



INTER PARES

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SEEKING GLOBAL SECURITY: *From Privilege to Justice*

Inday is a woman of the Philippines who has worked for change all her life – change in her own life, change for her community, and change for her troubled country. When our colleagues met with her recently, Inday talked of her struggle, what had been gained, and her hopes for the future. Inday's eyes told as much as her words. Alive with hope and good humour. Tired, but intense and flashing with determination.



David Barbour, CIDA

"We have done much, but there is so much more to do," Inday said. She was proud of the achievements of her community, but also told us about the deep frustration of never being able to do enough to break the cycle of poverty in which so many families were mired.

"We have organized our community. We have set up health programs and small credit schemes, and adult education programs. We have fought for schools for our children, and clean water and sanitation." She smiled. "As they say in those Hollywood movies – we win some and we lose some." Her smile disappeared. "But why must we always have to fight for so little, when a few have so much? When will we have the health and security that the wealthy consider as their right?"

This experience is commonplace. In thousands of similar communities in countries where Inter Pares supports anti-poverty actions, people have mobilized to solve their own problems to the best of their ability, achieving tremendous gains with little assistance from their own governments, or from outside. They have made their world – and *our* world – a better place. Yet the questions that Inday asks are increasingly being voiced in the

face of wealth and privilege that ignores and slanders these efforts and achievements.

This is the context in which heads of government, United Nations diplomats and officers, peoples' organizations, and international voluntary organizations, are gathering in Copenhagen in early March to attend the World Summit for Social Development. The Summit will focus on social development strategies to solve and prevent the crises that have

faced the United Nations and the global community in recent years, notably the collapse of civil governance, the disintegration of states, intense civil strife, and massive displacement and migration.

The concept of "global security" will be central to this meeting, and we will be hearing much about the need to find a way to make the planet, and ourselves, safer and more secure from the turmoil and social decay that appears to deepen around us.

Yet in the existing global order, there is little in common between the security "interests" of privileged citizens of the affluent industrialized world, and the

interests of the majority in the East and the South – and the poor in the North – who are marginalized from sharing the bounty and stewardship of the planet, and whose prospects are increasingly miserable. The health and security of this majority are threatened by global systems that are established to their detriment. As long as this remains the condition of the majority of the planet – or even a

significant proportion – neither they, nor the minority who benefit from unjust global systems, will ever be secure.

Only when the security of none is threatened, is the security of all guaranteed. This is the true meaning of common security, and is the only possible road to building a common global future of peace and prosperity.

If we wish to contribute to global peace and security, we must continue to promote economic justice, human rights,

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and democratic development. We must work with Inday, and thousands like her, to answer the question, "When will we have the health and security that the wealthy consider as their right?" Ultimately, only when Inday no longer has to fight for her birthright will her future, and ours, be secure.

This *Bulletin* looks at how some of the organizations supported by Inter Pares are promoting this alternative vision of global justice and common security.

BANGLADESH: *Sustaining Livelihoods*

During the past several years, farmers in the Khulna region of Bangladesh have organized to promote their own visions of social, economic and environmental security. This work has been so effective that it has become a national campaign.

The campaign began as farmers organized to resist the takeover of cropland by shrimp producers. During the winter season, shrimp producers negotiate agreements with large landowners to flood thousands of acres of fallow land with salt water to create massive shrimp ponds. This flooding affects everyone in the area, including small farmers who own or sharecrop adjacent lands. Government supports the shrimp industry since it is a major source of foreign exchange. But for local farmers, the loss of access to these lands, once used for winter vegetables and pasture, poses serious economic hardships. To make matters worse, land that has been flooded with sea water becomes increasingly salty, making it less productive for food crops in the summer season.

Five years ago, farmers in Khulna began to challenge the shrimp industry.

Some groups leased fallow lands in their areas, thus preventing access by the shrimp producers. Others cut the embankments around the shrimp ponds to release the water. The shrimp producers responded by sending in armed men to guard the ponds. Violent conflict became inevitable. In November, 1990, guards opened fire on a group of demonstrating farmers. Forty people were injured; a young woman named Karuma Moyee Sardar was killed.

Karuma Sardar has now become a national symbol of the anti-shrimp movement. Farmers' groups erected a monument in her honour on the spot where she was killed. Since 1990, meetings and seminars are organized where local groups come together every November to discuss the social, economic and environmental impact of the shrimp industry and to develop common strategies. Some are now so well-organized that they have successfully declared their communities as "shrimp-free zones".

Much of the organizing and educational work related to the shrimp industry



John Paul Key

has been done with the assistance of the Bangladesh organization Nijera Kori, one of Inter Pares' partners. Nijera Kori supports farmers to come together to share information, and is carrying out a national public education and media campaign. Nijera Kori recently initiated an environmental impact assessment of the shrimp industry, including a soil fertility study on the long-term impact of salination.

These communities are defining a vision of security based on their own needs and priorities. Central to this vision is a determination that resources for local livelihoods must continue to be accessible to, and managed by, local people.

TRADING INSECURITY

Throughout the Caribbean, structural adjustment and debt repayment are resulting in severe poverty, rising unemployment, cutbacks in health and education, and environmental degradation.

It was these problems that brought together Caribbean NGOs, trade unions, farmers and women's organizations, as well as some international guests in Barbados in October, 1994, to discuss the impact of the new General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) on Caribbean people. The *GATT Forum*, organized by the Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC), is part of an ongoing attempt by CPDC to explore Caribbean responses to global economic policies.

The implications of the GATT for food security, employment, trade, culture and sovereignty were among the issues the

Forum addressed. Historically, Caribbean economies have relied on agriculture for domestic food needs and employment, a self-reliance seriously undermined in the last twenty years. An emphasis on export agriculture is threatening the livelihood of small-scale farmers in rural areas.

Trade liberalization and the intellectual property rights provisions of the GATT could generate even more unemployment in both agriculture and industry, and further erode the sovereignty of Caribbean micro-states.

Guests from Central America and the Philippines echoed Caribbean fears about loss of control over domestic economies. A key concern was the impact of the GATT on women. Tess Oliveros of the National Federation of Peasant Women of the Philippines (AMIHAN) spoke about how women in her country will be

affected by the GATT. In the Philippines, as in the Caribbean, the majority of farmers and agricultural producers are women who rely on subsistence production for local markets to feed their families.

The *GATT Forum* resulted in an agreement among all participants to collaborate more closely in monitoring and challenging the negative effects of the GATT, and to organize and share information at the national and regional levels, as well as internationally. They also stressed that people must participate more fully in decision-making processes that affect their lives, their security, their future. As one participant put it: "This is what our governments should be doing. They should be discussing the issues with the people, so that we can determine together what to do, and then do it".

OWNING THEIR FUTURE: *Worker's Property in Nicaragua*

Following the 1990 elections in Nicaragua, the new government began to dismantle the economic model promoted by the Sandinistas and to curtail the social gains achieved by the revolution. Through intense mobilization and debate, organized workers succeeded in resisting government plans to privatize state-owned companies. After months of struggle and negotiations, the workers won ownership of a significant percentage of the agricultural and industrial enterprises now known as the Area of Workers' Property (APT).

In the coffee sector, members of the Farmworkers' Association (ATC) acquired 37 plantations and a processing plant. The ATC set up a holding company known as AGROCAFE to oversee the operations and the management of these enterprises. Ninety-eight percent of AGROCAFE's shares are held by the workers, 25% of whom are women. AGROCAFE's farms are responsible for 10% of the country's coffee production, making the worker-owned enterprise a major actor in the planning of national production strategies.

For farm workers, the struggle over property rights has been a matter of survival as well as principle. Had they not

fought for ownership of state companies, most workers would have lost their jobs and access to housing, health services, child care and education provided by the enterprise. Today, they have property, jobs, basic services and the possibility of influencing their company's decisions.

Worker-shareholders face many challenges. AGROCAFE owes a debt of approximately \$7 million which must be repaid to the government over the next eight years. Many farms had been stripped of equipment and other assets, and require substantial investments to reactivate or increase production. Access to credit for production is limited due to the government's policies and the banks' lending practices which favour large private owners attempting to reappropriate land redistributed under the Sandinista agrarian reform.

However, the biggest challenge facing AGROCAFE may be to overcome basic obstacles to internal democratization and genuine participation of the workers in the affairs of their company. These include the lack of management experience on the part of farm workers, and the increasing incidence of illiteracy. As a result, business decisions are still in the hands of managers and senior union

leaders. But the ATC and AGROCAFE recognize that the development of a real sense of ownership, participation and commitment among the shareholders is the best way to increase production and guarantee the long-term viability of the model.

With the support of Inter Pares and Tools for Peace, AGROCAFE has developed a literacy, management and technical training program aimed at empowering workers with the skills and knowledge necessary to help administer and manage their farms and improve their productive capacity. Ultimately, this may prove to be the most significant factor in ensuring the security of the workers and their livelihoods.

JUSTICE & SECURITY : *A Voice from the South*

The Third World Network (TWN) is an international network of social justice activists that provides a forum for discussing and debating Third World needs and issues. Central to the work of TWN is the task of challenging Northern ideas of what constitutes "global security" with perspectives and experiences from the South. TWN holds seminars, publishes a wide range of materials, and is an active participant in multilateral and UN debates. TWN monitors international negotiations related to trade, economic and environmental sustainability, and analyzes the implications of these negotiations for the Third World.

TWN publishes *Third World Resurgence*, a monthly magazine which is an excellent resource for those seeking alternative information related to justice, development and sustainable global security.

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US \$45; Individuals: US \$35)



ETHIOPIA: *Food Security through Diversity*



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Not so long ago the cameras brought us yet again pictures of thousands of Ethiopians waiting for food handouts in order to survive. Yet Ethiopia is the centre of one of the world's most important food resources. Many of the planet's food grain crops, such as durum wheat and sorghum, originated in the vast highlands of this country.

For thousands of years, small farmers carefully selected, bred and cultivated many varieties of grains, and used their knowledge to adapt these varieties to the diverse micro-climates and fluctuations in rainfall. Most farmers planted not one, but many varieties of seeds, thereby ensuring that they would not lose an entire crop to one pest, disease or drought. Careful seed selection and farming practices allowed farmers to feed themselves and conserve enough seeds for the next planting season, creating and preserving genetic diversity, generation after generation.

But during the 1970's and '80s, farmers were encouraged to abandon

traditional seeds in favour of new high-yielding varieties that were supposed to be more drought and pest resistant. War and drought in the mid-1980's forced farmers to eat their seeds in order to survive, further eroding the diversity of available seed varieties. Food aid shipments also meant that imported varieties made their way to the farms and traditional seed varieties began to disappear.

The problem with imported seed varieties is that they require fertilizers and pesticides, which most farmers cannot afford. The newly-introduced

seeds are less well-adapted and more genetically uniform than the traditional varieties. Lacking the genetic flexibility to cope with climatic variations, imported varieties tend to degenerate, producing lower yields. With decreasing yields, farmers must buy seeds every year rather than conserve seeds for the next year's crop. This cycle of dependency on external seeds puts farming families at greater risk and threatens their livelihood.

Dr. Melaku Worede is an Ethiopian scientist known internationally for his pioneering work on plant genetic diversity and is the founder of the Plant Genetic Resources Centre (PGRC) in Ethiopia, which today is one of the world's best seed banks. Through years of working with local farmers, Dr. Melaku learned that traditional seed varieties do not require synthetic fertilizers in order to produce and are more resistant to drought and pests. Traditional varieties are also much better adapted to Ethiopia's micro-climates which can differ sharply from one valley to the next. Dr. Melaku was determined to

stop the disappearance of Ethiopia's precious heritage of seeds. Working directly with farmers, Dr. Melaku learned of the tremendous knowledge that farmers bring to the selection and breeding of local varieties and their essential role in seed conservation.

In 1988, Dr. Melaku launched the Seeds of Survival program to help Ethiopian farmers conserve and cultivate traditional food grains. The program, supported by USC Canada, Rural Advancement Foundation International and Inter Pares, aims to restore and protect genetic diversity to ensure food security.

The Seeds of Survival program started out with twenty farming families, by encouraging them to use traditional seed varieties in their fields. The twenty families cultivated and harvested these crops and conserved and multiplied the varieties, which were then distributed to more farmers. Since 1988, the program has reached over 20,000 farmers and will spread much beyond those directly involved, since farmers tend to exchange and pass seeds on to their families and neighbours. Farmers are pleased with the yield of the local seeds, and talk enthusiastically about the preferred flavour of the traditional varieties of teff, a grain used in many common dishes. The program also increases the effectiveness and impact of the PGRC by involving farmers with scientists who work together to collect and conserve Ethiopia's diversity.

Initially, the idea of seed conservation, utilization and breeding at the small farm level was greeted with skepticism. Today the program is recognized by major agricultural and development institutions worldwide as essential to food security. This work is being used as a model for further seed conservation elsewhere in Africa. The program has developed training and networking activities for African farmers and scientists. For small-scale farmers in Ethiopia, the experience of restoring long-lost traditional seeds has provided hope for the future, and a new sense of security.

