
4. Radical well-being alternatives to development

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INTRODUCTION

It is easy, and understandable, to be pessimistic in today's world. Brexit in UK, Trump's victory in USA and signs of other right-wing resurgence in many parts of the world, a setback to the peace process in Colombia, the continuing wars, conflicts and dispossession in central Africa and west Asia resulting in massive exodus of 'refugees', a massively disruptive demonetization in India, and, as if this was not enough to heat things up, many of the hottest years in recorded history: the mid-2010s have been a doomsday forecaster's dream period. In such dark days, do we have hope for the future?

I believe we do. For these years have also seen a massive build-up of people power, folks in millions spilling out into the streets to protest despotic rule and corruption and inequalities and the madness of 'development'. While this is the more visible part of the expression of people wanting a more just, equitable and peaceful world, there are also quieter elements, equally important. These are the 'everyday acts of reconstruction' (with apologies to James Scott for modifying his phrase),¹ complementary to those of resistance. They come in myriad forms, from assertions of democratic decision-making by local collectives to experiments in ecologically sensitive production systems, from re-commoning of urban spaces to democratization of knowledge and technology, from alternative learning centres to socially controlled media, from experiments in gender equity to explorations in multiple sexualities, from indigenous peoples' assertion of territorial and epistemological identity to the takeover of production facilities by workers ... and much more. Together, they constitute a 'blessed unrest'² that appears to be growing wider and stronger.

By no means are these initiatives and movements capable, as yet, of transforming the situation at a macro-political and economic level, to adequately counter the forces that continue to drive humanity towards obscene inequalities and ecological suicide. But they provide bright pinpoints of inspiration and hope, the potential for transformative change, the seedlings of what could possibly be massive *kalpavrikshes*.³ Combined

¹ James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale University Press 1987).

² Paul Hawken, *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw it Coming* (Viking 2007).

³ 'Trees of imagination' which grant everyone their wishes, referred to in ancient Indian mythology; but also several actual tree species in India such as the coconut, that are used for multiple purposes, are given this nomenclature.

with the increasing mobilization of people against centralized political and economic power, these alternative initiatives could well be the foundation of a saner, more just future.

This chapter explores the architecture of such a future, based on real-life examples of practice and conceptualization that are found across the world. It has a heavy focus on India as I am more familiar with this region, but it also brings on board experiences from many other countries and peoples.

A. ALTERNATIVES TO WHAT?

Before we get into the alternatives, it is important to ask: alternatives to what? Inequities and wars and climate crisis and biodiversity loss are only symptoms of deeper structural forces. Concentrations of power, whether political in the hands of the state, economic in the hands of corporations, socio-cultural in the hands of men or some ethnic/racial groups, or epistemological in the hands of modern science and technology and 'experts', and the alienation of humanity from the rest of nature, are at the root of the problems we are confronting. We therefore need fundamental or systemic alternatives to stateism, capitalism, patriarchy, anthropocentrism, and socio-cultural hegemonies of any kind. This also means that we cannot be satisfied with solutions that deal only with symptoms; these include technofixes like geoengineering, market mechanisms like carbon trading, mere reformist measures such as green growth and economy, individualistic acts like recycling that are not embedded in structural changes to modes of production and consumption, and so on.⁴

In a deep sense, the search is not merely for alternative (or sustainable) development, but for alternatives *to* development, in so far as its concept and practice is based on the culturally hegemonic notion of a unidirectional, universal movement of 'undeveloped' to 'developed', and is inextricably linked to the ever-expanding use of materials and energy. As brought out brilliantly in *The Development Dictionary*⁵ and a number of other essays and studies in the last couple of decades, the project of development has been profoundly disruptive for the global South, and the planet as a whole. Tinkering around with it by attaching prefixes like 'sustainable' or 'inclusive' does little to challenge these inherent flaws.⁶

⁴ Gareth Dale, Manu M Mathai and JP de Oliveira, *Green Growth: Ideology, Political Economy and the Alternatives* (Zed Books 2016); Thomas Fatheuer, Lili Fuhr and Barbara Unmüßig, *Inside the Green Economy: Promises and Pitfalls* (Green Books 2016); Ashish Kothari, Federico Demaria and Alberto Acosta, 'Buen Vivir, Degrowth and Ecological Swaraj: Alternatives to Sustainable Development and the Green Economy' (2014) 57 *Development* 362.

⁵ Wolfgang Sachs, *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power* (Zed Books 1992).

⁶ Ashish Kothari, Ariel Salleh, Federico Demaria, Arturo Escobar and Alberto Acosta (eds), *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary* (Tulika Books and Authors Upfront 2019).

B. THE ARCHITECTURE OF RADICAL WELL-BEING ALTERNATIVES

In the embattled transboundary region straddling Turkey, Syria and Iraq, the Kurds are attempting a bold experiment in feminist, ecologically sensitive democracy.⁷ Halfway across the world the Zapatista of Chiapas in Mexico have already been practising their own brand of autonomy since the early 1990s, based on principles of direct democracy, localized economic self-sufficiency, and open learning.⁸ In the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, Dalit (so-called 'outcaste' or 'untouchable') women farmers have achieved food sovereignty by reviving biodiverse, millet-based farming using their own seeds, credit and knowledge, and fighting off state-led or capitalist agro-industries.⁹ In Barcelona, Spain, the Cooperativa Integral Catalan caters to food, housing and other needs of several thousand people through producer-consumer links, a local currency called ECO and the revival of relations of caring and sharing.¹⁰ In some parts of Latin America, indigenous and Afrodescendant peoples are making 'Life Projects or Plans' that put their knowledge, wisdom and visioning centre-stage, in some cases after having claimed full rights to their territories.¹¹ Several communities in different African regions are demonstrating through agro-ecological experiments that they are not quite the 'basket case' that the West makes Africa out to be, and that their struggle is more against the continuing neo-colonial practices of western 'aid' than against their own lack of capacity.¹²

These are a tiny sample of thousands of initiatives across the world, showing how human well-being can be achieved in ways that are just and relatively equitable, ecologically sensitive, providing dignity, empowerment and social security. They demonstrate transformation in five broad spheres, interconnected and overlapping: ecological, political, economic, social, and cultural.

In an ongoing process of confluences and visioning in India that bring together movements and groups working on alternatives, the Vikalp Sangam,¹³ these spheres are described thus:

⁷ Anja Flach, Ercan Ayboğa and Michel Knapp, *Revolution in Rojava* (Pluto Press 2016).

⁸ Levi Gahman, 'Food Sovereignty in Rebellion: Decolonization, Autonomy, Gender Equity and the Zapatista Solution' (2016) 7(4) *Solutions* 77.

⁹ Ashish Kothari, 'Seeding an Agrarian Revolution in India' *Earth Island Journal* (14 December 2015), accessed at www.earthisland.org/journal/index.php/elist/eListRead/seeding_an_agrarian_revolution_in_rural_india/.

¹⁰ Cooperativa Integral Catalana, accessed at <http://cooperativa.cat/en>.

¹¹ See the Life Projects Network, accessed at <http://www.lifeprovida.net/lifeprovida/index.php?lang=en>; Central Ashaninka del Rio Ene, *Kametsa Asaike: el vivir bien de los Asháninka del Rio Ene* (Agenda Política de la CARE 2011).

¹² Oakland Institute, *Agroecology Case Studies* (n.d.), accessed at www.oaklandinstitute.org/agroecology-case-studies.

¹³ Vikalp Sangam, accessed at <http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/vikalp-sangam-outputs/#.XR2g-y2B1E5>.

- a. *Ecological integrity and resilience*, including the conservation of nature and natural diversity, maintenance of ecological functions, respect for ecological limits (local to global) and ecological ethics in all human actions.
- b. *Direct and delegated democracy*, with decision-making starting in spaces enabling every person to participate meaningfully, and building from this to larger levels of governance by downwardly accountable institutions; and all this respectful of the needs and rights of those currently marginalized.
- c. *Economic democracy*, in which local communities and individuals have control over the means of production, distribution, exchange and markets, based on the principle of localization for basic needs and trade built on this; central to this would be the replacement of private property by the commons, and increasing focus on the economy of caring and sharing.
- d. *Social well-being and justice*, including fulfilling lives (physically, socially, culturally and spiritually), equity between communities and individuals, communal and ethnic harmony; and erasure of hierarchies and divisions based on faith, gender, caste, class, ethnicity, ability and other attributes.
- e. *Cultural diversity and knowledge democracy*, with multiple co-existing knowledge systems in the commons, respect for a diversity of ways of living, ideas and ideologies, and encouragement to creativity and innovation.

Let us examine each of these below, and how myriad initiatives are already pointing to the possibility of achieving them.

1. Ecological Integrity and Resilience

It is amazing how many people still need to be convinced that without a healthy environment, no amount of development or progress will mean much. Despite overwhelming evidence of how the neglect and violation of basic ecological principles and limits is rebounding on us, the latest being the very visible signs of climate crisis, humanity continues to behave as if it is somehow independent of nature, immune in its techno-bubble.

Fortunately, a rapidly growing ecological movement, and increasing awareness of the above, is slowly changing this reality. A number of exciting trends are visible: the assertion of indigenous peoples' ways of 'living lightly' from whom *Homo industrius* could learn a lot, the spreading phenomenon of 'indigenous peoples' and community conserved territories and areas' (ICCAs), the restoration of ecosystems and species once thought to be doomed, dramatic clean-ups of pollution and waste (such as in some of Europe's rivers), rediscovery of ancient technologies that have become even more relevant today (like mud architecture) and the invention of new ones that revolutionize energy and materials efficiency (e.g. cradle to cradle technologies), the growing body of scientific evidence showing humanity's impact on the planet, and much else.

Of the above, ICCAs are worth mentioning in more detail. Community conservation of forests, wetlands, grasslands and coastal/marine areas, as also wildlife populations

and species, is spread over hundreds of thousands of sites across the world; they possibly cover as much if not more of the earth's surface as do official 'protected areas'.¹⁴

Underlying these trends is a connection with the earth, a realization of an ancient truth that we are part of nature, not separate from it. Many peoples never lost this truth but are making it explicit as part of the assertion of their self-identity and sovereignty; others who lost it due to notions of modernity, or for other reasons, are rediscovering it. A relatively new reflection of these is the attempt to give nature legal agency and rights, as in the case of the Ecuadorian Constitution (2008) which extends to nature the right to 'full respect for its existence and the maintenance and regeneration of its vital cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes', the Bolivian Law of the Rights of Mother Earth (2010),¹⁵ the recognition of the rights of a river as a legal entity in an agreement between the New Zealand government and the Whanganui River iwi indigenous people, and an Indian court's recognition of the rivers Ganga and Yamuna as 'persons' with fundamental rights.¹⁶ These have strong ethical and spiritual foundations, and even mainstream religions are expressing alarm at the ecological degradation and the need to take drastic action, as in the Encyclical 'Care for our Common Home' issued by the Pope in 2015, and a statement on the climate crisis by Islamic clerics shortly thereafter.¹⁷

2. Direct Democracy: Power to Communities

A crucial governing principle of the Zapatista in the Chiapas of Mexico, or of the Kurdish autonomous region in west Asia (both referred to above), is that of direct or radical democracy. This not only goes beyond but in some crucial ways transforms the paradigm of 'representative' democracy that most countries have adopted, which is based primarily on elections, majoritarianism, and the accumulation of power at levels of governance well above the general public.

Decision-making starts from the smallest, most local unit in rural and urban areas (such as village and neighbourhood assemblies), and flows into expanding spatial units

¹⁴ See a series of publications at www.iccaconsortium.org/index.php/category/publications-en/key-resources-en/consortium-key-resources-en/.

¹⁵ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 'Development Strategies of Selected Latin American and Caribbean Countries and the Green Economy Approach: A Comparative Analysis' (UNEP, Discussion Paper 2013).

¹⁶ Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature, *Whanganui River Given Rights as a Legal Identity* (8 September 2012), accessed at <http://therightsofnature.org/rights-of-nature-laws/whanganui-river-given-rights-as-a-legal-identity>; Ashish Kothari and Shrishtee Bajpai, 'Rivers and Human Rights: We Are the River, the River Is Us?' *52/35 Economic and Political Weekly Engage* (2 September 2017).

¹⁷ Holy Father Francis, 'Encyclical Letter: On Care for Our Common Home' (24 May 2015), accessed at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html; *Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change*, (2015), accessed at <https://unfccc.int/news/islamic-declaration-on-climate-change>. For a commentary on the Encyclical Letter, see Ashish Kothari, 'Pope's Encyclical: Is this the Push the World Needed?' *India Together* (18 August 2015), accessed at <http://indiatgether.org/articles/pope-s-2015-encyclical-op-ed>.

(such as governance institutions at landscape, district, state, provincial and national levels). Gandhi characterized this as a system of 'oceanic circles'. Power emanates outwards or upwards from the basic units of governance, seeking to make larger-scale institutions of decision-making accountable to these basic units. A key principle is that of subsidiarity, denoting that all decisions that can be taken at the smallest or most local institutional level will be taken there, and larger level institutions handle only those functions that local ones cannot, such as landscape level management, coordination of some kinds, or handling of large-scale transportation operations.

In India, the indigenous village of Mendha-Lekha has practised direct democracy for nearly three decades.¹⁸ Its slogan neatly encompasses the above principle: 'In Mumbai and Delhi is the government we elect, but in our village, we *are* the government'. All decisions are taken by consensus in the full village assembly, based on information generated by *abhyas gats* (study circles). A struggle against a big dam that was to displace Mendha-Lekha and dozens of other villages, in the 1980s, brought home to the villagers the importance of self-mobilization. Since then the village has conserved 1,800 ha of surrounding forest, and recently gained full rights to use, manage and protect it under the Forest Rights Act 2006, reversing a couple of centuries of colonial and post-colonial top-down governance of forests.¹⁹ It has moved towards fulfilment of all basic requirements of food, water, energy and local livelihoods, including through the sustainable harvesting of bamboo from the forest.

In Venezuela's *consejos comunales*, neighbourhood assemblies arose in the 1980s with the slogan 'we don't want to be government, we want to govern'. In the last few years, several thousand of these assemblies have been formed to experiment with direct democracy processes, with support and sponsorship of the government.²⁰ They consist of between 150 and 400 families, a size that makes face-to-face consultation, deliberation and decision-making very feasible. Their main function has been the improvement of living conditions through the self-management of social services and government-funded projects, but they were also supposed to be part of President Chavez's call for 'a radical restructuring of the spatial-political organization of the country under the rubric of "a new geometry of power"'.²¹ In many instances the connection with the state and the ruling political party appears to have compromised

¹⁸ Neema Pathak and Vivek Gour-Broome, *Tribal Self-Rule and Natural Resource Management: Community Based Conservation at Mendha-Lekha, Maharashtra, India* (Kalpavriksh and International Institute of Environment and Development 2001); Milind Bokil, *Kahani Mendha Gaon Ki* (National Book Trust 2015).

¹⁹ Neema Pathak and Erika Taraporewala, *Towards Self-Rule and Forest Conservation in Mendha-Lekha Village, Gadchiroli* (Report of a Consultation for an ICCA Consortium and IUCN TILCEPA-TGER project sponsored by GTZ, Kalpavriksh 2008); Vasundhara and Kalpavriksh, *A National Report on Community Forest Rights under Forest Rights Act: Status and Issues* (Vasundhara, Kalpavriksh and Oxfam India 2012).

²⁰ Dario Azzellini, 'The Communal State: Communal Councils, Communes and Workplace Democracy' (2013) 46(2) *NACLA Report on the Americas* 25.

²¹ Arturo Escobar, 'Latin America at a Crossroads: Alternative Modernizations, Post-Liberalism, or Post-Development?' (2010) 24 *Cultural Studies* 1; Edgardo Lander, 'Venezuela: The Bolivarian Experience in the Struggle to Transcend Capitalism' (Paper for Working Group 'Beyond Development' of Rosa Luxemburg Foundation presented at Quito, May 2017).

their independence and their sustainability when the state has withdrawn financial or other support; in other instances where they were connected to local movements and had the ability to self-organize, they have led to more autonomous processes.

Obviously, units of direct face-to-face democracy have larger level connections; they are not isolated entities. Many operations need to be coordinated and managed at much larger levels, such as the railways and communication services. Many problems (toxins and pollution, desertification, climate change) are at scales much larger than the individual settlement, affecting entire landscapes (and seascapes), countries, regions, and indeed the earth. The need for governance at these larger (up to global) levels is widely recognized and pursued on a range of issues. Such larger level governance structures can be envisioned as clusters or federations of villages and towns with common ecological and cultural features. Such ecoregional or biocultural landscapes are likely to cut across many existing political boundaries, including those of nation-states. A crucial part of the transformation therefore is to reconceptualize political decision-making according to what makes ecological and cultural sense.

There are a number of exciting landscape, transboundary or ecoregional planning and governance approaches being tried out in several countries and regions. In India, for a decade starting in the 1990s, the Arvari Sansad (Parliament) in Rajasthan brought 72 villages in the state together, to manage a 400 km² river basin through inter-village coordination, making integrated plans and programmes for land, agriculture, water, wildlife and development.²² Its functioning has weakened in recent times, but it provides an important example to learn from. In Peru, the Quechua indigenous people are combining the sustenance of several hundred varieties of potato and other crops with conservation of crucial Andean ecosystems in a community-declared Potato Park, using a 'biocultural' approach that looks at the landscape as simultaneously natural and cultural.²³ In Australia, the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative is attempting an ambitious linkage of landscapes over 3,600 km.²⁴ Learning from the successes and failures of these, ecoregional governance possibilities in South Asia could include the vast mangrove forests straddling India and Bangladesh (potentially based on direct democracy processes by fisher and other communities residing here), the high mountain ranges and trans-Himalayan cold desert areas straddling India, Pakistan and China (with nomadic pastoral and small farming communities at the centre of decision-making of a possible Peace Park that also commits all peoples to end armed conflicts)

²² SN Hasnat, 'Arvari Sansad: The Farmers' Parliament' (2005) 21(4) LEISA: Magazine on Low External and Input and Sustainable Agriculture 14. For River Arvari Parliament, see <http://tarunbharatsangh.in/river-arvari-parliament/>.

²³ The biocultural approach stresses that any landscapes and seascapes which have traditional resident or user communities are an integrated and symbiotic whole of both the biological and the cultural, the natural and (within it) the human. See, for instance, Alejandro Argumedo, 'The Potato Park, Peru: Conserving Agrobiodiversity in an Andean Indigenous Biocultural Heritage Area' in Thora Amend, Jessica Brown, Ashish Kothari, Adrian Phillips and Sue Stolton (eds), *Protected Landscapes and Agrobiodiversity Values* (IUCN & GTZ 2008) 45.

²⁴ Ian Pulsford, G L Worboys and G Howling, 'Australian Alps to Atherton Connectivity Conservation Corridor' in GL Worboys, W L Francis and M Lockwood (eds), *Connectivity Conservation Management: A Global Guide* (Earthscan 2010) 96.

and the seas between Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh (with fisher communities at the core of governance).

Across all levels of decision-making above the smallest direct democracy unit, ways to ensure accountability of representatives have to be built in. Lessons could be learnt from ancient Greek and Indian democracies (noting prominent exclusions such as slaves and women in the former) and from experiments in Latin America.²⁵ These include highly constrained 'delegated' responsibility where representatives do not attain power independent of the constituency that has elected or selected them, but are subject to clear mandates given by the constituency, the right to recall, having to report back, and so on. This will of course be more challenging at larger scales of decision-making where delegates or representatives are far away from the local units. A system of referendums for crucial decisions, as practised in some countries like Switzerland, can also bring direct democracy (albeit not face-to-face) to much larger numbers; though as noted later in this chapter, in both this country and elsewhere referendums too can be subject to regressive forces, indicating that no such measure is sufficient in itself to achieve positive transformation. In India, as part of the decentralization introduced through constitutional amendments in the 1980s, with elected bodies at village levels nested within district and state institutions, there has been an attempt to introduce greater accountability and participation. This has, however, been very partial, especially as financial and lawmaking powers remain largely concentrated within national and state governments.

Will there be a role for the state in such a direct democracy? It seems that during the transition, while communities (rural and urban) will be the fulcrum of the alternative futures, the nation-state has a critical supporting and enabling role to play. This includes the formulation of policies that facilitate the transition towards systemic alternatives, strengthening its welfare role for those currently marginalized (human and non-human) and regulation of business elements or others who behave irresponsibly towards the environment or people. It will also have a role in larger global relations between peoples and nations.

Over time, however, nation-state boundaries may become far less divisive and important if genuine globalization (free-flowing cultural exchange as its crucial component) is promoted; eventually they may become irrelevant. The increasing networking of peoples across the world, through both traditional means and new digital communications, could be a precursor to such a process. Cultural and ecological identities will become more important, but these too defined not so much as isolated categories but as enriching diversity within the essential unity of humankind, a diversity to be celebrated, and with the openness of learning from and supporting each other. Some form of state (in its basic meaning of a governance mechanism, not its currently dominant meaning of an all-powerful centralized institution), as a forum of larger-scale

²⁵ Steve Muhlberger, 'Democracy in Ancient India' (8 February 1998), accessed at <https://faculty.nipissingu.ca/muhlberger/HISTDEM/INDIADEM.HTM>; Brian Roper, *The History of Democracy: A Marxist Interpretation* (Pluto Press 2013); Miriam Lang and Dunia Mokrani (eds), *Beyond Development: Alternative Visions from Latin America* (Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and Transnational Institute 2013).

facilitation and decision-making amongst units of direct democracy, may continue to have a legitimate space, subject to the mechanisms of accountability mentioned above.

Four crucial aspects are needed to make such a system of direct, delegated and ecoregional democracy work: the right to participate, the capacity to participate, accessible forums of participation, and maturity or wisdom in the quality of political processes. Any one of these without the others would be ineffective or even counter-productive; for instance, in India 50 per cent of the *panchayat* (village council) heads have to be women, but often they are simply there in name, and actual power is held by their husbands or fathers. Or historically marginalized sections such as Dalits ('out-castes' of Hindu society) can simply be silenced by more powerful castes in many parts of India. Slowly, processes of capacitating and empowering women, Dalits and other marginalized sections in India are helping them to have an effective voice, as is the case with women, blacks, and landless workers in other parts of the world. Maturity is needed also to overcome other distortions, such as majoritarianism leading to the genuine needs of minorities being ignored, or public discourses based on misleading messaging and media coverage leading to regressive referendum results (the Colombian one on the peace process, or Brexit, or Trump's election, being recent examples). It would, however, be a mistake to think that such distortions are inherent to direct democracy; rather, I would argue that they are symptoms of the sidelining of crucial direct democracy processes and principles.

The ancient Indian notion of *swaraj* (inadequately translated as 'self-rule') is very relevant here. While it became most well known in India's struggle for independence from colonial rule, its consequent definition as national freedom is very limited. Much deeper is its stress on individual and collective autonomy and freedom linked to responsibility for others' autonomy and freedom, a focus on ethical behaviour that makes possible the fulfilment of this responsibility, a stress on limiting one's wants and desires, and a sophisticated understanding of the balance between the individual and the collective, as evident for instance in the work of Gandhi.²⁶ In many ways this is a precursor to the notion of direct or radical democracy; I will come back to this below in the notion of *eco-swaraj*.

3. Economic Democracy

Radical democracy cannot work in isolation of the democratization of economic life. Transformation has to take place towards an economic system that acknowledges and respects ecological limits, places control over the means of production in the hands of communities, empowers producers and consumers to democratically manage the economy as it relates to them, and brings to centre stage the relations of caring and sharing that have been hidden, marginalized or displaced by commercialized, monetarily mediated exchanges, ironically so given the latter continue to remain dependent on the former albeit in often contradictory ways.

Congruent with localized governance is economic localization, reversing the trend towards economic globalization. Here too, a crucial principle is that subsidiarity, in

²⁶ See, for instance, MK Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings* (Anthony J Parel (ed), Cambridge University Press 1997).

which those living closest to those elements of nature and means of production and reproduction (the forest, the sea, the coast, the farm, the factory, the urban facility, and the like) should be empowered to govern and steward it. This is because it is assumed that they would have the greatest stake, and often the best knowledge, to do so. Of course, this is not always the case, for centuries of centralization have crippled community institutional structures, customary rules, and other capacities. There is also the issue of non-resident local communities having significant dependence on the local ecosystems and landscapes, for example in the case of mobile pastoral peoples, or people in larger regions which these ecosystems and landscapes benefit. But with such complexities built in, a move towards open localization of essential production, consumption (or, removing the binary, prosumption) and trade, and of health, education and other services, is eminently possible if civil society organizations and the government sensitively assist communities.

The most crucial element in the success of economic localization is local control over the means of prosumption, trade and reproduction, and the re-commoning of privatized lands and other crucial elements of nature and 'natural resources'. Reclaiming collective rights over landscapes and seascapes is one approach; examples include indigenous territorial claims across Latin America, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, peasant takeover of farmlands by the Movement of Landless Workers (MST) movement in Brazil, forest-dwellers reclaiming community and individual forest rights in India, the re-commoning of urban spaces in many parts of Europe and North America, and many others.²⁷ According to a recent (2014) estimate, 513 million ha of forest (about 15 per cent of the world total) are under some form of government-recognized indigenous peoples' or community control.²⁸

Producer-consumer-prosumer (and adding to this at times, investor) collectives, running on democratic, fair remuneration and solidarity principles are found across the world. Several factories in Argentina, parts of Europe and northern Africa have been taken over by workers and are run on a diversity of democratic principles; Viome in Thessaloniki, Greece, is an example.²⁹ India has several dozen producer companies and cooperatives, of farmers, craftspersons, fishers, pastoralists, and others, many of them run on democratic lines of decision-making and revenue sharing. These include the Nowgong Agriculture Producer Company Ltd (NAPCL) in Madhya Pradesh, the Aharam Traditional Crop Producer Company (ATCPC) in Tamil Nadu and the Dharani

²⁷ On land and territorial claims, see www.landcoalition.org/en; on Brazil's MST movement, see <http://mstbrazil.org>; on India's Forest Rights Act process, see www.cfrla.org.in; on the commons, see David Bollier, 'The Commons as a Template for Transformation' (Great Transition Initiative, 2014), accessed at <http://greattransition.org/publication/the-commons-as-a-template-for-transformation> and David Bollier and Silke Helfrich (eds), *The Wealth of the Commons: A World beyond Market and State* (The Commons Strategy Group 2012).

²⁸ Caleb Stevens, Robert Winterbottom, Katie Reytar and Jenny Springer, *Securing Rights, Combating Climate Change: How Strengthening Community Forest Rights Mitigates Climate Change* (World Resources Institute 2014).

²⁹ See www.viome.org/search/label/English and www.workerscontrol.net; see also *Alternative Models of Ownership* (Report to the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer and Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy), accessed at <http://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Alternative-Models-of-Ownership.pdf>.

Farming and Marketing Cooperative Ltd in Andhra Pradesh, all examples of farmer-run companies encompassing several settlements, that enable producers to directly reach their markets; Qasab – Kutch Craftswomen’s Producer Co. Ltd in Kachchh does the same for women working on embroidery, appliqué and patchwork; Just Change is a producer-consumer-investor cooperative in southern India aimed at economically empowering indigenous producers.³⁰

A host of social or community currencies, and non-monetized exchange systems, are springing up in the heart of highly commercialized, industrialized societies. The commune of Beckerich in Luxembourg, which I visited in mid-2016, is using the Beki, a local currency initiated a few years back. Equivalent to the Euro in value, Bekis can be used for a host of local products and services; for instance, buying bread at the local baker, paying for local green energy, buying food from farmers, and so on. Each time it is used, it is a tiny but significant act of freeing oneself from the Euro (though of course not completely, since the values are still linked). Each Beki makes about five rounds of exchange before being changed back to the Euro, in effect reducing the need for Euros by that many times.³¹ Most importantly, though, the Beki enhances local exchanges, stimulates local production and services, and provides the incentive for stronger local social relations as its use is based on knowing neighbours and local producers and consumers.

Local, or social, currencies like the Beki are increasing in many parts of the world. One of the most famous is the Bristol Pound, used by residents of the UK town of Bristol. Several dozen kinds of products and services can be availed of using this currency at over 800 shops, restaurants and other providers; even many taxes can be paid. So popular is it that the previous mayor of Bristol, George Ferguson, took his entire salary in it! As the promoters of the Bristol Pound state:

By incentivising spending in independent businesses, the Bristol Pound helps wealth created in Bristol to stay here. Known as the multiplier effect, Bristol Pounds will be spent repeatedly only within the local economy. With sterling, much of the wealth spent in the city is lost to big international business, related management structures, remote shareholders and the boom-bust of the financial banking system. The Bristol Pound can help deepen and diversify the connections between local business people and all the citizens of the region – an important part of building a sustainable regional economy and providing high quality employment.

In 2017, the city council of Barcelona introduced a pilot project for a social currency, starting with 5,000 people, and including in it the possibility of a green energy cooperative that could serve these people by accepting payment in this currency. If successful at this small scale, the council hopes to increase its use to other parts of Barcelona. A precursor to this has already existed for some years now, the ECO, used by members of the Cooperativa Integral Catalana (<http://cooperativa.cat/en/>), a collective working on organic food, housing for low income groups, democratic technology

³⁰ Email communication with Avani Mohan Singh, NAPCL Board (13 January 2010); <http://timbaktu-organic.org/index.php/about-us-3/>; www.facebook.com/pages/Qasab-Kutch-Craftswomen-Producer-Co-Ltd/120970047978656; www.justchangeindia.com.

³¹ Hilbert, personal communication (2016).

development, and other aspects. Based partly on this experience, one of its founders, Enric Duran, initiated FairCoin, an ambitious attempt at a global exchange system based on fairness, linked to a global cooperative, FairCoop (<https://fair.coop>). The website <http://community-currency.info> provides examples from around the world. Simultaneously, a host of localized, community-based banking and financing systems have also cropped up over the last couple of decades; these could begin to challenge the mega-concentrations that the big banks and financial institutions represent.

Going one step further, there are increasing initiatives promoting non-monetized exchange. In several countries, timesharing or timebanking brings together individuals into a collective where they agree to provide each other skill-based services for free. For instance, you could sign up to offer 4 hours of free yoga classes to anyone in the collective, and in turn you could avail yourself of someone else's expertise at repairing gadgets, or teaching children, or looking after the elderly in a community setting ... all for free. In Athens, Greece, I met members of Mesopotamia, a network of about 400 individuals who are part of such a timesharing arrangement. Several of them volunteer to teach at a special learning centre for children, where the values of inter-cultural respect and responsibilities towards the environment are part of the curriculum. In UK and Wales, the network Spice Time Credits has at last counted 25,000 members sharing over 400,000 hours, working with 1,200 organizations and services that accept such timesharing (www.justaddspice.org).

A crucial aspect of such processes is the equal respect given to all kinds of skills and expertise; 1 hour of gardening services are worth the same as 1 hour of IT skills, and so on. This means that people discarded as 'worthless' by the mainstream economy can also be valued by society; dignity can be restored to people. And it builds social relationships, stimulates learning new skills, restores self-confidence in people. Plus, it is interest-free, avoiding the vicious credit-debt cycles that mainstream economies are plagued with.

Economic democracy is also, crucially, about local self-reliance in basic needs, and through this the elimination of poverty defined as deprivation of basic needs.³² Across the world, movements for food, water and energy sovereignty are proving that this is eminently possible, and in ways that are ecologically sensitive. In India, sustainable agriculture using a diversity of crops has been demonstrated by thousands of farmers (including the most marginal, caste-disadvantaged women farmers) where the community groups Timbaktu Collective and Deccan Development Society work in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, by communities working with Green Foundation in Karnataka, by farmers of the Beej Bachao Andolan and the Jaiv Panchayat network of Navdanya.³³ Sustainable pastoralism has been defended or revived amongst nomadic or resident

³² In countries like India, poverty in its multifaceted forms, including being deprived of access to basic needs, continues to be widespread despite decades of 'development' and economic growth, with estimates ranging from 30 to 70 per cent of the population being 'poor'; see Aseem Shrivastava and Ashish Kothari, *Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India* (Viking/Penguin Books 2012).

³³ Deccan Development Society, accessed at www.ddsindia.com; Green Foundation, accessed at www.greenconserve.com/; Navdanya, accessed at www.navdanya.org/campaigns/jaiv-panchayat.

pastoral communities with whom the group Anthra works.³⁴ Water self-sufficiency in arid, drought-prone areas has been demonstrated by hundreds of villages, through decentralized harvesting and strict self-regulation of use, such as in Alwar district of Rajasthan by Tarun Bharat Sangh and in Kachchh by Sahjeevan and other groups.³⁵ In Bhuj town (Kachchh, Gujarat), groups like Hunnarshala, Sahjeevan, Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan and Arid Communities and Technologies (ACT) have teamed up to mobilize slum dwellers, women's groups and other citizens into reviving watersheds and creating a decentralized water storage and management system, manage solid wastes, generate livelihood for poor women, create adequate sanitation and provide dignified housing for all.³⁶ Here and in Bengaluru, Pune and other cities, increasingly vocal citizens are invoking the 74th Amendment to urge for decentralized, local development planning and resource allocation through programmes like participatory budgeting.³⁷

ICCAs, mentioned above, already help achieve many of the goals of so-called 'sustainable development' contained in the SDG 2030 agenda that governments agreed to in September 2015, including secure livelihoods and health, safeguarding of water and other crucial elements, sustaining diverse cultures and knowledges. They could do this much better if given recognition and support at local to global levels.³⁸

Again, just as localized power is not adequate to deal with political relations at larger scales, localized economies cannot survive in isolation, especially in a world so intricately connected through economic relations. Parallel to political institutions at landscape and larger scales, there is a need to conceive of economics at scales different from the currently dominant structure. This includes trade and exchange conducted on the principles of democracy and fairness. Groups of villages, or villages and towns, could form units to further such economic democracy. For instance, in Tamil Nadu state, the Dalit *panchayat* head of Kuthumbakkam village, Ramaswamy Elango, envisages organizing a cluster of between 7–8 and 15–16 villages to form a 'free trade zone' or 'regional network economy', in which they will trade goods and services with each other (on mutually beneficial terms) to reduce dependence on the outside market and government. This way, the money stays back in the area for reinvestment in local development, and relations amongst villages get stronger.³⁹

³⁴ Anthra, accessed at www.anthra.org.

³⁵ Tarun Bharat Sangh, accessed at www.tarunbharatsangh.in; Sahjeevan, accessed at www.sahjeevan.org/pages/water_unit.html.

³⁶ See, for example, Sahjeevan, accessed at www.sahjeevan.org/pages/urban_cell.html.

³⁷ Eg Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy, accessed at www.janaagraha.org.

³⁸ Ashish Kothari and others (eds), *Recognising and Supporting Territories and Areas Conserved by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities: Global Overview and National Case Studies* (Technical Series No. 64, Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, ICCA Consortium, Kalpavriksh, and Natural Justice 2012).

³⁹ Personal communication with R Elango, *panchayat* head (Kuthambakkam village, Kuthambakkam, Tamil Nadu, January 2013); Adam Cajka, 'Kuthambakkam: Re-Embedding Economy in Society' in Neera Singh, Seema Kulkarni and Neema Pathak Broome (eds), *Ecologies of Hope and Transformation: Post-Development Alternatives from India* (Kalpavriksh and SOPPECOM 2018).

Communities across larger landscapes could get together and prepare land/water use plans. Such plans, for each bioregion, could be combined into state and national plans, permanently putting the country's ecologically and socially most fragile or important lands into some form of conservation status (fully participatory and mindful of local rights and tenure). Such plans would also enjoin upon towns and cities to provide as much of their resources from within their boundaries as possible, through water harvesting, rooftop and vacant plot farming, decentralized energy generation, and so on; and to build mutually beneficial rather than parasitic relations with rural areas from where they will still need to take resources. Such actions will spread where rural communities have a greater say in deciding what happens to their resources, and city dwellers become more aware of the impacts of their lifestyles.

Such approaches provide massive opportunities for livelihood generation and the elimination of economic poverty. There needs to be a renewed emphasis on labour-intensive industries and infrastructure, including handlooms and handicrafts, local energy projects, local access roads and communication lines, and others that people can be in control of, building on their own traditional knowledge or with easily acquired new skills. In India, Jharkhand's state-created initiative, Jharcraft, has in less than a decade enhanced the livelihoods of over 300,000 families with relatively simple inputs to empower the producers of silk cloth, cotton handlooms, metalcraft, tribal art, leatherwork, bamboo and cane furniture, and so on.⁴⁰ Another state government initiative, Kudumbashree in Kerala, has provided or enhanced livelihoods for over 4 million women in various local production or service units, though like many such successful large enterprises there are tensions created by political parties vying for control and unequal empowerment.⁴¹ Institutions like Khamir, Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan and Qasab have helped families engaged in weaving, embroidery and other crafts enhance their skills and outputs, reviving what were otherwise dying occupations.⁴² The social enterprise SELCO has enhanced livelihood and social conditions of over 150,000 families through decentralized solar power, provided by ensuring financial linkages that help the families ultimately pay for it themselves.⁴³ Even in highly industrialized, automated societies of Europe and North America, there is a slow revival of physical labour as people want to make products with their hands, repair appliances rather than throw them away, build their own houses, grow their own food.⁴⁴ And it is worth noting that the United Nations Environment Programme has advocated a

⁴⁰ Personal communication with Dharendra Kumar, MD, Jharcraft (Ranchi, Jharkhand, February 2013); Ashish Kothari, 'Being the Change' *The Hindu* (21 April 2013), accessed at www.thehindu.com/features/magazine/being-the-change/article4636561.ece; recent (mid-2017) news reports suggest that there has been a setback in the programme with change of leadership, which highlights the fragility of processes dependent on the state (or for that matter on civil society) where adequate community empowerment has not taken place.

⁴¹ J Devika and Binitha V Thampi, 'Between "Empowerment" and "Liberation": The Kudumbashree Initiative in Kerala' (2007) 14(1) *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 33.

⁴² Khamir, accessed at www.khamir.org/; Qasab, accessed at <http://qasab.org/>; Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan, accessed at <http://kmvs.org.in>.

⁴³ Praful Bidwai, *An India that Can Say Yes* (Heinrich Boll Foundation 2010); SELCO, *Access to Sustainable Energy Services via Innovative Financing: 7 Case Studies* (SELCO 2008).

⁴⁴ See, for instance, Craft Revolution, accessed at www.dartington.org/?s=craft+revolution.

transition to 'green jobs', for example, in public transportation, sustainable farming, and renewable energy, which would provide far greater decent employment than does today's economic model.⁴⁵

A transformation to economic democratization of the kind envisaged above could also lead to a huge shift in currently dominant demographic trends, according to which the world will be predominantly urban within a couple of decades. At several places in India where villages have been revitalized through locally appropriate development initiatives, such as the ones mentioned above in Jharkhand and Kerala or others like Ralegan Siddhi and Hivare Bazaar in Maharashtra, rural-urban migration has slowed down and even got reversed.⁴⁶

Reviving public control of the monetary and financial system, and reorienting financial measures such as taxation, subsidies and other fiscal incentives/disincentives to support ecological sustainability and related human security and equity goals is also critical. Incentives and governmental support for renewable energy have mushroomed, with countries like Germany showing what is possible; schemes to support organic farming, tax breaks to urban neighbourhoods installing water harvesting and energy saving technologies, and other such measures are also getting more popular. Transition Towns (spawning the Transition Network) are a major locus of such actions and others aimed at cutting down urban carbon emissions and other environmentally damaging activities; at a recent (January 2018) visit to Totnes in UK, the first of such towns, I was witness to several 'REconomy' processes of localizing production and consumption, small retail, generation of energy, and urban commoning.⁴⁷ State support enabled one of the most exciting urban agriculture processes in the world in Havana, Cuba.⁴⁸ City administrations have enabled significant steps in sectors like mobility, for example Curitiba in Brazil showing how efficient public transport can make a huge difference. In and of themselves, such measures could be considered merely reformatory (for instance organic urban agriculture or public transport could be in the control of capitalist corporations or a repressive state), but in conjunction with some other changes mentioned above which help challenge systemic factors, they are transformative.

4. Social Justice and Well-being

Direct political and economic democracy are in turn linked to social justice, equity and well-being. Discrimination, inequalities and exploitation based on gender, race, ethnicity, caste, class, ability and age are found in all societies, albeit to widely varying

⁴⁵ United National Environment Programme and International Labour Office, *Green Jobs: Towards Decent Work in a Sustainable, Low Carbon World* (UNEP 2008).

⁴⁶ Concerning Ralegan Siddhi, there has been contestation on the strategies employed to transform the village, see eg Mukul Sharma, *Green and Saffron: Indian Environmentalism and Hindu Nationalist Politics* (Permanent Black 2011); however, here I am pointing to the economic transformation which is generally acknowledged.

⁴⁷ Transition Network, accessed at <http://transitionnetwork.org>; REconomy Centre, accessed at <https://reconomycentre.org>.

⁴⁸ Richard Levins, *Talking about Trees: Science, Ecology and Agriculture in Cuba* (LeftWord 2008).

degrees. Some of these stem from tradition, some emerge from the quest for modernization and development. The quest for a non-discriminatory, equitable society is a crucial sphere of transformation.

Movements for social justice have created greater space across the world, in more recent times through struggles for basic collective and human rights. Anyone doubting the potential of peoples' movements and the actions of civil and political society need only look at the enormous ground that feminism has been able to cover, including through its embracing of ecological perspectives in the form of ecofeminism.⁴⁹

But social justice is also a part of movements for economic democracy, sometimes only implicitly. A prime example is the case of Dalit women gaining dignity and independence through the food sovereignty movement of the Deccan Development Society in southern India, mentioned above. The environmental justice (EJ) movement in USA has brought the issue of racial and ethnic discrimination relating to environmental rights to such prominence that EJ is now a common banner for many similar struggles across the world (highlighted in the incredibly useful mapping process at www.ejatlas.org). Initiatives like that of Maati Sangathan in Uttarakhand have mobilized and empowered women to resist domestic violence, gain independent livelihoods and challenge male-dominated political processes.⁵⁰ Associations of wastepickers and hawkers such as the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) in Pune and Hasirudala in Bengaluru and the National Hawkers Federation have provided substantial dignity to people otherwise socially shunned by the rest of society, by enhancing incomes, building relations with middle-class households and showing that they are an essential part of the city.⁵¹

Being mindful of exploitative and iniquitous structures is important to avoid falling into other traps, such as that of xenophobia and hatred of 'outsiders', currently rearing their ugly head in Europe and USA, amongst others. In India, several groups have promoted revivalism, blindly promoting the 'golden past' as an ideal for the future, linked to an ultra-nationalist, Hindutva ideology;⁵² this has increased since 2014 when a right-wing party formed the government. Many of these forces also talk of localization, self-reliance and other terms that progressive movements also use, making it imperative for the latter to put tolerance, cross- and multi-culturism, and open societies prominently in their messaging.

Peoples' movements are also urging to put social well-being, including healthy social relations, happiness, satisfaction and the like, at the centre of what it means to be prosperous and wealthy (which in its Germanic origin meant 'well-being'). Replacing GDP with such qualitative values (and not falling into the trap of comparative quantification of these attributes, like the Global Happiness Index) has been advocated as a far healthier approach to assessing whether a people or country is doing well or

⁴⁹ Jai Sen (ed), *The Movements of Movements, Part 1: What Makes Us Move?* (PM Press and OpenWord 2017); Jai Sen (ed), *The Movements of Movements, Part 2: Rethinking Our Dance* (PM Press and OpenWord 2018); Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx, and the Postmodern* (1st edn 1997, Zed Books 2017).

⁵⁰ Shiba Desor, 'Maati' in Singh and others (n 39).

⁵¹ KKPKP, accessed at www.kkpkp-pune.org; Swach, accessed at www.swachcoop.com; Hasirudala, accessed at www.hasirudala.in.

⁵² See Sharma (n 46).

not. Bhutan's bold experiment with Gross National Happiness has several flaws and inconsistencies (not least of which is the mistreatment of Nepali 'migrants'), but, as the only one of its kind at a national level, has much to commend and learn from. Indigenous peoples' notions of well-being, increasingly being voiced and integrated into movements of resistance against extractivist development in Latin America or other struggles against displacement, dispossession and erasure in various parts of the world, also have much to teach the rest of humanity.

5. Culture and Knowledge Diversity

As biodiversity is to natural ecosystems and ecological processes, so too cultural diversity is to human society: a source of resilience, strength, and continuous adaptation and evolution. A just society needs to nurture and promote diversity and pluralism: of cultures and languages, ideas, lifestyles, and so on. India for instance is home to enormous socio-cultural diversity,⁵³ with close links to its ecological diversity. Development and modernity have wiped out substantial parts of this diversity, but a number of initiatives at alternative living are successfully resisting this. The women of the Deccan Development Society, for instance, regularly celebrate festivals and occasions related to all religions (including highlighting the links between cultural and biological diversity).

Cultures are also repositories and nurturing grounds for knowledge, whose diversity in turn is crucial for human existence. Several indigenous and community movements around the world are about asserting or reclaiming their languages, epistemologies and knowledge systems. Many also stress that the dualisms created by western rationality need to be dissolved, such as between the 'natural', and 'social' sciences, between these sciences and the 'arts', between 'traditional' and 'modern' knowledge, between the 'wild' and the 'domesticated', between the 'natural' and the 'human'. Many eastern/southern worldviews do not have such rigid compartments, with the 'biocultural' approach of the Quechua of Peru mentioned above as an example. In general the decolonization of knowledge and epistemologies or the struggle against 'epistemicide' is a crucial part of transformation towards radical well-being, as increasingly advocated by both peoples' movements and by intellectuals and scholars notably (but not only) from the global South.⁵⁴

The generation, transmission and use of knowledge and of ethical perspectives are crucial pillars of any society. The more we can learn and teach and transmit knowledge

⁵³ This includes nearly 800 distinct languages, according to the Peoples' Linguistic Survey led by Ganesh Devy, (n.d.), accessed at <http://peopleslinguisticsurvey.org/>.

⁵⁴ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development* (2nd edn, Princeton University Press 2011); Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Zed Books 1999); Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (Taylor and Francis 2014); Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Teresa Cunha (eds), *International Colloquium Epistemologies of the South: South-South, South-North and North-South Global Learnings* (Centro de Estudos Sociais 2015); Tirso Gonzales and Matt Husain, 'Indigenous Autonomy, Community-Based Research and Development Aid: Sumaq Kawsay in Three Epistemic Scenarios' (2016) 12(3) *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 266.

and conduct research in holistic ways, giving respect not only to specialists but also to generalists, the more we can understand nature and our own place in it. A number of alternative education, learning and research initiatives in India attempt to do this: the *jeevan shalas* ('life schools') of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, struggling to save the Narmada valley and its inhabitants from a series of mega-dams, Marudam in Tamil Nadu, Krishnamurti Foundation schools which mix mainstream with alternative, and Adharshila Learning Centre in Madhya Pradesh; colleges like the Adivasi Academy at Tejgadh, Gujarat; open learning institutions like the Bija Vidyapeeth in Dehradun in Uttarakhand, Bhoomi College in Bengaluru and Swaraj University in Udaipur.⁵⁵ In other parts of the world, the idea of (and attempts at creating) pluriversities has similar aims; as do the autonomous schools of the Zapatista in Mexico.⁵⁶

Many of the initiatives on alternative living also attempt to integrate or combine various knowledge systems, emanating from local communities, formal scientific institutions, and others. Sustainable food production, water harvesting, appropriate shelter, and so on, are successfully achieved with such knowledge mixes. Several groups are working on public health systems that empower communities to deal with most of their health issues, through combining traditional and modern systems, and through strengthening the links between safe food and water, nutrition, preventive health measures, and curative care. Venezuela's Mission Barrio Adentro is an example of community or collective health care that has benefited poor sections of society in several cities. The national-level Jan Swasthya Abhiyan (People's Health Movement) in India campaigns for greater public accountability of the official health system, against its privatization and for greater access to the poor, the right to health and healthcare, and community-level management.⁵⁷

Movements for the knowledge commons are also gaining ground, countering the last few decades of privatization especially in the form of intellectual property rights. These include copyleft, creative commons, open source software, Wikipedia-like approaches, and many other examples. Cuba's experiment with public R&D has been an example of what democratic knowledge generation can do, to help solve problems of a people beleaguered by imperialist politics.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Pachasaale, accessed at <http://www.ddsindia.com/www/psaale.htm>; Narmada Jeevan Shala, accessed at www.narmada.org/ALTERNATIVES/jeevanshalas.html; Marudam Farm School, accessed at www.marudamfarmschool.org; Krishnamurti Foundation India, accessed at www.kfionline.org/education-centres/; Adharshila Learning Centre, accessed at <http://adharshilask.tripod.com/aboutadh.html>; Adivasi Academy, accessed at www.Adivasiacademy.org; Bija Vidyapeeth, accessed at www.navdanya.org/earth-university; Bhoomi College, accessed at <http://bhoomicollege.org/>; Swaraj University, accessed at www.swarajuniversity.org.

⁵⁶ Javier Echeverria, 'Pluralidad de la filosofía: pluriversidad versus universidad' (2012) 12 *Ontology Studies* 373; Angélica Rico, 'Educate in Resistance: The Autonomous Zapatista Schools' *ROAR* (2 January 2014), accessed at <https://roarmag.org/essays/zapatista-autonomous-education-chiapas/>.

⁵⁷ For details on Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, see <http://phmindia.org>.

⁵⁸ Levins (n 48).

C. THE ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF WELL-BEING ALTERNATIVES

The five spheres of transformation laid out above encompass or display a set of diverse principles and values. The Vikalp Sangam process mentioned above has listed the following as an initial set; these are implicit (or explicitly stated) in the myriad alternative initiatives across India, but have more universal relevance:⁵⁹

Ecological integrity and the rights of nature: The functional integrity of the ecological and coregenerative processes (especially the global freshwater cycle), ecosystems, and biological diversity that is the basis of all life on earth.

The right of nature and all species (wild and domesticated) to survive and thrive in the conditions in which they have evolved, and respect for and celebration of the 'community of life' as a whole (while keeping in mind natural evolutionary processes of extinction and replacement, and that human use of the rest of nature is not necessarily antithetical to its respect).

Equity, justice, and inclusion: Equitable access and inclusion of all human beings, in current and future generations, to the conditions needed for human well-being (socio-cultural, economic, political, ecological, and psychological), without endangering any other person's access; and social, economic, and environmental justice for all regardless of gender, class, caste, ethnicity, race, and other attributes (including a special focus on including those currently left out for reasons of physical/mental/social 'disability').

Right to and responsibility of meaningful participation: The right of each citizen and community to meaningfully participate in crucial decisions affecting her/his/its life, and to the conditions that provide the ability for such participation, as part of a radical, participatory democracy.

Corresponding to such rights, the responsibility of each citizen and community to ensure meaningful decision-making that is based on the twin principles of ecological sustainability and socio-economic equity.

Diversity and pluralism: The integrity of the diversity of environments and ecologies, species and genes (wild and domesticated), cultures, ways of living, knowledge systems, values, livelihoods, and polities (including those of indigenous peoples and local communities), in so far as they are in consonance with the principles of sustainability and equity.

Collective commons and solidarity with individual freedoms: Collective and co-operative thinking and working founded on the socio-cultural, economic, and ecological commons, respecting both common custodianship and individual freedoms and choices (including the right to be 'different' such as in sexual orientation) and innovations within such collectivities, with inter-personal and inter-community solidarity, relationships of caring and sharing, and common responsibilities, as fulcrums.

Resilience and adaptability: The ability of communities and humanity as a whole, to respond, adapt and sustain the resilience needed to maintain ecological sustainability and equity in the face of external and internal forces of change, including through respecting the conditions enabling the resilience of nature.

Subsidiarity, self-reliance and ecoregionalism: Local rural and urban communities (small enough for all members to take part in decision-making) as the fundamental unit of

⁵⁹ Vikalp Sangam, 'The Search for Alternatives: Key Aspects and Principles' (2017), accessed at www.vikalpsangam.org/about/the-search-for-alternatives-key-aspects-and-principles/.

governance, self-reliant for basic needs such as food, water, health and learning/education, linked with each other at bioregional and ecoregional levels into landscape, regional, national and international institutions that are answerable to these basic units. (The term 'self-reliant' here means self-sufficiency for basic needs as far as possible, and the right to access what is not possible to meet locally, from more centralised systems guaranteed by the state).

Simplicity and sufficiency: The ethic of living on and being satisfied with what is adequate for life and livelihood, in tune with what is ecologically sustainable and equitable.

Dignity and creativity of labour and work: Respect for all kinds of labour, physical and intellectual, with no occupation or work being inherently superior to another; giving manual labour and family/women's 'unpaid' work and processes of sharing/caring their rightful place, but with no inherent attachment of any occupation with particular castes or genders; the need for all work to be dignified, safe, and free from exploitation (requiring toxic/hazardous processes to be stopped); reducing work hours; and moving towards removing the artificial dichotomy between 'work' and 'leisure' by enabling more creative engagement.

Non-violence, harmony, peace: Attitudes and behaviour towards others that respect their physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being; the motivation not to harm others; conditions that engender harmony and peace among and between peoples.

Each society has its own worldview (or multiple worldviews), often implicit or unstated, which influences beliefs and actions relating to other humans and to the rest of nature. The great transformation towards justice and ecological wisdom entails the generation (or revival) of worldviews that encompass the above (evolving) set of values. It is doubtful that, in an increasingly interconnected world, any but those communities who seek to avoid contact (and there are some who have chosen to do so, which needs to be respected) will retain its own worldview uninfluenced by others' worldviews. Unfortunately much of the cross-cultural exchange of the last few centuries has so far resulted in western, colonial, industrial worldviews dominating and often displacing others. Movements of resistance and alternatives are asserting the continuing relevance of ancient indigenous cosmologies, but also that aspects of more recent societies are worth considering, such as progressive notions of democracy and rights. Hybrid worldviews based on both are emerging.

An example of this is *eco-swaraj* or radical ecological democracy (RED), being articulated in India. This is closely connected to the Alternatives Framework developed in the Vikalp Sangam process in India, mentioned above. RED is 'a socio-cultural, political and economic arrangement in which all people and communities have the right and full opportunity to participate in decision-making, based on the twin fulcrums of ecological sustainability and human equity'.⁶⁰ Such frameworks and worldviews are emerging, or re-emerging in new forms, across the world, examples include *buen vivir* or *vivir bien*, *ubuntu*, ecofeminism, degrowth and many of them present a radical

⁶⁰ An early treatment of this concept is in Ashish Kothari, 'Radical Ecological Democracy: Escaping India's Globalization Trap' (2009) 52(3) *Development* 401; subsequent development is in Shrivastava and Kothari (n 32); Ashish Kothari, 'India 2100: Towards Radical Ecological Democracy' (2014) 56 *Futures* 62; Ashish Kothari, 'Radical Ecological Democracy: A Path Forward for India and Beyond' (2014) 57(1) *Development* 36 and Ashish Kothari, 'Beyond "Development" and "Growth": The Search for Alternatives in India towards a Sustainable and Equitable World' in Dale and others (n 4) ch 10.

challenge to patriarchy, capitalism, state-led politics and other structures of inequity and unsustainability.⁶¹ Worldviews that reposition humanity within nature, promote respect for ecological limits and prioritize the caring, sharing, generous, collective aspects of human nature are likely to lead us to a saner world; those that continue human-nature separation and celebrate individual selfishness, greed and competitiveness can only spell further disaster.

CONCLUSION: ROLE OF LAW AND POLICY IN A TRANSFORMED WORLD

To end, I offer some brief comments on the role of law and policy in a radically transformed world, necessarily brief because this is not my field of experience or expertise. In so far as law and policy are an outcome of the desire of society to have some rules governing its members, these will need to reflect the five spheres of transformation and the values and principles described above. The increasing inclusion of rights-based approaches, notably including the extension of rights to nature in various parts of the world, are signs of this. But it is likely that the transformation towards *eco-swaraj* or a RED will render the role of formal, statutory law and policy much less important; the *social contract* amongst people will be based much more on evolving norms and customs, sustained through collective mechanisms of dispute resolution and dealing with violations, and able to accept considerable diversity, adaptability and flexibility.⁶² Every unit of direct democracy would be a unit for formulating such norms (or where necessary laws, and in this sense considerably deepening the decentralization of powers currently envisaged in India's *panchayat* system, adding crucial financial and lawmaking powers). Larger ecoregional or other units of decision-making will build on these, facilitating the resolution of conflicting norms, and so on. From a legalistic 'rights of nature' discourse (itself just emerging in the early 21st century), there would be a transformation towards respecting nature as an integral part of living. There may remain an uneasy balance or tension between the norms at the local level, and norms that all of humanity agrees to through global decision-making processes, such as basic collective and human rights, or the rights of nature. Mechanisms of resolving such possible tensions through dialogue and other approaches will be needed. In general, as one moves towards *eco-swaraj*, there will be a tendency for ethics and law/policy to converge more, in other words to see law/policy as not only that which regulates, but which has the ethical justification of regulating.

⁶¹ Eg Lang and Mokrani (eds) (n 25); Kothari and others (n 4) 362; Kothari and others (n 6). See also www.radical ecological democracy.org, and www.globaltapestryofalternatives.org.

⁶² See Arpitha Kodiveri, 'Legal Futures for India' in Ashish Kothari and KJ Joy (eds), *Alternative Futures: India Unshackled* (Authors Upfront 2017) 138.