

# Summary of Contributions in this Volume

## Setting the Context

The development debate thirty years after *What Now*  
*Sheila Coronel and Kunda Dixit*

The first article in this volume delineates the broad social and political backdrop to the *What Next* project by surveying some major contemporary problems and challenges and by tracing the development debate over the last thirty years. Coronel and Dixit start from a snapshot from the Philippine island Siargao that dramatises both global disparities and the utterly bleak conditions under which many people live today. With no other way to survive, some farmers and fisherfolk on Siargao are driven to sell their kidneys to rich buyers, exemplifying current trends toward commodification, whether of nature, the human body or genetic material. Cases such as that of Siargao, Coronel and Dixit write, are part of a wider movement of marketisation, privatisation and neoliberal globalisation, now being promoted as a 'single formula for all'. The world at the outset of the 21st century, they state, is marked by a paradox: 'despite increasing levels of global wealth and giant leaps in technological development, global poverty and inequity are at higher levels now than 30 years ago'. Moving back to the 1970s, when the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation's report *What Now: Another Development* (1975) was published, the article also describes how the development debate was then framed. Development was seen by many as a fairly straightforward process through which Southern countries should strive to replicate the economic structures of the North. Yet at the same time, Coronel and Dixit note, this conception was being questioned. Among the early attempts to envision another view of development was the *What Now* report, which stressed the need for pluralism, self-reliance and holism as well as ecological concern. With the benefit of thirty years of hindsight, Coronel and Dixit's article revisits the principles of *What Now* and weighs them against the development thinking of today, epitomised by the UN Millennium Development Goals.

From *What Now to What Next*  
Reflections on three decades of  
international politics and development

*Praful Bidwai*

In the second article, Praful Bidwai provides a bird's-eye view of major political and social changes during the past three decades or so, in part developing and expanding on the analysis in the first article. Like Coronel and Dixit, Bidwai sees a world fraught with contradiction and ambiguity. On the positive side are decolonisation, increases in living standards in some countries, decreasing inter-state conflicts and, importantly, the end of the Cold War. Yet such developments have been partly eclipsed by chronic and growing poverty in many parts of the world, persistent and increasing inequalities among and within nations, worsening ethnic tensions, and unceasing environmental destruction, with climate change as a new and potentially disastrous threat. Bidwai further sees recent decades as the period that brought about the rise of neoliberalism as a dominant ideology and the consolidation of the elitist or middle-class belief in the supposedly limitless benefits of 'the free market'. The consequences of these trends are many and profound and include a 'rolling back' of state capacities, growth in corporate power, exacerbation of the 'commodification' and degradation of nature, and marginalisation of other economic paradigms. Neoliberalism and free-market tenets, he holds, have also had a fundamental impact on international relations and the direction that principal multilateral economic organisations, such as the WTO, have taken. Yet these damaging developments have been closely accompanied by creative popular opposition. The extensive protests organised nowadays whenever major international political or economic meetings take place, is but one example. This resistance, Bidwai argues, is a significant source of hope for a better world.

Before Thinking about *What Next*  
Prerequisites for alternatives

*Gilbert Rist*

The third contribution, Gilbert Rist's 'Before thinking about *What Next: Prerequisites for alternatives*', intertwines self-critical reflection on the premises of 'transformative' undertakings such as the *What Next* project with an interrogation of the notion of development. Both of these elements, Rist argues, are critical prerequisites for attempts to envision alternative futures. The deep-rooted belief in development, characteristic of modern society, he maintains, is a key reason why so many prevailing social, economic and environmental

problems are not tackled successfully. For ‘development’ has become inexorably bound up with processes of ever-increasing ‘commodification of nature and social relations’, marketisation and economic growth, and, ultimately, a westernisation of the world. As such, it should not be seen as the solution to global problems, as the dominant discourse has it, but, in fact, as the very source of many of them. It is therefore urgent that we rid ourselves of the naïve belief in the blessings of ‘development’, he states. But this may be a tall order, since development is one of the grand narratives of our age, an irrefutable ‘good’ transcending ideological divisions and deeply rooted in the Western psyche. The task requires deconstructing the assumptions and tacit epistemological preconditions which give rise to ‘development thinking’ in the first place, many of which have their roots in economic theory. If such ‘deconstruction’ is neglected, efforts like the *What Next* project, he writes, run the risk of reproducing ‘the usual Western hegemonic programme’ cloaked in the name of ‘universalism’. In order to evade the ethnocentrism with which initiatives in the field of development have been historically associated it is imperative, as we aspire to tackle the current problems and envision a better future, that non-Western voices be placed at the core.

### Enough!

#### Global challenges and responsible lifestyles

*Göran Bäckstrand and Lars Ingelstam*

The subsequent article, ‘Enough! Global challenges and responsible lifestyles’, written by Göran Bäckstrand and Lars Ingelstam, is a follow-up, thirty years later, to their 1975 paper entitled ‘How Much is Enough? – Another Sweden’. That paper, which was written as a part of *What Now*, gave rise to an intense national debate. It proposed a number of reductions in Swedish consumption patterns in light of the need to share resources among the world’s countries more equitably. And it offered a blueprint of what an alternative development pattern for a rich industrialised country like Sweden should be like from the point of view of international equity. Bäckstrand and Ingelstam’s contribution to the present issue of *Development Dialogue* asks: How does the 1975 vision stand today? Focusing chiefly on the issue of economic equity, the 1975 blueprint for ‘another Sweden’, they conclude, gave insufficient attention to ecological constraints, human security, and the diversity of actors on the international political scene. However, they contend, the basic proposal – that a more equitable world requires lifestyle changes in rich countries – remains valid today. Curbing consumption in the rich countries is necessary not only to foster equity but also to improve the rich world’s own quality

of life. Beyond a certain income and consumption level, which rich countries as a whole have already passed, individuals and societies do not experience improvements in quality of life. For Bäckstrand and Ingelstam the conclusion is clear: if the goal of economic growth is increased human well-being, the rich world ought to lessen its aspiration for rising levels of growth, consumption and wealth. Indicators that assess human well-being and quality of life, instead of the limited GDP measure, ought to be a central pillar in future politics.

### Activism, Expertise, Commons

*Larry Lohmann*

The issue of what development is and how it is commonly conceived, is also dealt with in the fifth article of this volume, 'Activism, Expertise, Commons' by Larry Lohmann. For many policymakers and activists, social and political reality is imagined to be divided into two parts: what Lohmann terms 'disembodied, potent, transcendental, "global" entities' such as 'globalization' and their alleged counterpart in the 'local' and 'particular'. Through such dualisms emerges, among other things, a view of development as being a process of planning, taming, organising and rationalising undeveloped, natural, irrational or unmapped domains. However, these dualisms, through which much politics – tacitly or overtly – tends to operate, are, he says, subject to incessant collapse. Using three different examples – dams/development, commodification/'the economy' and science – Lohmann describes the processes by which the dichotomies are built up and disintegrated. Every development 'master plan' and its implementation, he points out, evolves through an endless chain of revisions, additions, restructurings and other redistributions of power in offices, corners of farmers' fields and elsewhere. Similarly, the politically-contested frontier between 'the market' and what is imagined to be 'outside the market' constantly shifts as the institutions of 'economics' work at the unfinishable job of creating an 'economy'. A more determined awareness of the processes through which dualisms between intention and world, theory and practice and 'inside' and 'outside' are set up, Lohmann suggests, could help middle-class activism better achieve its goals. Rather than buying into a dichotomous metaphysics by attempting to improve theories that are seen as different in kind from practice, he argues, middle-class activists might become more effective by becoming more self-conscious about the primacy of forming closer working alliances with what he calls 'commoners', whom he sees as being often less prone to imagine political action in terms of such dichotomies.

## Civil Society: What Next?

*Göran Hydén*

The sixth article, ‘Civil Society: What Next?’ by Göran Hydén, deals with the increasingly important role of civil society in today’s world, with particular reference to the field of development. In the wake of the structural political transformations of the past two or three decades – notably, the ‘rolling back’ of state capacities and the reinforcement of corporate power – civil society has emerged into a position of central importance. In the area of development, civil society initiatives have been given prominence as alternatives to, what has been perceived as, a failed development agenda largely driven by top-down state-planning and, later, free-market policy. To help clear up the conceptual confusion surrounding the term civil society, Hydén first traces its historical-political roots. In the face of the increasing influence of neo-liberal economic policies and the skewed nature of the global economic system, he writes, many civil society organisations (CSOs) ‘see themselves increasingly in opposition ... above all to corporate capital’. In their endeavour to redress the imbalances of the global order and move beyond mere critique, ‘global justice’ organisations face a number of challenges: to seek to exert influence in established and new sites of action, to pursue reactive and proactive work, and to grapple simultaneously with local, national as well as global political contexts. Perhaps the most demanding task facing CSOs, in Hydén’s view, is ‘to make the poor part of a solidarity movement, in which they are not just pawns but autonomous actors’. To do this, he says, CSOs must increasingly engage in integrating activist work with continuous self-reflection and analysis regarding methods, tactics and possibilities for increasing civil society cooperation.

## Stop the ‘Stockholm Syndrome’

### Lessons from 30 years of UN summits

*Pat Mooney*

Such self-reflection lies at the core of the final article collected here, Pat Mooney’s ‘Stop the “Stockholm Syndrome”! Lessons learned from 30 years of UN summits’. An activist for more than thirty years and a participant in numerous international conferences in the field of environment and development, Mooney sets out by taking stock of the achievements of the summits and major conferences held at the international level over the past three decades. His view is plain: they have yielded meagre results, if any at all. In addition to accomplishing very little politically, these international high-level meetings have also had a detrimental impact on the work of civil society, Mooney argues. They serve to exhaust the energy of CSOs through, for ex-

ample, long and complicated preparatory processes, and to divert attention away from work that could otherwise have been carried out. Civil society groups should therefore, he contends, consider to boycott future ‘gala international fora’. But such a tactic may be difficult to achieve, as many CSOs suffer from the ‘Stockholm Syndrome’: that is, they have been ‘taken hostage’ by the logic and appeal of international summitry. Mooney sketches two possible treatments for the ‘Stockholm Syndrome’. One is for civil society to devote more of its time to influencing and restructuring the UN and its agencies as well as other international organisations. The other is to engage in an intensified dialogue among civil society organisations themselves in order to strengthen information flows and probe strategic possibilities for increased cooperation. Mooney’s article is a revised and updated version of a paper previously published by the ETC Group.