

# Prosperity at whose cost?

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The word 'globalisation' is increasingly entering the public discourse often as an explanation for what are seen as necessary and inevitable changes in the world as we know it. There is more talk of the global village and an assumption that it is benevolent and that recent technological changes will ultimately enhance our lives. Earlier this year at the G8 meeting in Okinawa, Japan, world leaders made a statement in support of offering increased internet access to the countries of the South, presumably based on the assumption that they too could participate in the wonderfully connected world. As expected they ignored the pleas of these same governments who were calling for debt cancellation and a change in the way the global economic structures are run. By failing to acknowledge the differing perspectives of Southern governments and other critics, the G8 leaders and the international financial institutions which they dominate, continue to impoverish and exclude the majority of the world's citizens.

Since the Zapatistas launched their campaign on January 1, 1994, the day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect, the visible opposition to globalisation, the growing power of Transnational Companies and organisations like the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank are growing. Their meetings are accompanied by large protests which cannot be ignored and by a high level of lobbying from groups campaigning against their policies. The opposition visible in New Zealand media is only a small representation of what is happening in the public spaces in many countries of the South, where there is growing opposition to economic policies characterised as excluding and impoverishing citizens, denied access to the resources they need to live. Some of this activity is in the public eye in the form of debt tribunals and public protest, while the rest can often be seen in community development praxis within marginalised communities. This paper will explore the responses of two effective community development organisations, Las Dignas working with women and children in El Salvador and CEPAD, working from a base within the Protestant church in Nicaragua. Both organisations are engaged at all levels of their societies in challenging the hegemonic view of globalisation which suggests that all profit and privilege only belongs in the hands of the rich and powerful. Las Dignas and CEPAD are committed to the full participation of all people in their societies and their right to justice and a decent livelihood. If the discourse of globalisation was shaped much more from an understanding of the diversity of human experience and a respect for all people and peoples, perhaps the global institutions might be forced to change the way that they operate and the worldview on which their analysis is based.

Of all the representations of globalisation, I have found the description of John Berger's the most compelling (1998/9). He likens the outcome of this process to Hieronymus Bosch's third panel of the Millennium Triptych representing hell. He sees the panel as a bleak prophecy of a world with no horizon and therefore no hope, and where everything is commodified. It is a wretched picture but the Triptych has two other panels, one depicting Adam and Eve in Paradise and the other The Garden of Earthly Delights. Berger offers this image in the belief that an alternative can be created. In the mean time there is a need for a better understanding of what is going on in this world. For this analysis he turned to the writing of Subcommandante Marcos writing of the Zapatistas in Chiapas who described the world as the

battlefield of the fourth world war. The powerful are waging a war to turn the entire world into a market which they will dominate.

Marcos represented this picture of seven puzzle pieces that do not fit together. The first piece is a green dollar sign, representing the growing concentration of global wealth in fewer and fewer hands. The consequence of this accumulation is unprecedented poverty and hopelessness amongst the majority of the world's citizens.

His second representation is a triangle representing the lies that say this new order is rational and modern while in reality it is a return to the barbarism of the beginning of the industrial revolution, exploiting people, including children, in appalling working conditions, without alternatives. This new order is pursued fanatically and without tolerance of alternative perspectives or possibilities.

The third piece of his puzzle is a vicious circle representing the enforced emigration of people from their lands and livelihoods, to meet the demands of the market tossing them out when they are no longer useful.

The fourth piece is a rectangular mirror which represents the collusion of commercial banks and world racketeers. Crime is also global.

The fifth piece of the puzzle is a pentagon to represent an increased level of physical repression, the growth in the arms trade and the necessity of governments to protect the interests of those who own the global market.

The sixth piece is in the shape of a broken scribble. It represents the interconnectedness provided by new technologies like the internet and the market, including trade agreements, which ensures that Coca Cola is available everywhere. These commonalities are broken by the increased fragmentation of communities and the undermining of the nation state.

The final piece in the puzzle is shaped like a pocket to represent the pockets of resistance found around the globe. While the Zapatistas in their struggle with the Mexican government are one such pocket, there are many other communities who in their own way are seeking to build a different order. These communities are disparate and represent the rich diversity available to humanity if we 'build a world capable of containing many worlds'.

Marcos' representation of the world offers many possibilities of interpretation and may suggest other images of global processes. There are other critiques of the current global situation from the South which could also be considered, but it is not my intention to compare these. Many organisations have critiqued the global economic arrangements issuing statements and carrying out research that questions the dominance given to market ideology and for example the economic policies of the Bretton Woods institutions. In response to what has become a sustained attack, these institutions are more and more using the rhetoric of consultation and engagement. However the rhetoric has yet to be matched by any significant changes in policy or practice that ensure a respect for human dignity and life or the environment. Prosperity is measured in abstract financial measures, that often have no existence except on computer screens and pieces of paper. The cost borne by those who have lost land, livelihood and a future, remains uncalculated.

As a non-governmental organisation committed to the dignity of people, Christian World Service has developed strong partnerships with groups working to meet the immediate needs of the poorest peoples and who address the causes of poverty and injustice within their contexts. For many years Christian World Service has been involved in supporting these 'pockets of resistance' as identified by Marcos and has engaged in education and action in Aotearoa New Zealand. As a founding member of GATT Watchdog, as part of the Set the Children Free Coalition and as a lead agency with Caritas in the Jubilee 2000 campaign, we have opposed free trade, child labour and structural adjustment programmes. We have listened to our partner groups relate their experience of these policies and the way they are used to destroy their communities, ensuring growing inequities and injustice.

Two of the partners with which we have had a long standing relationship are CEPAD, the Council of Evangelical Churches in Nicaragua and Las Dignas in El Salvador. Nicaragua is the second poorest country in Latin America with a per capita income on USD \$440 (1996 figures). CEPAD reports that an estimated 74.8% of its 4.4 million population experience some level of poverty, of which 43.6% experience extreme poverty. At the same time the 1998 World Bank figures indicate a total debt service of \$1300 per person - the highest in the world. Nicaragua has been designated a Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) by the World Bank and will at some time be eligible for some debt relief if the appropriate conditions are met. Some debt relief was provided after the devastating results of Hurricane Mitch at the end of 1998 but this were temporary. Like many similar HIPC countries the Nicaraguan people see little hope at the end of the debt tunnel.

CEPAD has consistently spoken out against the economic situation. They have participated in campaigns against structural adjustment programmes and called for the cancellation of Third World debt as part of the Jubilee 2000 campaign. At a meeting on issues of debt in Tegucigalpa at the beginning of 1999, CEPAD Executive Director, Gilberto Aguirre said that he was

“worried that both our government and the multilateral financial organisations are letting us believe we’re off the hook when the truth is we’ll have to pay later. The impact of the hurricane isn’t something we experience for just a few days and then life goes back to normal. We couldn’t pay the debt before the storm, and we simple can’t pay after the storm. The church is clear about this, and we’ve got to make the international financial organisations listen and understand.”

CEPAD as part of its normal work, includes analysis of the high cost of debt amongst Nicaraguans, as well as consideration of other economic and political activity. They have endeavoured to monitor the way the government used aid donations, noting that they have built relatively few houses despite the availability of international aid, although NGOs and regional government have built more. CEPAD has been extensively involved in reconstruction work, building homes, latrines, schools, wells, bridges, providing livestock and replanting trees. On top of this work they have continued to run training programmes to teach skills of development and evaluation, conflict resolution and ecological practice. Staff and volunteers run education programmes for school drop outs and teach literacy skills. As well as these training courses CEPAD offers loan finance to help families raise livestock and crops and run small businesses. An important aspect of their work is the organisation of trained human rights teams who are involved with monitoring economic, social and cultural rights as well as offering mediation in local conflicts. Finally CEPAD continues to mobilise work brigades to build roads, bridges, schools, latrines and wells.

Las Dignas, Women for Dignity and Life is not organised around churches but it has been organised for women by women who had been involved in the FMLN during the war. Ofelia Lopez from Las Dignas visited Aotearoa New Zealand some years ago. With the agreement of the peace accord in 1990 the women found themselves expected to return to their former roles. Instead they set out to ensure a place for women at every level of Salvadoran society and that all women could participate in the rebuilding of their country. At the same time they needed to deal with the very specific consequences of women after the war.

Las Dignas is the largest women's organisation in the country and the ultimate intention is that some of the programmes that they have initiated will be handed over to the state. They work by resourcing the women through training in various skills to meet their own goals. 68% of women cannot find formal work and those that do are often employed in harsh conditions manufacturing clothes or electronic equipment. Like Nicaragua they had to deal with the after affects of Hurricane Mitch but it is the on-going level of violence within the country that is of perhaps more concern. Las Dignas reported that 18,000 men formerly in the army or police were now employed as private security guards. In 1998 31% of children were reported to have suffered sexual violation and 26.7% were abandoned or neglected by their parents. Some 270,000 were classified as child workers as a result of the high level of poverty in their land.

It is in this context that Las Dignas offers literacy training in a non-sexist way and teaches skills of mediation and non-violence in skills. The women work together to campaign against violence towards women and within families. They offer reproductive health programmes in a number of communities, training and supporting midwives. They have built a birthing centre in the Berlin district which is now run by the local community and run mental health programmes for women suffering from extreme trauma as a result of the war. Las Dignas has supported the establishment of many women's groups, training women in local development skills and those skills necessary to participate in local government. Increasingly they have been working with men.

Although the pictures of CEPAD and Las Dignas have been very sketchy, my intention has been to contrast it with the puzzle pieces described by Subcommandante Marcos. Both groups work out of a commitment to ensure the participation of all people in their communities. The economic spaces that they create through the capacity to raise funds and to provide effective interventions in an increasingly complex world give life and create a future for those who may well be discarded by the global economy. They start from a fundamentally different place than the international financial institutions. It is the real world inhabited by real people who are attempting to live in spite of the economic forces over which they have no control.

These voices have seldom been heard in the international discourse of the market and by those who wield power, but they will not go away. Groups like these, working alongside those who are impoverished and excluded, are demanding to be heard, just as the governments of the South refused to be manipulated into another round of trade talks in Seattle.

“We are talking... about a strategy that consciously subordinates the logic of the market, the pursuit of cost efficiency to the values of security, equity, and social solidarity. We are speaking about re-embedding the economy in society, rather than having society driven by the economy. (Bello, September 2000)

The current global economic arrangements have arisen from decisions made by identifiable actors who also frame the debate of economics. The terms of this global integration have been dictated by those who have benefited the most. Organisations like Christian World Service, Las Dignas and CEPAD are committed to finding ways to develop a different economic model that ensures a future for us all.

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