

*"Burst with indignation against Poverty!"*

by

Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo

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Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

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## Introduction

1. Last December the Independent Commission on Population and Quality of Life initiated a series of eight Regional Consultations with Public Hearings of groups and individuals.

The first one was in Harare, with English-speaking countries of the African continent.

When I heard that we were going to have the testimony of some 400 people, coming from all the NOGs of Zimbabwe and from regional associations as well as representatives of State, academic and private institutions, I wondered about the outcome. Would it be possible to find a common language among such diversified groups? Would any message come out of it?

But as soon as we were in the building where the Hearings were conducted, there couldn't be any doubt.

On the wall, there it was, in huge red letters, their message:

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We deserve a better Quality of Life"

And then, one after the other, the groups explained, mimed, talked, sketched, sang scenes of their lives: (the old wondering why the land is not yielding as it used to, the women plotting about ways to cope with violence in the street and at home, the young without jobs, referring to sex as an escape, so eager to live a different life ..) and experts gave context, and civil servants told about their attempts - and all the time, as a cry, the questions some of the young ones were repeating:

- "- is there anybody listening?
- is there an echo?
- to whom shall I speak who will listen to me?"

Since then these questions are haunting me.

This is why I am so grateful for a meeting like this with so many personalities who are listening to the people, wherever their cry comes from ...

Maybe by listening ever more attentively, "the reversal of logic", Juan Somavia pleaded for in the first morning, will happen by itself. People and their voices will be speaking.

### Change and Complexity

2. This is not rethoric.

It is affirming :

the first pre-condition for change - that people themselves will take things in their hands and speak up;

that they will refuse the fatalism and resignation of a magic thinking;

and start imagining how things could be, searching for partners who will listen to them in this interconnected world of ours.

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When we listen, we are urged to give answers.

This meeting shows how great is the potential for change in a group of committed human beings.

From the experts and the international leaders present here (as well as from many diversified places and institutions all over the world) come:

the sharp analysis of obsolete tools, programs and mechanisms,

the gropings for new concepts,

the proposals for new modes of operation.

3. Indeed, we are attempting to draw up a map of still uncharted landscapes. We are sharing ideas and building blocks for "well-ground intellectual framework" (as Juan asked).

But ... what will happen next?

Of course, international conferences put together with the dedication and the intelligence of those who spoke here during these days, are part of the answer.

But not all the answer.

4. All that is said - if it is to be implemented - must be taken up, with equal weight of determination and imagination, into political action.

And I ask: how ready is political action for change?  
for the jump needed?

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What do we see:

the more urgent action becomes, the less political action seems to cope.

Again and again in the last 20 years leaders met at the highest level in different fora and took important decisions from The Hague Declaration to Agenda 21.

What has happened to their decisions?

Which mechanisms stopped the process of implementation?

Why is it that enforcement in the social and economic area does not seem viable?

5. One striking example of the apparent powerlessness-of-the-powerful was described publicly last June by a member of the G7. There he was, theoretically one of the seven men at the highest level of political power, saying to an international audience just a few days before he went to Naples:



"we cannot anymore entrust the evolution of the world to the monetary regulations".

And I ask: who is doing that if not he?

He went on saying:

"we have to refuse the disappearance of development aid from the agenda of the rich countries Summit".

And I ask again: who is deciding that agenda if not he?  
who is deciding?  
who is responsible for implementation?  
where is the authority for enforcement?

6. These are not new questions.

They gain momentum now as we are witnessing the exponential complexity of the interwoven fabrics of ideas/events/institutions.

Indeed in a situation defined by complexity, there are multiple causes and effects interacting among each other in unceasing movement.

Each fact, event, sector of activity, institution (national or international administration), each is at the same time autonomous and interdependent.

This is why any expression of conceptual and programatic inconsistency has its counterpart in institutional anarchy.

Governance is at stake there. But the governance needed today cannot by-pass the complexity of reality.

### Political leadership

7. To cope with complexity, leaders have to know the facts and to learn how to interrelate them. They have to look at reality through lens taken from different types of knowledge and from different sectors of society.

Such are the conditions for the much needed political vision. It is only then, in the interplay between a guiding vision and the multifaceted reality, that true leadership can be exercised - a leadership that brings about answers not only for the problems of today but also - and maybe most of all - for the problems of the coming decades.

Indeed, demographers, among others, are pretty rigorous in establishing scenarios for tomorrow:

- how many young people to expect in every country and for whom education facilities have to be devised and, later on, jobs provided;
- equally, how many people will need old age protection from the community, in which circumstances and for how long.

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It is not only "numbers" the political leaders are compelled to see:

it is also the modification of populational structures, the speed of the urbanization processes; the types of infra-structures needed; the big migratory movements.

Political action confines itself too often to macro-economic management while the accumulation of pressing problems is much nearer and requires another type of action.

It is time for leaders to hear what people are feeling and saying in very diverse social, economic and cultural situations. They do want the fabrics of their lives and what really matters for them, to be of concern to politicians.

One man, in a public hearing in South Asia, denounced with indignation the too easy replacement of real problems of alive people by indicators. He said:

"The demographic indicators shouldn't be used to describe the lives of people!"

For him to do so was a scandal - he called it a "Numbergate" scandal.

8. There are however other questions at the core of today's governance. One seems fundamental to me:

Can democracy in its present form contribute to the guiding vision needed?

Is our contemporary democratic culture able to encompass the questions of today's complex society?

Indeed, in order to formulate and implement a vision which requires a profound transformation of accepted concepts and institutions a long period of time is needed. And yet democratic rule can only tackle the long-term through discreet, fragmented units, corresponding to the electoral cycles. In this context, we ask:

Would there be a way in which democratic rule may also be vision-oriented?

Can democracy contemplate the expected trends of the future?

Or is it bound and tied to the unexpected events of the present?

How to combine the two?

This is decisive for the future and particularly in relation to the wide array of public policies connected with population.

Through the work of the Independent Commission I see very clearly that little progress is possible if these two perspectives are not there.

9. Population policies - implicit or, as in many cases, explicit - should embody a vision.

Indeed, a vision through which society, like the atom, may live in harmony because of a continuous process of "conflicts and exchanges" in its populational composition.



Such a harmony is rooted in the culture of each society and in the values it cherishes. There the vision is one of a dynamic population balance:

balance in the relationship men/women;

balance in the relationship young/old;

balance in the relationship between those who are autonomous, actively earning their living, and those who are entrusted to the care of the community;

balance between society and nature.

And again, each of these balances conveys elements of culture, of history, of the way of relating to each other, to the world, to nature.

If vision is to be embodied in the short-term, integrated policies of social and economic areas are essential.

First and obviously, the crossroads between health policy and education policy. No population program can be carried out with efficiency if it is not part and parcel

- of an education program geared to men and women
- and of a network of primary health care services which include family planning, child and mother care.

In the short-term, these appear as a condition sine qua non of efficient policies and humane programs.

But integrated policies have to go further.

Other sectoral fields of political policy play a role. They also must be taken into account.

(The work done by Indian scholars from different disciplines in the book "Science, society and development" is for me one of the best examples of an integrated conceptual approach to population policies).



10. If population policies are part and parcel of an integrated approach to society's living human forces, it is obvious that the place for the decision is government itself - not a council here or there but in the mechanism and occasions where political will can re-direct public policies and combine the different - and often opposed - demands.

Let us be clear on our aspiration though. If we mean strong political action, this means more State,  
 more intervention,  
 more regulation,  
 more public initiative.

But then how to make this compatible with the total deregulation pruned by the current trend of free market?

In order to come to grips with the situation as it is now and as it is foreseen in the coming years, to translate new ideas (for example human security as dynamic population balance) into feasible policies and operational measures it is impossible to count on the market as a starter or as a regulator.

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Whatever "natural laws" may be guiding the market, its instincts are not enough to address the need  
 for more jobs,  
 for a direct fight against poverty,  
 for stopping the degradation of the environment,  
 for developing basic infra-structures of health and education.

Social sectors are not, should not be the corrective factors of the consequences of hardship coming from economic rules. They embody societal goals and have absolute primacy.

In order to take seriously social development, it is impossible to go on with a deregulated economy. If political leadership has a vision it has to intervene and to create conditions for the regulation of the deregulated economy.

11. Let me single out one important element of political action. No political leader can work democratically in isolation or only within the circle of his colleagues and friends. The industrial society provided us with the concept and practice of the social partners in the questions of production, namely the trade unions.

In our time, no policy of social development can be elaborated or made effective without the participation of those who are the main actors.

The concept of social partner should be elaborated so as to involve in decision making those who are directly concerned with the questions at stake.

Comprehensive population policies require dialogue with those who are the subjects of their destinies. When I hear in one Regional Consultation somebody who says:

"By putting family planning as mere technology we miss the boat ... what we need are packages of development with family planning"

... When I heard this, if I am at the national level, I have to pursue the dialogue: what does she include in the package of development, how can that be managed with resources available, to whom, to which region to give priority, etc., etc....

This dialogue is indispensable. It is also the sign that political leadership is contributing to empowerment of people and particularly of women.

As one woman said in the Regional Consultation in Mali:

"If you don't have an enabling' environment, there is no sense in enabling women to decide, to make choices."



Concerted international action

12. In many different ways, we have been illustrating (in this conference) the need for concerted international action.

But what then of the huge array of organizations, institutes, organs, agencies? How can they serve integrated policies?

Let us not fool ourselves.

What we are dealing with is not only the absence of coordination. It is also the fact that it is impossible to coordinate what is not even a system. Again, in a system, different elements are autonomous indeed but interdependent.

Any reform has to take into account that in these so unique 50 years as Margaret was saying, the change in knowledge and in technology went far beyond any other period in history (moon and miniaturization).

**But** those radical changes were encompassed by changes in international institutions which came into being through successive adjustments of the same pattern created immediately after World War II and which had nothing of the same radical zest. (G.A. about new reform: the finances committee - oral inclusion).

The split in institutions within the international machineries has led to serious inconsistencies,  
 in problematics addressed,  
 in strategies defined,  
 in actions undertaken.

13. This is notorious in the so much claimed concern with population matters.

First one obvious difficulty.

In all regions but especially in countries with structural adjustment programs, the inconsistencies reach the level of the absurd.

Indeed, how is it possible to carry on any population policy when the SAP demand a reduction/control of public expenses and this means automatically a substantial cut in health and education?

Secondly, even with the best intentions, different international agencies and also representatives of bi-lateral agreements of cooperation, do pull in all directions the sector of the national machinery to which cooperation is offered.

Let us say it honestly: it is totally unmanageable a situation where a director-general or even a minister have to listen to different perspectives and to different conditionalities which don't recognize in themselves what they are.

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Why not an integrated approach in the field? In substance and in machinery? Can the international organisations and bilateral cooperation work towards that?

14. We are trying to find a way for getting fresh resources. (The Independent Commission has started a process of consultation with leading financial experts to determine the feasibility and the concrete modalities of the Tobin's tax.)

Of course, a new rationale will be needed for the management of such resources.

But also, as international institutions are modern tools of governance, they must be submitted to democratic control by organs with political legitimacy.

### Paradigm

15. Important as they are, institutional reforms don't solve everything. We need conceptual breakthroughs into new theoretical perspectives.

The most important one concerns the end of the limitless horizon.

It is easy to verify that the 60's/70's were the climax of a vertiginous "always more".

It is easy to demonstrate that resources are limited, that the planet, the land, the cities, the organisation of society cannot proceed anymore along the expectation of endless growth.

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It is even easy to appeal to the acknowledgement that life is a learning process about the acceptance of our own personal limits.

But it is difficult to establish a paradigm which includes limits, a paradigm has entropy at its core.

We need soon to move towards the formulation of the paradigm: we are dealing in the most acute way with the question of production and consumption patterns.

16. In the preparation for the Cairo Conference - as well as in all the literature in the line of "another development" - it is an acquired fact that in terms of the threat to the ecosystem and to future generations, population and consumption go together.

Only apparently is this a North/South divide. Twenty years ago, the community of nations was voting the new international economic order declaration culturally based on the concept of endogenous development. What a change since then! To the aspiration



for autonomous models proper to each culture which characterized part of the discourse at the international and even national levels succeeded the slogan spread in East Asia and particularly in South Korea : "from initiation to innovation".

All countries are by choice or by necessity following the same path, - using the same pattern. Hence, the need to tackle scientifically this overwhelming tendency to consumption. (But that is a major difficulty).

The open question on production and consumption patterns is an illustration of a basic fact.

17. For new ideas and concepts on social development to be effective, there is an urgent need for new economic tools, for new economic theories, capable of incorporating a factor of flexibility.

Paradoxically, at the moment when freedom in the economic field is the line of the day, economic science itself is still caught in the monolithic economic perceptions that characterized the Cold War period. Liberalism has become ever more dogmatic, unable to adjust itself to different sociological situations.

Flexibility in economic theories is particularly in demand when the social development agenda assumes as its own the fight against poverty, a whole set of actions through which "freedom from want" is pursued.

Running contrarily to the monolithic perception of economies, the fight against poverty implies specific economic and social strategies aimed at the eradication of extreme poverty.

This is a field where contribution of all disciplines will be necessary. But most of all, this can only come about if, having burst with indignation against colonialism, against dictatorship, against apartheid, we are sensitive enough **to burst with indignation against poverty**.

18. A final personal note.

This morning I noticed a coincidence that has a great meaning for me.

Here we are trying to see how change can come about so that people - all people - may enjoy human security and quality of life.

It does happen that today in my religious tradition, christianity, two stories are read from the Bible:

one several centuries before Christ when a prophet shares with a hundred people the wheat he had been given -they all eat and there was still plenty;

the other about the other prophet, Christ, distributing to a multitude the five loaves of bread and two fishes his disciples had brought and the astonishing fact that everybody ate and there were still several baskets of leftovers.

Just two ideas:

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- in both cases, a prophet, somebody who speaks out of a vision he has about how things are and how they should be, is able to answer the material needs of people;
- in both cases, there is also more:
  - . the prophet of the first story is a man who in several occasions was moved by an immediate compassion
  - . in the case of Christ, the text says that he looked at the people and had a great compassion.

Maybe this is a metaphor for our action: vision and compassion.

And we will be able to change the world.