

Peace, human rights and development in a multi-polar and evolving world

Johan Galtung
Social Forum- 01-10-2012

Your Excellencies: The title for this Sixth Social Forum--in the context of the 10 Articles of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development of 4 December 1986--is very well chosen. The focus is on people-centered development--as opposed to system-centered economic growth. And on globalization, a challenging process involving all states and regions, nations and civilizations, humans and nature--as opposed to a globalized market with only three free flows, of capital, goods and services, not labor; increasing the global economic gap.

And this in the context of rampant poverty, widening domestic inequalities, economic crises due to the disconnect between real and finance economies and greedy speculation, rising unemployment and popular unrest. Yesterday's map dividing the world in developed and developing countries makes little sense when many of the developed are de-developingⁱ, declining, and many of the developing, emerging, on the way up--like BRICS--pass them on their way down. A new world.

Permit me Twelve Theses addressing this serious situation.

Thesis 1: Meeting people's basic human needs is possible, but the basic unit of development is neither the single individual given a fellowship, nor the whole country by subsidizing the budget. The basic unit is the local level of neighboring villages; starting with the poorest; and within them starting with the most needy, lifting the bottom up. "Trickling down" does not work; "pumping up" may.

Thesis 2: But socio-economic rights should not be met at the expense of civil-political rights. From the inside the communities have to organize democratically in the sense of transparency of the development processes, dialogues toward consensus, and debates toward voting. Democracy is not only a right, but also a need for self-expression and dignity; "my voice makes a difference".ⁱⁱ

Thesis 3: The outside the public, private, civil society and technical sectors that enter with capital and technical resources have to dialogue with the inside. Coordination is a joint task, by elected or administrative bodies, NGOs, temples, etc. in everlasting dialogue.

Thesis 4: Micro-credits are not given to individuals but to local micro-companies provided [1] that the company produces basic needs satisfiers, and [2] that those employed are the most needy, hungry, thirsty, badly clad and housed, ailing and-or illiterate. The name of the game is not efficiency but decency and

dignity for the most needy.

Thesis 5: Meeting basic needs, even quicklyⁱⁱⁱ, is feasible^{iv}:

* food, by growing the food needed on publicly owned, but privately used land, by cooperatives with sales points, using old and new technologies (combining agri- and aquaculture, 3-dimensionally), short transportation distances for a sustainable environment, if possible producing not only the food but also the means of production locally;

* water, by distilling ocean water with solar energy and focused mirrors, adding minerals, using pipelines for water, not only for oil;

* housing by easily assembled-disassembled inexpensive building blocs like standardized, cubic containers, local materials, adaptable to changing family needs, on publicly owned, privately used, land;

* health by making clean water available to all, by having a dense network of polyclinics, "barefoot" doctors-nurses, generic medicines, and regional hospitals and helicopters for emergencies;

* education by offering everybody, not only children, alphabetization, for membership in the symbolic culture; by inviting students or officers to live half a year or so in needy villages, a dense network of internet-connected schools, and cheap bus transportation.

Thesis 6: Beyond this, as the Millennium Goals stipulate:

* a focus on gender parity: education is a proven approach, making it obligatory, beyond elementary school, assumes that it also is free, and in principle guarantees parity far beyond school age^v;

* a focus on the environment: a massive switch is needed from depleting-polluting oil-gas-coal based technologies to sun-wind-water (falls, tidal, waves)-bio- and geo- and hydro-thermic based energy conversion, using fines and incentives, equalizing the energy access;

* a focus on global equity: increased local, national and regional self-reliance in the production of goods-services for basic needs and for normal consumption--necessities and normalities--not luxuries; intra-rather than inter-sector trade for equity (resources against resources, processed against processed, services against services); tariff protection for weak sectors; canceling debts not primarily intended to meet basic needs, and incurred non-democratically.^{vi}

Thesis 7: Meeting basic needs of the most needy is a non-negotiable rock bottom of the Right to Development. What are the obstacles to be eliminated?^{vii} Social and global pathologies, such as capital being unavailable for the low returns from the most needy with no buying power; democracy may malfunction when the majority becomes middle class with no solidarity with the poor; ideological obsession with the market system; a wish to keep people in misery willing to do menial jobs; minorities afraid of losing their privileges; those high up feeling less high when the gap narrows; and then the basic fear:^{viii} they will treat us the same way as we treated them if they come up. Hence: lift those at the bottom up without threatening those at the top, while pointing out the advantages to all of an equitable society.

Thesis 5 policies meet this. In homogeneous countries taxing the rich to promote the poor may work, but most countries are not homogeneous.

Those high up must be prepared to live in societies with parity for both genders, all colors, for the older-middle-aged-younger, with many nations; no longer run by ruling elites of male, white, middle-aged from one dominant nation only. But others must learn that those high up are also human beings, not just "parasites". A focus only on the rights of the deprived excludes preparing the privileged for the inevitable, and for the pleasures of living in diversity and parity.

Thesis 8: These obstacles lead many to two conclusions: domestically revolution to give the bottom half a chance unimpeded by the upper half, and globally decoupling from the dominant system. Understandable but implementing the Right to Development bypasses such policies through more equality within by lifting the bottom up, and more equity between states by self-reliance and trade for mutual and equal benefit. The two Human Rights covenants of 16 December 1966 can be realized together. As the Right to Development states several times: the rights are indivisible, and interdependent.^{ix}

Thesis 9: There are basic needs beyond survival and physical wellness, freedom and identity are also basic to human well-being. Meeting basic somatic needs is a must, but so are the mental needs for freedom to choose development model to feel identity, to be at home. To impose Western development models, liberal (growth, with Western law, individual human rights^x, democracy by multi-party election and majority rule), marxist (basic somatic needs), or both (growth and distribution, like Nordic welfare states) as the only, universal model is an insult to the world's globalizing 7 billion population.^{xi}

There are Islamic models focused on "togetherness, we-culture, sharing (zakat, ramadan)", and Buddhist models based on "neither too little (floor with basic needs met) nor too much (ceiling), liberating people from economic worries, for spiritual development." There are eclectic Japanese and Chinese models high on overcoming false Western dichotomies like labor vs capital and capital vs state, more focused on social and world harmony. To impose one model is not globalization but Westernization, in the old spirit of missionary, colonialist and imperial mentalities, today unacceptable.^{xii} These models do not exclude but complement each other. They may focus on good acts of omission, not only rule out bad acts of commission like Western law, may promote collective peoples' rights, not only individual rights, and democracy by dialogue-consensus, not only by debate-voting-majority rule. Wise policy: take the best from all, select, eclectic, use globalization positively! There are good ideas everywhere.

Thesis 10. We have indicators for economic growth (GNP) and for basic needs (HDI based on health and education); we need indicators to promote and monitor the implementation of human rights. Fortunately the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has made path-breaking work in that direction (hrindicators@ohchr.org). Right to Development indicators should be at least as well known as GNP.

Thesis 11. People-centered development will change domestic society; reducing structural violence--the exploitation, penetration, segmentation, fragmentation, marginalization--and building structural peace, meaning equity, mutuality, integration, solidarity, inclusion. Many societies have much structural peace already, but sometimes threatened, even destroyed by imposing Western development models based on individualism and competition. Lifting the bottom up without threatening the top would move a society toward structural peace, without direct revolutionary violence from below, or direct counter-revolutionary violence from above. But there has to be dialogue, and the top has to be prepared when gender, race and class gaps decrease. The rights of the underprivileged come with the duty to prepare the privileged to share power and privilege. A right is vested in a party but is also part of a conflict between those wanting the right to be met and those opposed. Persuasion and bargaining make people-centered development compatible with peace, force does not.

Thesis 12. Globalization implies changes in global society, also in the direction of reducing structural violence--the exploitation, the self-colonization often found in dependent countries, the absurd division of labor specializing in resources and commodities, the poor countries relating to the rich and not to each other, exclusive clubs only for rich countries. Global structural peace implies equitable exchanges for mutual and equal benefit, equitable challenges to develop and for the environment, autonomy, integration, less division of labor, solidarity with those at the same level and those that are not, like with those living in misery anywhere, regionalization also for developing countries, using the UN for dialogues. Persuasion and bargaining make globalization compatible with peace, force does not.

The old order is gone. The problem is not who is now on top, but how to arrive at a global, equitable, order with nobody on top.^{xiii}

- i. In the sense of losing gains in basic needs satisfaction, and in meeting human rights, civil-political as well as social-economic.
- ii. Not only a right, democracy is also a duty, implied by fundamental freedoms and human rights, see Right to Development, Article 2.2.

iii. Time is of the essence; people are starving. Article 4 of the Right to Development urges "more rapid development of developing countries". We might add: reversing the de-development of some developed countries is also a matter of urgency.

iv. For more see Johan Galtung, A Theory of Development, TRANSCEND University Press, 2010, Prologue and Part Five (www.transcend.org/tup).

v. Right to Development, Article 8,1.

vi. See Article 3.3 of Right to Development, mentioning "mutual interest and cooperation". "Cooperation for mutual interest and equal benefit" might actually be a better expression of the spirit of "a new international economic order".

vii. In the Right to Development, Article 6.3 this is seen as the duties of the states. But some states could themselves be the problem, confusing people-centered with state-centered development.

viii. To this can certainly be added how the absence of development leads to armed revolts from below, counter-revolutions from above, military intervention to support one or the other; losing lives and resources for development. See Right to Development, Article 7.

ix. Article 6,2; Article 9,1.

x. Of course, the right to self-determination is collective, but it often seems problematic whether a people has the right to the right to self-determination. See Right to Development, Article 1.2.

xi. See A Theory of Development, Part Four, "Development Across Cultures".

xii. See Right to Development, Article 5.

xiii. Admirably expressed in the Universal Declaration Article 28: Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized. Structural peace, socially and internationally, domestically and globally, is that order. People-centered development and (true) globalization are roads in that direction.

In principle a right implies a claim in court; human rights in general, and the right to development in particular, should be justiciable. Irene Galtung's thesis for her PhD at European University Institute in Firenze was an exploration of the justiciability of a major right to development, the right to food (and safe drinking water), "can the right be claimed, can the claim be righted?" (irene.galtung@eui.eu).