

**NGOs: GLOBAL NAVIGATORS (NOT AVIATORS) OF  
FUTURE SOCIETIES**

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Five re-enforcing and sometimes contradicting forces in the planet will primarily determine societies in the future. These five forces are events and experiences, compelling visions, technological innovations, quality of consciousness and political will. A quad folding process is likewise emerging in the world and if it is successful in forging a collective visions and convergence work on the ground it will make the role of civil society/NGOs very critical. This quad folding phenomenon will have to necessarily demand from NGOs the following complementing roles: as Visionary of Better Societies, as Net weaver of the Energies and Forces of Good, as Consensus Builder of Transformative and Alternative Lifestyles, as Innovator of New Social Architectures, as Advocate of Causes for Sustainability and lastly as Keeper of the Civic Covenant. Balance and harmony in the long run will still be the delimiting considerations. NGOs must continue to conspire in hope so that they can become catalyst and cultural agents for societal transformation.

## **1. Changing roles of NGOs**

### *1.1 Greetings of Peace!*

It must have been *foresight* for the organizers to entitle this session as, “NGOs being global navigators instead of aviators”, as the latter term is quite problematic because of the recent terrorist attacks by aviation hijackers in the United States. I know that we are all still in shock by the unimaginable terrorist quake that unfolded right into our televisions screens a week ago. Like an earthquake, it will be long remembered as a preview to the futures of terrorism in this planet. On hindsight too, I believed that NGOs as navigators for future societies is a better description for the work of NGOs as it involves swimming

and making meanings in the many cross currents that the NGO boats have to face in the oceans of emerging trends that will likely impact on the futures of our societies. NGOs will have great difficulties becoming *pilots/aviators* because of the speed it has to contend with, oftentimes bypassing the elements natural to living systems.

Bracketing aside events in the United States, this conference of NGOs in Taiwan has become an important positive outlook at alternative futures. The theme of this sub-session is very vital in hedging against possible *breakdown futures* like one that will be dominated and controlled by terrorism of every sort, political/ideological, economic, ecological, religious and virtual or electronic.

### *1.2 What future societies?*

The kinds of societies we will inherit in the future will still be mainly determined by our answers to the fundamental questions of:

1. Who are we?
2. What does citizenship mean to us?
3. How can/should we organize our societies?

Culture, which is about identity, citizenship and ways of life, along with Events and Experiences, Compelling Visions, Technological Innovations, Political Will and Quality of Consciousness will greatly determine the kind of societies we will all inherit in the future. Identity is central as it means engaging and struggling with the fundamental issues of who we are and this, in turn, determines our meanings in life. Citizenship means to be empowered but also entails duties. Meaningful and responsible participation of people in community governance towards the common good is both a pre-requisite and the result. Ways of life means the way we live, think, value and organize our societies. This will follow all of the above.

## **2. Future societies waiting to be born**

### *2.1 Three scenarios for near and long term futures*

#### *Great Wall scenario*

According to Sohail Inayatullah, a Pakistani born American residing in the same country, Australia has already chosen that route, with basically a prison lock down ahead, especially to newcomers (who desire to enter the Fantasy island of

the Virtual West). The costs for elites will be very high given globalized world capitalism, and with aging as among the major long term issues. Great Wall scenario leads to general impoverishment and the loss of diversity and creativity that is attributable to the immigration innovation factor. In the short run, it will give the appearance of security, but in the longer run, poverty will result, not to mention sham right winged and militaristic democracies with real aligned with the military/police complex.

*Abu Sayaf Scenario – vengeance forever*

Bush has already evoked the “Wanted – Dead or Alive” clause for the terrorists that attacked the US recently. We have seen what that leads to all over the world, and the consequences are all too clear. Endless escalation in war that will look like the USA has won – once all Muslims are nuked off the face of the earth. But what if a few survive? The survivors will remember the latest round, and the response will be far more terrifying. In any case, with the USA army, especially the marines – rapidly becoming Muslim – conversion and growth rates – new war will start to eat at the inner center. And once state terror begins, there will be no end in sight. Bush has already stated the assassination clause does not apply to Bin Ladin and others since the USA is acting in self-defense. Hence, cowboys win again, but only in the beginning, while crowds chant USA, USA, until the next hit. Meantime CIA and CIA like hit squads can get back to business.

Critical futurists like Sohail Innayatullah believe that in this future, there is no real change to the world system. Once the terrorists are caught, no changes in international politics or international capital occur; simply OECD states become stronger, while individuals become more fearful, anxiety prone. A depression of multiple varieties is likely to occur (economic and psychological).

*Peace, justice and reconciliation scenario*

This means transforming the world system, focusing on a post-globalization vision of the future, and moving to a world governance system. In terms of epistemology, this means moving from the strategic discourse, which has defined us for hundreds of years, to the emergent healing discourse (within, toward others, toward the planet, and for future generations). This means far more of a Mandela approach, what Johann Galtung is doing via the transcended ([www.transcend.org](http://www.transcend.org)) network than the Bush short term approach.

The first scenario is very much a return to the imagined past, the second the likely future, and the third, for me, the aspirational. This means moving beyond capitalist West and the feudalized, ossified non-West (and modernized versions

of it) and toward an Integrated East and West civilization. The huge stumbling blocks are – perceived injustices, the “isms”, and the asymmetrical world order, and national leaders unwilling to give up their “god-given” right to define identity and allegiance. This 3<sup>rd</sup> scenario is the global civil/spiritual society vision, and one that stands in strong opposition to the declared USA position and the extremist groups all over the world.

### **3. NGO intervention: critical navigators**

#### *3.1 VISIONARIES of alternative societies*

We begin to realise our poverty in embracing long-range visions. The lack of compelling and collective long-term visions seems to be at the center of our crisis. It is only with the strength of a compelling vision that will move us to a planetary consciousness of the power of visions in our lives and societies. NGOs can take the lead in inviting people and communities to articulate collectively drawn and empowering visions and anchoring lives upon these visions. NGOs cannot afford but be long-range visionaries otherwise will may all inherit a future we all abhor. A weakness of many NGOs in the world today is its failure to chart a long term vision of the future and contend this with the other oftentimes hidden conception of the future being sold by media, the market and ideologies which are more popular and subliminal. NGOs must become Institutions of Foresights (IoFs) if they want to become relevant to the future. As an institution of foresight, NGOs must be able to harness its resources to be able to develop its hindsight, presentsight and more importantly its capacity for anticipation or foresight.

#### *3.2 ADVOCATES of caring lifestyles, planetary ethics, transformative governance and geo-spirituality*

As advocates, NGOs must continue to be at the cutting edge of the articulation of another view of the future. Advocacy means knocking at the doors of decision makers and the citizenry explaining the need for a new consciousness on sustainability that demands a lifestyle of simplicity, planetary ethics, governance that transforms selfishness, unjust structures, destructive ways of living and eco-justice that leads to respect the integrity of creation.

#### *3.3 INNOVATORS and MOVERS of the cultural creatives*

As innovators and movers, we must take the cue from the “cultural creatives” whose population has been increasing overtime in many parts of the developed world. Cultural creatives according Ervin Laszlo are people and communities

that are socially concerned with green values, globalist in perspective and in search of what is spiritual, “authentic”, holistic (food, health, work-play). The positive and appropriate innovations can hopefully be mainstreamed all throughout the world so that we can create a lifestyle where that is caring for others who are in need and to our natural habitat.

### *3.4 NETWEAVERS for convergence*

#### *CONSENSUS BUILDING of stakeholders*

In relations to being visionaries, NGOs must be able to gather stakeholders in the community to start articulating the visions of the different stakeholders and pause for a dialogue of visions among them. Consensus building is the key to grass roots community building through people empowerment. Through consensus building, citizen/stakeholders are trained to participate in community affairs as a whole and not just as individuals.

#### *KEEPERS of the civic covenant*

Finally, NGOs are there not just to uphold the civic covenant that provides essential safety nets for people in the emerging global and post globalization worlds, but also to ensure the success of civic education and train the people for responsibilities towards their families, local communities, nation, the world, all life forms. People must be taught this sense of responsibility and they must be committed to keeping it.

## **Conclusion**

Our nations are caught, on one hand, in the mad rush for globalization, and on the other, the movement towards stronger, more informed, more vigilant civil society. The continued growth of civil societies, as seen in the proliferation of NGOs is noteworthy, according to Dr. Talisayon (ASEAN Assembly Report). According to Lester Salamon, the rapid growth of civil society during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century is an “associational revolution”. One that is as important as the rise of nation states back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This revolution is seen in the “massive array of self-governing private organizations, not dedicated to distributing profits to shareholders” but by empowering them with civic responsibilities for all of life now and in the future.

### **Continue with the revolutionary growth of the civil society movement!**

Presented at the NGO Conference of the Asia-Pacific Public Affairs Forum (APPAF) in Taipei, Taiwan, September 2001.