the harvest was for the poor. But the world has changed. I also want women and young people to be given a place." She laughs: "We no longer want a group of old men making all the decisions."

However, this form of local government takes courage, as Awimbo notes: "The courage to stop complaining, to take your life into your own hands, and to actively contribute to the development of your own neighbourhood, community and country." Awimbo, who lives in the Kenyan port city of Mombasa, supports organisations in Eastern Africa that play a role in local palaver activities. The "*Capacity for courage*" is what she calls it, the ability to be brave. "I want to strengthen that capacity. This requires people being informed and feeling responsible for making decisions on how they want to live and where." Awimbo is convinced that people want this and, "because they don't lend themselves to pre-programming," the results are impossible to predict.

"We are not as brave as we should be," Awimbo observes. When she says 'we', she means: 'we, Africans'. Too many people prefer hiding behind others because then they don't have to take action themselves. "If you speak with them, they say: 'we don't know because no one tells us'." She also blames those in power, who are interested in keeping others poorly informed. This turns the search for truth into an almost impossible task. "It has everything to do with power and

control." Most African politicians and traditional local chiefs don't like sharing information. Officials at the district and central government levels are unwilling (or barely able) to provide information that would enable people to make informed decisions about their own lives. She is not positive about the media either: "We have radio, television and newspapers, but journalists do not provide us with the information necessary to close the gaps in our knowledge." The result, Awimbo believes, is that many people have a distorted world view. "They think it is inevitable that some people dominate others. Or that change is simply impossible."



### Acting Based on the Truth

As a result, the problems of our time will continue to fester. "Everyone knows by now that natural resources are rare. But few people are willing to seek out alternatives. They're afraid that they'll have to change their lives. This also applies to climate change. People deny that it exists because they're afraid of the consequences of recognising this phenomenon. So we need people who are able to accept, and act from, the truth. That is what I mean with 'capacity for courage'. They – and in fact this goes for all of us – must learn to face the truth and act accordingly."

When people have access to better information and are better able to understand how they are being governed, they can respond creatively, suggesting their own ideas instead of simply waiting. "And we should have the courage and determination to demand the



same of our brothers and sisters, children, neighbours, friends, and colleagues."

Awimbo's ideal is to have "open days" during which authorities from all levels of government explain what they do, the decisions they make and their performances, and also discuss this with their employers. Awimbo believes this does not necessarily entail, for example, the number of public toilets built, but should focus mainly on informing the citizenry. "In other words: What have the authorities, from a ministry or a municipal government office, done to increase the 'governance literacy' of its citizens?"

### Breeding Grounds

Citizens also need to get to work. Awimbo encourages them to express their ideas about how society should be governed, and to test those ideas against the opinions of others. She calls it a breeding ground: where people have the necessary space to safely discuss their ideas. "If you have an idea about your town or your neighbourhood, you need to be able to



### We no longer want a group of old men taking the decisions.

figure out if it works. Whether it is a good or a bad idea and without automatically having to join a political party. People have to feel that, through negotiation and compromise, they can achieve maybe 70 instead of 100 percent of their wishes, but that, in this way, the other parties will also be satisfied."

Why not leave this task to the politicians? Isn't that why they were elected? Awimbo: "Many people don't understand that the government is there to implement the

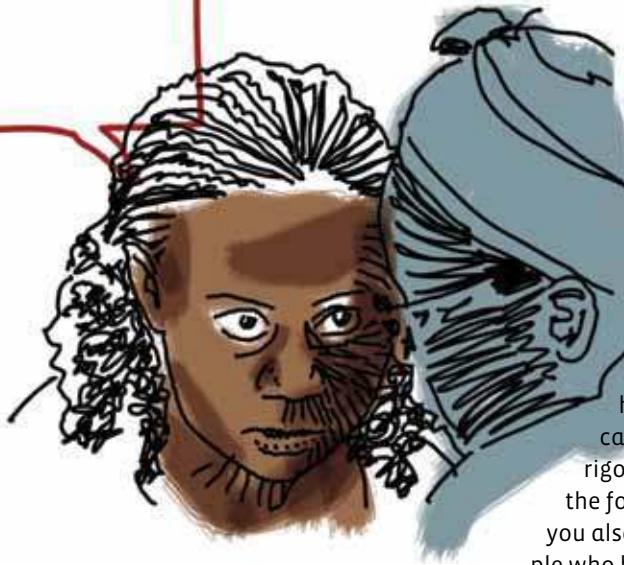
wishes of the people. They have no idea how they can exercise their influence. We must take responsibility for our own lives. But for the record: the breeding grounds are not there to replace politics, they are there to influence the decision-making processes."

Enhanced governance is not the ultimate goal; Awimbo wants to improve governance over all of the nation's natural resources. "It's our water, our air, our country – what we designate as cropland, what land we need to build houses and businesses, how extensive agricultural production should be. Those kinds of decisions."



Awimbo's ideas stem from her profession as an ecologist; she studies the relationship between plants, animals and humans in an effort to create ecological harmony. This is quite tricky because each of the elements gets in the way of the others. The solution is a compromise in which everyone gives in a little. "I am particularly interested in how ecology affects people's lives."

Awimbo works together with local community organisations to carefully examine how to preserve special natural habitats, without it having an adverse effect on the people who depend on these areas



for their livelihood. In other words, with and by these people. "In Africa, nature preserves are often precisely where people live. The worst thing that can happen – and which often indeed does happen! – is that decisions concerning the protection of ecologically important sites are made at the national government level, and thus excludes the people most affected by the decisions. The question thus becomes: for whose benefit are you protecting these areas? The interests of nature obviously do not always coincide with those of the people. So a balance between the two must be found and compromises must be made. A forest where a community harvests honey is essential for the people who live there: it is their traditional way of life. They sell their honey in neighbouring communities. If the forest becomes a totally protected preserve, the local residents can no longer use it to cultivate their honey and they would be prohib-

ited from chopping down trees to create areas for their bee-hives. Maybe others can do this, but by rigorously protecting the forest from everyone, you also prevent the people who have a vested interest in actually protecting it from having access to it."

### **'Nairobi Used to Decide Everything'**

Top-down decision-making is the normal practice in much of Africa. But Awimbo has observed some changes. Kenya's government is located in Nairobi, the capital, but it is in the process of transferring more and more power to the provinces. "Nairobi used to decide everything. Even the notion of 'local' used to be defined at the central government level. That does not work in a large and diverse country like Kenya. You cannot govern a big city in the same way you do an agrarian community. One perfect solution for all of the different regions is not feasible."

The Kenyan government has established numerous *Community Forests Associations* together with the local communities in Kenya's swampy coastal region. They

**At the present, anyone can voice his or her opinion. So change is possible.**

give the local people the power to manage and protect their own mangrove forests. They can also analyse whether protection of the natural habitat is possible without adversely affecting local fishing. "This is what we are negotiating now. Twenty years ago, this would have been impossible in Kenya. But after much pressure from the people, it now works. Those in power have always considered the Kenyan people as a source of cheap labour, but never as a part of the decision-making process. That is changing now. That gives me much hope."

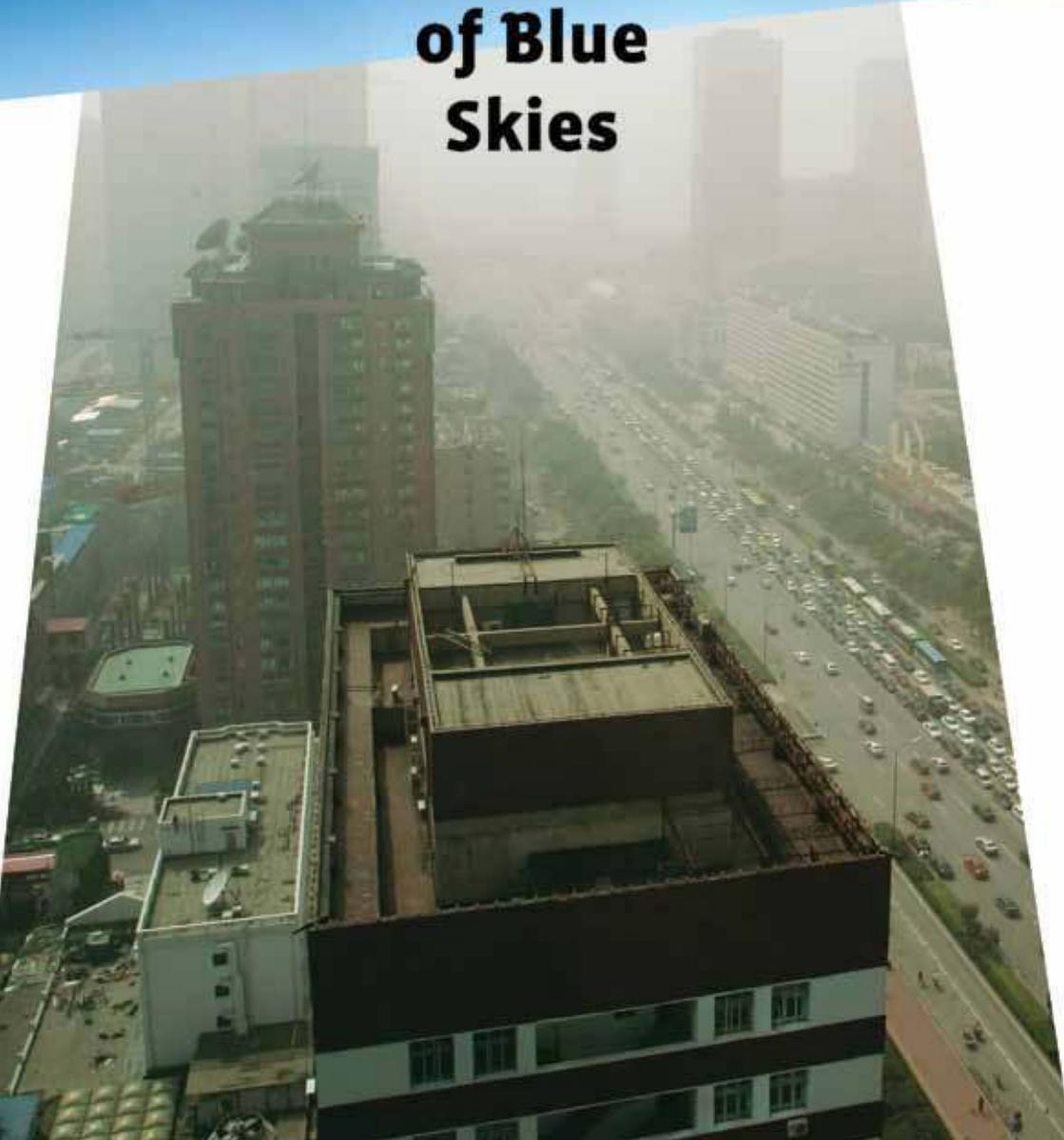
What also makes her hopeful is how the mass media in her country are changing. "Fifty years ago, the media were totally controlled by the government and wealthy businessmen. Now anyone can voice his or her opinion. So change is possible."

### **Experiencing the beauty of a forest while having dinner**

Janet Awimbo (1964) has been protecting nature and involving people in this effort for over twenty years. She focuses on educating and training people (capacity building), so that they can better employ their talents and skills to take their lives into their own hands. She also teaches (local) governments how to negotiate with each other and how to reach compromises. She also works on social and environmental justice, including through the Global Greengrants Fund, which she coordinates in Eastern Africa. This fund provides small grants to local groups. "For example, we have given money to a group of people who are protecting a mangrove forest near the coast. They started a restaurant with this money. That attracts people who can experience the value and beauty of the forest."

Awimbo has previously worked for organisations such as the Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI), the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), the Impact Alliance, Pact Kenya and the NGO Resource Centre (Zanzibar). She is now a senior consultant with Casework Equatorial, helping individuals and organisations in coastal Kenya become agents of positive change.

# The Miracle of Blue Skies



People are happiest when they feel connected to nature, claims Chee Yoke Ling. China has become increasingly aware that human well-being has been disturbed by enormous economic growth. Yoke Ling, has been on the international barricades for twenty years promoting sustainable development, which include her dreams of clean skies over Beijing and of revitalised rural communities. "Don't think it's just some distant ideal. China has exploited nature over many decades, often neglecting the environment, but it is still able to engage in revolutions: nowhere else can things change so drastically in so little time once the will is there."

### Chee Yoke Ling

Third World Network, China





Chee Yoke Ling, points out that people who, like her, live in a city like Beijing, with its twenty million inhabitants, have a lot to complain about: the blanket of smog that is always hanging over the city, fuelled by traffic emissions. The bicyclists who once filled the streets of Chinese cities have had to make way for the massive streams of cars purchased by the growing middle class. Meanwhile, old neighbourhoods fall prey to relentless demolition and bulldozers, making place for even more of the same apartment and office buildings. Yoke Ling was born in Malaysia and is not the complaining type. She prefers to look at what remains and what may come. "The city still has authentic neighbourhoods and communities. In three minutes' time, you can walk from a six-lane highway to the old city, with its small streets and houses arranged around a courtyard. There, it is quiet and you can still hear the birds." Not all is lost, is what she means. And because ancient China still

exists, it could become part of a new, more sustainable China. "I hope that bicycles will once again dominate the streets of Beijing, combined with an efficient and sustainable public transport system, with buses and metros that operate on green electricity. And, of course, I long for the great miracle of finally seeing clear, blue skies again, day after day."

## I hope that bicycles will once again dominate the streets of Beijing

Yoke Ling's dream does not stop at Beijing's gates. The human dimension, she observes, demands much more attention in China. The restless migration of millions of Chinese in search of employment and higher wages has caused an explosion of urban sprawl, while

the countryside is becoming less sparsely populated. The elderly have stayed behind and often take care of the grandchildren while the parents work in the cities. This has to change, Yoke Ling insists. With well-targeted policies it must be possible to breathe new life into rural communities so that future generations can once again grow up being raised by both parents and that the youth no longer has to flee the countryside to find a job in the city.

### Contrast

Nowhere in the world is the contrast between city and countryside greater than in China. The country has made an enormous effort to produce sufficient amounts of food to feed the rapidly growing population. The famines of the past have been practically forgotten. But while agrarian production has expanded immensely, rural incomes have remained far below those of the urban Chinese. Large parts of the country remain impoverished. Social cohesion has come

under increased pressure, not only in the peasant villages but also in the metropolises. Meanwhile, the sprawling cities and factories take up increasingly more valuable farmland.

"Restoring the balance between what is urban and non-urban", says Yoke Ling, "is essential for the future well-being of the Chinese." This means that the sharp distinctions between the city and the countryside need to be minimised. The two should be complementary and not in an adversarial relationship. There is a need for smaller cities and a revitalised countryside. "Today, every small peasant dreams of sending his or her children to the city to study. But if there were sufficient facilities and local services, this would no longer be necessary. I hope I'll have a chance to see a migration reversal out of the cities with people returning to the countryside and once again getting in touch with nature and the land." Rural impoverishment is partly due to the deficient agrarian

## Restoring the balance between what is urban and non-urban is essential for the future well-being of the Chinese.

knowledge of the average Chinese farmer and the tiny plots of land millions of farmers rely on to feed their families. There is a lack of modern agricultural educational opportunities. Meanwhile, the larger producers have become addicted to intensive agricultural practices, which increase water and soil contamination. As usual, the planners have turned to a technological approach, which means giving an important role to genetically modified crops.

Yoke Ling has, both at home and abroad, always actively resisted unbridled technological interventions such as genetic manipulation, which she believes seriously threatens China's biological safety. She believes that Chinese planners should be seeking a new, more ecological strategy. The first signs of change are already visible. "I work with Chinese partners who regularly visit the countryside and the indigenous communities, where there are the early signs of a revitalisation of local life. There is more hope that the young will eventually return, armed with the knowledge they acquired in the city, which they can combine with traditional knowledge. They can thus benefit from the combination of the best of both worlds and continue to stay in touch with the land."

Ling believes that some of the key elements of the new approach are respect for nature, a revaluation of traditional knowledge, the use of local materials, appropriate modern technology and people-centred management. "Many solutions are already available. We know what ecologically intelligent agriculture on the community level looks like, what a sensible diet looks like, how we can increase the farmers' productivity without polluting the ground and the water supply. The important thing now is to convert this into policies. The knowledge is there. What we need to do is apply it."

Yoke Ling sees parallels with movements in other parts of the world, from the Occupy movement in the West that started in New York to the revaluation of indigenous knowledge and ways of life in Latin America. "People eventually get tired of a lifestyle that merely focuses on more consumption. Things are brewing. People are thinking actively about 'urban reorienting'. And the core element that traverses all these initiatives is that people have to regain control of their own surroundings. Because this makes them happier: spending more time in their community, participating in a joint venture such as a city garden, and feeling part of social and cultural

photo <http://ersatzkaffee.blogspot.com/>

life. Millions of people have lost the feeling of belonging somewhere. This has to change." She denies that behind many alternatives there's a desire to return to the good old times, when life was still clear and simple. "It is precisely about the combination, the clever use of what is old and what is new."

### Constraining the Metropolises

The official development model is increasingly a subject of discussion in China, says Yoke Ling. For a long time, the starting point has been that people should better move to the city where, simply put, one finds the best services but this idea has come under increased criticism. Increasingly, there are arguments for decentralisation, for rural development and for limiting the sprawl of the metropolises. Yoke Ling: "Urban traffic and pollution make life increasingly miserable in many cities. People live in apartments that are just too small. On weekends and holidays everyone flees the city, which in turn leads to huge traffic flows. This is not the kind of life we want to lead. That is why we need people who have the political courage, with support from

the public, to say: 'We're going to do this differently'."

In the countryside, social protests against pollution and impoverishment are not unusual, and these signs can no longer be ignored. The Chinese government has announced various measures to improve the living standard in rural areas. Modernising agriculture is a core element of these plans and the provision of social services in rural areas are priorities on the agenda. A positive development, says Yoke Ling: "The current 5-year development plan signals a conscious attempt to seek a better balance among the environment, social and economic dimensions." Changes often occur rapidly in China; take, for example, the explosive rise of organic agriculture. Until some years ago, there was no demand for organic food products at all. But after a number of large-scale food scandals, things began to change. The urban *nouveau riche* began demanding more reli-

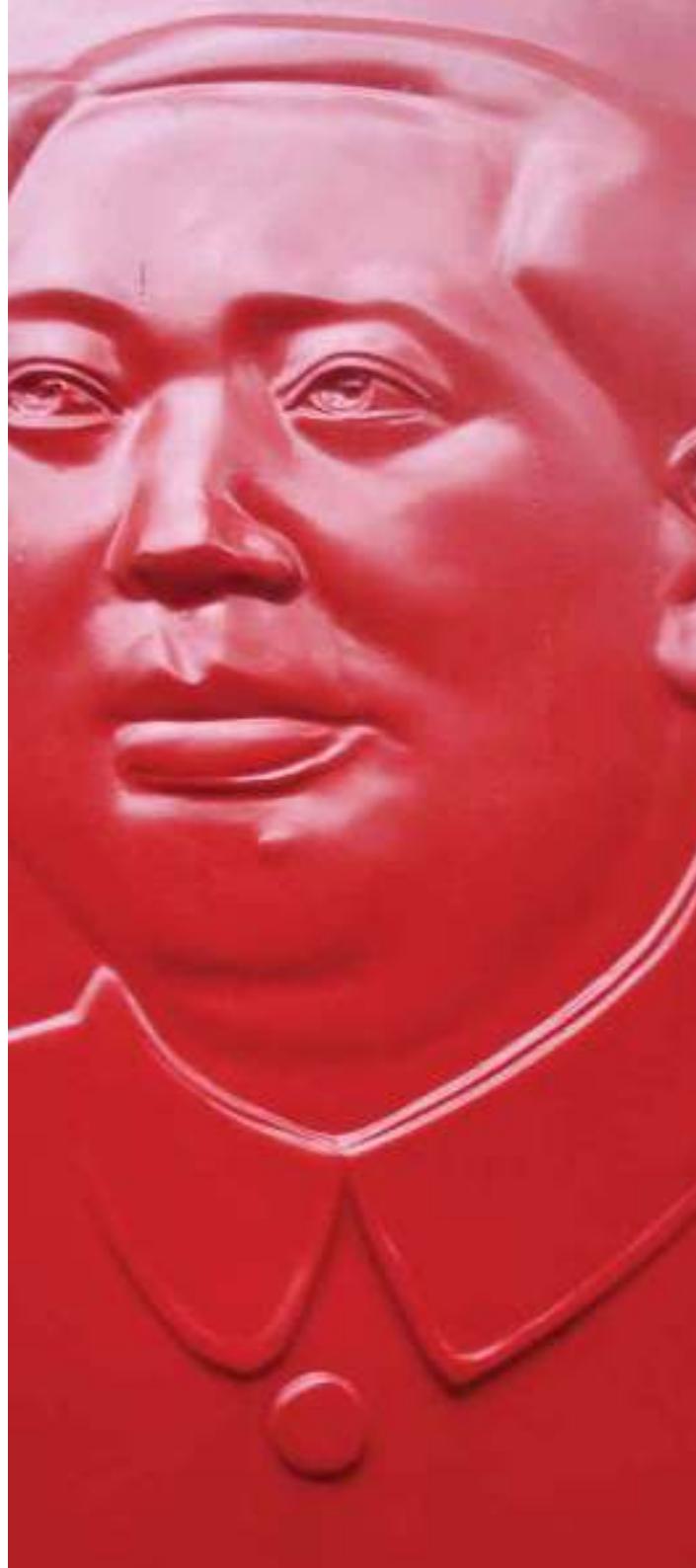


## People eventually get tired of a lifestyle that merely focuses on more consumption.

able foods, followed by the increasingly aware young people. Yoke Ling: "People are increasingly willing to pay slightly more for sustainably produced food. And this goes hand in hand with the revaluation of farming." Meanwhile, China has climbed among the world's top countries in area of farmland devoted to organic farming. At the same time, however, China uses more fertilisers and pesticides than any other country. A similar contradiction can be observed in the energy sector: China is not only the world's largest coal consumer, but for some years now it has also been the main investor in wind and solar energy. China is full of these kinds of contradictions, observes Yoke Ling. But she, being the eternal optimist, believes the glass is half full with rapid changes exemplifying the tremendous dynamic quality of contemporary Chinese society.

Yoke Ling has been concerned with living in harmony with nature ever since her student days. "As students in a developing country – in my case Malaysia – at the time we were very interested in the debate surrounding the Club of Rome's limits to growth. We wanted to learn from the West and avoid the mistakes made there." It was a time of optimism, she recalls. "We believed that – with the aid of the

United Nations, NGOs and campaigns, and by relying on our own strengths – we could change the world, make it more sustainable." But the next twenty years saw that ideal pretty much disappear. Instead of cooperating, profit-driven competition increased. But with a view to the Rio+20 conference, Yoke Ling once again sees some hopeful developments. "I still dream of social equality, justice, and living in harmony with nature, and of a lifestyle that fits this vision. To see that more and more young people are struggling for sustainability and for a different way of life is an enormous source of inspiration to me."



### Twenty years manning the barricades

Malaysia's Chee Yoke Ling (1959) is an international heavyweight, one of the veterans in the long and ongoing debate on sustainable development. She was closely involved in the preparations for the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and, as an NGO representative from the Third World and an official member of the Malaysian delegation, she played an important role in the conference. Today, twenty years later, she is still a prominent figure in the debate, for example at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development and the Convention on Biological Diversity. She is a popular guest at international conferences, where she speaks as easily about the dangers of genetic manipulation as about international trade or how climate change affects developing countries.

Yoke Ling studied international law at the universities of Malaya (Malaysia) and Cambridge (UK). She is the director of programmes of the Third World Network, an international network that advocates for the rights of people in developing countries and for a fair distribution of public goods such as clean air and water, and also encourages a type of development that is ecologically sustainable and satisfies human needs.



# The Good Life

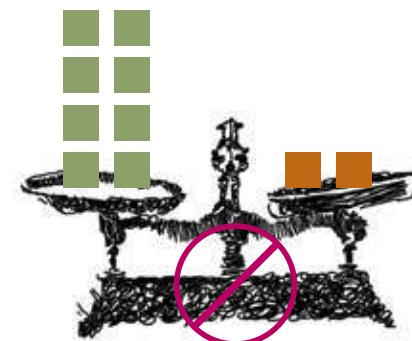
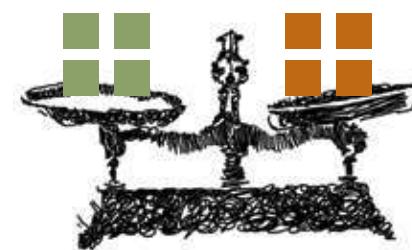
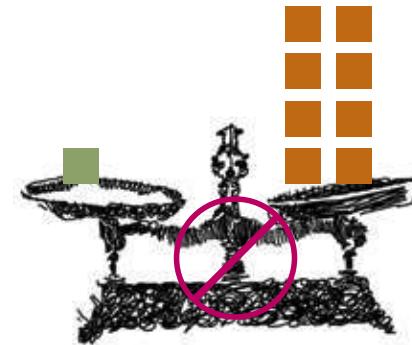
Europe should get prepared for the worst, as far as Eduardo Gudynas is concerned. From now on, we'll have to manage without Latin American minerals and agricultural products. This leading social ecologist from Montevideo wants to selectively disconnect the continent from the global economy as a way of first sorting things out internally in Latin America. However, life in the near future will be much soberer than it currently is.

"Luxury will be very, very expensive."



**Eduardo Gudynas**

Centro Latino Americano de Ecología Social, Uruguay



## In my ideal, of course luxury is still possible, but it will be very, very, very expensive.

Digital watches, with their extremely environmentally unfriendly batteries, will no longer be affordable because of the heavy tax levied on cadmium, mercury, and lead. This should be no problem because we can simply start wearing manual-winding or self-winding watches again. Like digital watches, many other consumer items of the global middle class such as a second car, air conditioning in every room, bigger and flatter TV screens – are unfeasible from an environmental perspective. That is why we have to drastically mitigate these consumer desires. The alternative to our current wasteful lifestyle is a sober but good life. That is Eduardo Gudynas's vision. To be sure, he looked up the term *austero* (austere) in the dictionary. Indeed: sober, plain. "In my ideal society, of course, luxury would still be an option, but a very, very, very expensive option. This is because the prices of things will be an honest reflection of their social and environmental costs." Thus, increased taxes and economic reforms will render mineral extraction much more expensive. "The royalties that the mining sector pays will increase substantially. One ton of iron will be much more expensive. And thus a great many consumer items as well."

To lead the good life is at the core of Gudynas's ideal vision of society. In Spanish: *el buen vivir*. But his interpretation of a good life is very different from the typical land of milk and honey. *Buen vivir* is the Spanish translation of some indigenous visions, such as the Kichwa *sumak kawsay*. This concept is diametrically opposed to the Western image of man and nature, in which the well-being and prosperity of the individual come first. Gudynas: "The underlying principle of *buen vivir* is that well-being can only occur in a community, which is social but also encompasses nature. After all, man is part of and not contrary to nature. *Buen vivir* thus goes beyond Western dualism where nature opposes society, and the individual opposes the community."

Gudynas warns that leading a good life should not be considered a "return to the past" of pre colonial times when the great indigenous cultures of South America reigned. "I do not advocate a return to the societies of hunters and gatherers in the forest. The point is that the



protagonist should be the quality of life, and not increasing the gross domestic product." He laughs: "The concept of *buen vivir* includes good computers and other technology. To put it simply: in my dream, we don't stop building bridges and we don't reject Western physics and mathematics to build them. But the size and the materials used to build those bridges will be different. And they will bridge rivers and ravines in other places, i.e., where they can contribute to local and regional transportation needs, and not where they contribute to meet the needs of the global markets." So, technology is still very necessary, "but future consumer products will last much longer than they do today, for decades, even. There will also be more options to repair them. This will create jobs and generate much less waste."

A left-wing breeze has been blowing for quite some time now over the Latin American continent, which sometimes blows like a hurricane. But, alas, this has for the most part not caused any radical

departure from conventional capitalist economic ideas. Ever since Latin America was 'discovered' by the Europeans, it has been a constant provider of important raw materials for Western economies. Despite all the leftist rhetoric, it has not changed much in recent times. While agricultural products and meat have long been the chief exports, in recent decades this has been complemented with petroleum, gas, coal, other minerals and agrifoods. Not only Europe and the United States, but also newcomers like China and other emerging economies, have become eager buyers of Latin American products. The new part of the equation is the important role that the state plays in mineral exploitation and the distribution of the revenues amongst a greater part of the general population. But the basic idea – that of Latin America as a cheap raw material provider – has remained unchanged and nothing is being done about the negative environmental impact or Latin America's dependence on foreign demand.

Gudynas offers a couple of examples to substantiate his harsh assessments: "Bolivia is increasingly exporting food crops, while a large part of its population lives in poverty and is starving. In Colombia, agriculture is dominated by the

flower sector. The flowers are mainly exported to the United States. The country itself has to import an increasing proportion of its food. We really need to put an end to this in a radical way." More recently, open-pit mining has been booming because of the global scarcity of certain metals and minerals. The resulting environmental damage is significant, Gudynas points out: "Even Uruguay, an agricultural country, isn't able to escape the large-scale mining operations."

Gudynas believes that the mistake that all leftist South American governments make is that they believe that development is the same as economic growth. That is why Latin American countries continue to export enormous quantities of raw materials. Gudynas also considers it "naive to think that poverty can be reduced by exporting more raw materials. We need an autonomous development strategy that comes from within."

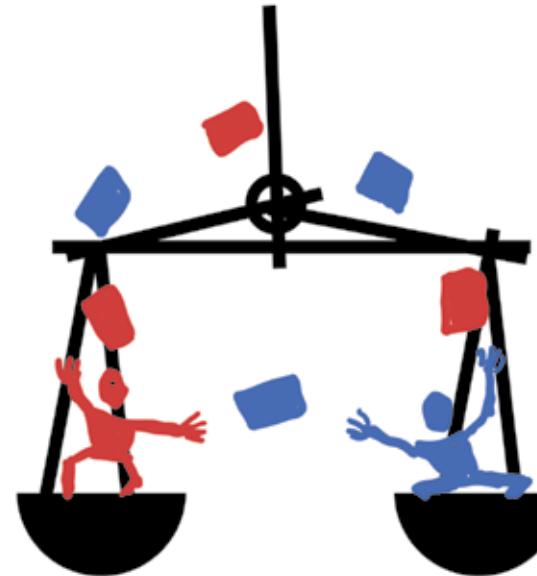
### Mutual Trade

The strategy of *buen vivir* is a concept that has been incorporated into the new constitutions of both Ecuador and Bolivia, and is being widely discussed throughout South America. It literally means 'leading a good life', although "in fact, it's

a term that cannot be translated properly." And we should definitely not consider this concept as a fully developed idea either.

Gudynas underscores that *buen vivir* has nothing to do with the Western debate about zero growth or negative growth. "Zero growth or negative growth might be a consequence of this approach, but not a pre-condition or assumption. The over-consumption by some groups, for example, the very rich, has to decrease. In that sense, there will indeed be less growth. But, on the other hand, some sectors do need to continue to show growth, for example, education and sanitation. The end result of this approach may be growth or no growth."

*Buen vivir* will also have important consequences for other economies, Gudynas predicts, because the unbridled exportation of raw materials to Europe and North America, or China and India, will eventually have to come to an end. "They will no longer receive our coal and gas. So, you better be prepared for winters without your fuel," he says



**The point is that the protagonist should be the quality of life, and not increasing the gross domestic product.**

with a laugh. "We will disconnect our continent from the global economy in order to determine our own economic strategy. The quantity of raw materials that we will eventually be exporting will only be about 10 percent of current levels. Only what is left over will be exported." An additional effect of this strategy would be that many social and ecological problems would automatically subside once the continent turns to a policy that involves using its natural resources for itself. This, of course, means that the total amount of raw materials that Latin America needs will be much lower than what it is currently exporting. Moreover, studies will be conducted to measure the social and environmental impacts prior to issuance of contracts for any large-scale projects or mining operations. Gudynas predicts that this will significantly reduce exploration and exploitation.

Instead of export-driven economies, Gudynas foresees Latin American economies that will be more regionally focused. "Trade between South American countries will increase. Instead of buying a table and chairs from China, we'd be much better doing this ourselves on a regional level!"

In Gudynas's vision, self-reliance will replace globalisation as the new perspective. The countries and continents will basically have to fend for themselves. And this will have far-reaching effects, "although it's not the same thing as isolation," Gudynas points out. "We can export our surplus food and other goods, provided production meets social and environmental standards. And I see no constraints at all regarding the provision of services." He suddenly takes on a reassuring tone: "And, of course, we'll always be exchanging books and music with the other continents."

# Only what is left over will be exported.

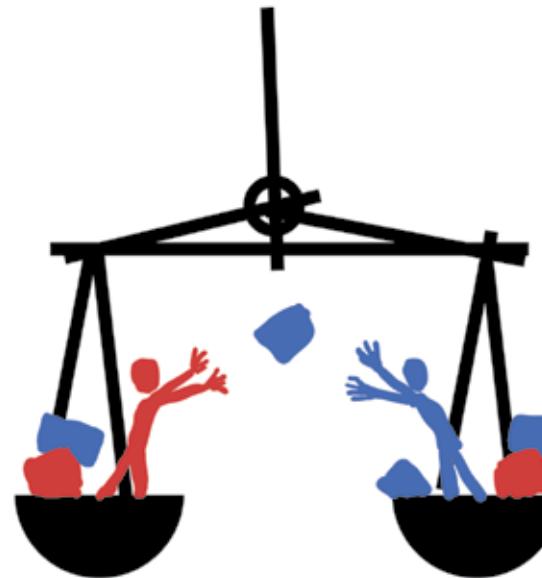
## Agriculture is the Basis

In Gudynas's dream, agriculture forms the basis of the economy, so that food sovereignty becomes reality for an entire continent. "When this process has been fully implemented, it will mean no more malnutrition. And since agriculture is good for employment, everyone will have a job and poverty will be reduced to 0 percent." Organic farming will be practiced on half of the farmland, with the actual distribution of production depending on the ecological capacities of each region. The starting point is that each region should become as self sufficient as possible. Which is, of course, not entirely possible, Gudynas admits. "Uruguay is better at producing organic meat than potatoes, which we can only grow here if we use a lot of pesticides. You have to increase production in the best areas with the best conditions. Which is quite a different concept from the notion of food sovereignty because this is not something that will be decided by individual countries in Latin America, but by the ecological capacity of its many regions."

And that brings him straight to the issue of governance, which, he insists, must also change. Latin American countries will maintain their sovereignty. But, whenever

necessary, regions will turn to regional forms of governance "which will not be based on national boundaries but on the region's needs. The Lake Titicaca region, for example, is currently governed by both Peru and Bolivia. A regional government would perform this task much better, because it would consider the needs of the entire lake basin area."

Gudynas is convinced that large metropolises such as São Paulo and Buenos Aires have exceeded their human dimension. "They are losing inhabitants to medium-sized cities that are more spread across the continent. Today, almost all of Latin America largest cities are located along the coast. A strategy of reorganisation would ensure better distribution between urban areas and the countryside." He quickly adds that one should not enforce migrations out of the urban areas. On the contrary, the entire continent needs to become much more democratic. "We have to seek alternatives to presidential democracies, which concentrate executive powers in the office



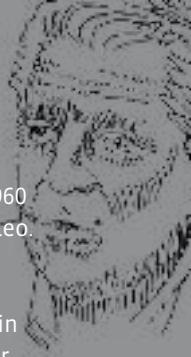
of the president. Instead, we need to seek a true balance between the various political powers. We need to increase citizen participation, particularly where larger projects are concerned. The balance of power will eventually shift from the urban areas to the provinces and rural regions."

There isn't much time to lose, according to Gudynas, because if something significant isn't done soon, the damage to mankind and nature by the current lifestyle may be irreversible "I hope that the petroleum will run out soon, or at least reach its production peak because then we still have enough time to repair the damage done by our current lifestyle. If it ends up being a long-term process, I will become increasingly pessimistic."

## An expert in sustainable development strategies

Eduardo Gudynas was born in 1960 in Uruguay's capital of Montevideo. He graduated as a social ecologist and wrote his thesis on the environmental movement in Latin America. Today, he is the Director of the Centro Latino Americano de Ecología Social (CLAES) in Montevideo. His field of expertise is sustainable development strategies for Latin America, with an emphasis on protecting nature, the situation of agriculture, regional integration, and globalisation.

Gudynas has participated in the publication of various editions of the *Global Environmental Outlook* of the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP). He has been a member of the UN climate panel IPCC since 2010. He has written a dozen or so books, which have been mainly distributed in Spanish-speaking countries. He is also the author of numerous scientific publications. Gudynas quite regularly shares his opinions in various Latin American media outlets.





## **“Your Own Tomatoes Really Are Sweeter”**

**Zenaida Delica Willison**  
UNDP, Thailand



photo <http://jeffwerner.ca/>

A healthy countryside leads to healthy cities. To arrest or at least slow down the seemingly unstoppable migration to the mega-cities requires increased investments in education, health care and transportation in rural areas, says Zenaida Delica Willison. “In the countryside, we can live a long and happy life.” Once she retires, she will move to the countryside together with her husband as ‘living proof’ to manage a demonstration farm and lifestyle centre near the mega-city of Manila, in the Philippines.





"My father was 103 years old when he died a year ago. In the countryside, he ate his own healthy fruit and vegetables, and he drank alkaline water from a stream. I know, it's an ideal situation that definitely doesn't exist everywhere, but I want his life to serve as a testimony that living in an unpolluted environment with basic but sufficient facilities offers a certain guarantee that one will live a long and happy life."

But one must match words to deeds and Zenaida (Zen) Delica Willison is exactly this kind of person. She will be retiring this year from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). She hopes to establish her own demonstration farm that will fea-

## The way you lead your life is an example to others.

ture organic agriculture together with her husband, who also works for the UNDP. They already own 5 hectares of land in Batangas City, about 100 kilometres outside of Manila. "I am fortunate that my husband and I feel the same way." There is already a lifestyle cen-

tre for the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, including vegetarianism, called the Talumpok Lifestyle Center. The ground floor is used for lectures, workshops and for enjoying meals. The second floor includes the bedrooms. There is also a church. "In 1986, my life changed radically when I joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is the best thing that ever happened to me."

The idea is that this project will serve as an inspiration for others to get involved. Delica Willison and her husband want to show city dwellers that life outside the city also has its significant advantages and charms. "The way you lead your life can serve as an example to others. There are never any absolute guarantees that what you do will have an impact. But, in your life, you have to do what you can within the realm of possibilities." The lifestyle they are promoting is patterned after NEWSTART: The N stands for Nutrition. Delica Willison: "You have to eat the right foods in the correct quantities and at the right time. We will teach people how to cook well and with good ingredients." The E stands for Exercise. "We need to be active: move, walk, ride a bicycle, climb, etc. Even in rural areas, people are no longer used to walking far to go to work or school for example: they

use scooters or motorbikes." The W stands for Water, which underscores the importance of "drinking a lot of pure alkaline water to help neutralise the acid levels in our bodies. At least eight glasses a day." The S, for Sunshine: a source of vitamin D. The T stands for Trust in God, which Willison says is at the core of a righteous lifestyle. R stands for Rest: we need at least eight hours of sleep every day, Delica Willison claims, plus a full day's rest every week. The last T stands for Temperance. "Do not use anything that is bad for your body, such as alcohol, tobacco or drugs, and don't exaggerate the good things either."

The farm is not yet fully operational. "We are busy planting trees. Fruit trees such as mango, coconut, banana, avocado, papaya, and tamarind. But also mahogany and *nara*. And there are also vegetable gardens." A lot of people have come to look, especially city dwellers from Manila and Batangas. "They enjoy coming here, to get away from the polluted city and become reinvigorated by the country life. After they establish themselves here they will begin to offer seminars, lectures or visitors can enjoy Zenaida's brother's bonsai garden or his *koi* carp pond. People will be able to camp here by simply pitching a tent. Guests will not be required to pay, although most visitors donate some money for cleaning.

After their stay, visitors return to their urban lifestyles because very few people are willing to get their hands dirty. And farming is not easy, I know from my own experiences. When people are still young, they hear that they have to get good grades in school, that they have to study hard so they can get a nursing job or something equivalent in the United States or Europe, and there attain a luxurious lifestyle. That is the mentality of entire generations of Filipinos: their hope lies in the West. So why should they learn to plant tomatoes and grow fruit?" Yes, a diploma is important, but not at the expense of a holistic lifestyle.

Delica Willison believes that an

tive has always focused on the local community."

### Dreaming Our Own Dreams

As a young student in the early seventies, Delica Willison was actively involved in opposing then-Filipino President and dictator Ferdinand Marcos and his wife Imelda. Delica Willison was eventually arrested in 1974 and received a substantial prison term. She was imprisoned together with her two-year-old daughter. She was eventually released after spending 801 days in prison due to international pressure organised by Amnesty International. "But we



For example, because they are completely unprepared. This goes for natural disasters such as typhoons, but also manmade disasters. Thus, it is important to design prevention, mitigation, preparedness and emergency response measures. It is my job to point this out to governments, organisations and people in general." She has been based in Bangkok since 2005, where she works as a UNDP advisor in the field of disaster risk reduction.

She admits it was 'pretty tough' putting her ideals into words, "because there are so many problems in my country that are screaming to be addressed all at once: corruption, unemployment, low productivity. But if I had to start somewhere, I would start in the countryside. I want to encourage farming once again."

This desire obviously comes from her dislike of Asia's mega-cities. "Practically all of Asia's cities are terribly congested. There is an ut-

ter lack of discipline. Not only is traffic a stinking mess, but it is also next to impossible to walk on a sidewalk or get around easily because of how shops, restaurants and workshops sell their goods. Regulations are not enforced. We are so unhealthy because of the lifestyle that urban living promotes. If the countryside were to be redeveloped, we could encourage people to go and live there."

### Magnet

The economic possibilities that cities offer act like a magnet for the rural population, for whom the economic prospects are indeed "very small" and the chances of improvement virtually nonexistent. "Because it is becoming more and more difficult to be a farmer due to the land issues, farmers end up migrating to the city where they often end up joining the growing informal sector. They are then faced with housing, health and safety issues. If something unforeseen happens in their lives, if they suffer a setback, this can quickly turn into a personal catastrophe. Because they have nothing and nobody to fall back on. In the countryside, at least they could still grow their own food."

It won't be easy to convince farmers to remain behind in the rural areas, or to encourage former

## Children have to experience how it is to taste the fruits of your own labour.

integrated approach is necessary to make country living appealing again. "This should begin at school, where youngsters could learn how to plant tomatoes in school gardens. They should be taught to appreciate this type of work. Children have to experience how it is to taste the fruits of their own labour – they really do taste sweeter!"

The demonstration farm and the lifestyle centre are seamlessly aligned with her great desire: the revitalisation of agriculture and the revaluation of the countryside. "My perspec-

have to dream our dreams and be prepared to pay the price to make those dreams come true."

Delica Willison studied nursing, sociology, business administration and public health in the Philippines and development practice including humanitarian and refugee law in England. She is considered an expert in the field of disasters and disaster risk reduction and has built up an impressive track record. "Natural hazards turn into a disaster only when vulnerable people are not able to cope.

farmers to return to the countryside, where there is often the threat of political armed conflict. "Militarisation has a negative impact on local farmers, who are subject to various restrictions. This is coupled with the increasing cost of agricultural inputs such as fertilisers and agricultural machinery, and the difficulties in accessing low-interest credit. So, any migration back to rural areas must go hand in hand with various incentives such as the promotion of organic farming, setting up and providing good health care services, and organising the sale of agricultural products. All these things have to occur simultaneously." The city is attractive for many real reasons: there are more economic opportunities and children have a better chance of getting a good education. "That is true. That is why it's not enough to say that people 'must' return to the countryside. Education in rural areas must improve considerably by, among other things, paying better wages to the teachers so that the good teachers will not abandon rural community schools. Today, the best teachers head to the city, where they can earn more, and the bad ones stay behind. It's also equally important to have a good health care system in place. In rural areas, at present, there are no doctors, not even midwives." This health care doesn't even have to be expensive. "In the cities, health care is about hospitals and expensive

medicines. But in rural areas, there is a lot of knowledge about traditional health practices, herbal medicine and preventive care."

Each region needs to utilise its own specific resources and measures. A fishing community is different from a peasant village in the mountains. "If you know that a certain community is unable to grow rice or grains, but it excels in making special handicrafts, then you have to support the latter. Each community produces what best fits that particular community. Make sure that these communities can sell their products to each other, so they can take as much advantage as possible of each other's expertise. This requires a proper transportation system. I don't claim that this is the only solution, but it could be a hopeful step in the right direction."

Delica Willison thinks that the city will continue to be the centre of cultural and intellectual life. "There will always be people going to the cities. That's not a development I want to stop. But I do want to see a balanced approach between urban and rural areas. If you promote resilient cities, you should also promote resilient rural areas. The same goes for safety, health care, education, and tourism: distribute things fairly across the country. I'm not advocating lowering the development of developed areas. But start developing underdeveloped rural areas. We need to correct these skewed kinds of development.

photo sara / Locket479



**If you promote  
resilient cities,  
you also have to  
promote resilient  
rural areas.**

### Nurse becomes a disaster expert

Zenaida Delica Willison (1950) was brought up taking care of others. In her village, her father was a traditional herbalist with informal training who healed people for free using simple means and medicines using bark, leaves, water, and heat. Young Zenaida also wanted to be a doctor, but her parents didn't think that was a good idea. Instead she was encouraged to become a nurse. After two years, she switched to business administration at the Lyceum of Batangas, where, like so many of her generation, she got involved in protests against the dictatorship of President Ferdinand Marcos. She eventually relocated to Manila. After four years of protesting against the dictatorship, she was arrested in 1974 and jailed together with her two year old daughter. Delica Willison studied in the Philippines and in England. She has worked in disaster risk reduction her entire working life and also serves as a consultant for various organisations. Her daughter now works in the same sector as her mother.



photo Joe Coyle

## 2012 Both ENDS & Cordaid

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Text                   | Hans van de Veen ☎<br>Han van de Wiel<br>( <i>ImpactReporters</i> )   |
| Editing English        | Bart Plantenga ( <i>Uncover</i> )   |
| Design ☎ illustrations | Joris van den Ende ( <i>Baracudah</i> )   |
| Printer                | Booxs.nl  |
| Production             | Nathalie van Haren ☎ Tim Senden<br>( <i>Both ENDS</i> ); Eric Fivet, Dicky de<br>Morree ☎ Roos Nijpels ( <i>Cordaid</i> ) |

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Both ENDS and Cordaid wish to thank CIDSE (international alliance of Catholic development agencies) for its financial contribution to the translation of this publication.

Special thanks to Emad Adly, Farida Akhter, Janet Awimbo, Zenaida Delica Willison, Eduardo Gudynas, Chee Yoke Ling and Moema Miranda. Their openness and creative spirit made this publication possible.

Cover photo  
StudioInvisible  
[www.studioinvisible.org](http://www.studioinvisible.org) ☎ the Beirut Wonder Forest proposal



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On 30 May 2012, His Royal Highness the Prince of Orange will receive the first copy of the book "Imagining Sustainability" during the event Rio aan de Maas



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