

Solidarity Issues Paper*

The concept of solidarity gets to the heart of our common humanity. And has multiple manifestations, more indeed than are usually recognized. Perhaps the most visible is when people unite in the face of humanitarian disasters. In the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami, the overwhelming response of the international community showed just how much can be accomplished through global solidarity.

The UN Development Agenda, defined by the UN global conferences and summits since the 1990s, is itself firmly embedded in principles of solidarity.

The Agenda expresses the economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights of world citizens. Indeed, it has firm roots in the history of struggle by international civil society for human rights, social equity, gender equality, environmental protection, and, more recently, for the globalization of cultural diversity and of solidarity itself. The Agenda articulates shared principles and consensus on policy options to address common, interconnected problems. And it sets out agreed goals and targets—such as the eight Millennium Development Goals—to help advance and assess implementation.

The World Summit for Social Development made clear the links between the UN Development Agenda and the principles of solidarity, when it recognized that “development and social progress will require increased solidarity, expressed through appropriate multilateral programmes and strengthened international cooperation.” This is what the General Assembly has recognized by calling for an International Human Solidarity Day as a new force in the fight against poverty and under-development.

All types of international economic cooperation are not necessarily forms of solidarity. Many are mainly ways of managing interdependence, which is, for example, the driving concept behind the provision of global public goods, such as environmental sustainability or the regulation of international economic transactions.

Yet, many of the tools we have in hand for combating poverty—and for seeking to make globalization a positive force for all—*are* motivated by solidarity. Development aid is, in this regard, a practical manifestation of human solidarity, as it extends opportunity to the less fortunate around the world.

For many countries, official development assistance (ODA) is vital to achieving the MDGs and other development goals. We are still far from reaching the long-standing target of 0.7 percent of GDP for ODA, today met by only a few countries. Scaling-up development aid flows, strengthening aid effectiveness, and maximizing ODA’s impact on poverty reduction are all of critical importance.

New forms of solidarity are emerging on this front, which should complement and not replace existing ODA obligations. Some of the most promising are the initiatives on innovative sources of financing for development, including the international solidarity contribution on airplane tickets that some countries have already put in place.

External debt relief can help in liberating resources for poverty reduction, as with the decision to cancel the debt of 18 heavily indebted poor countries, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa. Debt burden, however, still weighs heavily on many developing countries. And we have an ethical obligation to ensure that debt relief funds are directed towards poverty reduction financing, such as for primary health care services, immunizations, education, and access to water.

Meaningful efforts against poverty will also require much more attention to developing genuinely integrated economic and social policies that aim at *preventing* economic crises and developing permanent *social protection* systems. To be effective, these systems must provide for universal coverage based on solidarity principles, and cover basic risks in an integrated way, particularly nutrition, health, ageing, and unemployment.

Within today's rapid globalization process, rising inequalities within and among countries, and unsustainable forms of economic development, we must also devote more attention and creativity to supporting the role of *economic* solidarity. Indeed, the reproduction of old and the creation of new forms of economic solidarity, in this era of globalization and the profit motive, is a clear manifestation of the idea, expressed by major thinkers such as Austrian anthropologist Karl Polanyi, which some would still see as a paradox: that is, that the market economy can only prosper when subordinated to broader social objectives, which themselves must be firmly embedded in principles of solidarity.

Solidarity has a long-standing economic dimension, evident in activities that have evolved as a means for societies and groups to address social, economic, or environmental challenges that are not or are inadequately met by government or by the market.

An old, yet still quite prevalent, example is the "self-help" we see, particularly among the poorest and most marginalized persons in society. These have evolved, in turn, from older manifestations of solidarity, such as those that we still see today in indigenous communities or indeed the extended family. These sorts of activities can, in fact, embrace and engage large sectors of a population, including farmers, women and household members, young people, trade union members, and the unemployed who may be marginalized by the workings of market mechanisms.

We also see the economic dimension of solidarity in what we have come to call "social enterprise": the work of an expanding array of organizations such as cooperatives, mutual societies, voluntary and civil society organisations, foundations, and associations.

Cooperatives, which emerged as early as the 19th century, are today prominent in the areas of agricultural production, crafts, retailing, banking, and microfinance. Mutual societies are predominantly active in the insurance and mortgage sectors, while associations and foundations figure strongly in the provision of health and welfare services, sports and recreation, culture, environmental regeneration, and humanitarian assistance. The so-called "care economy" that has emerged to confront some social dimensions of our changing societies, particularly ageing, has

some similarities with these older concepts. There are also a growing number of businesses that employ staff who are marginalized, such as those with mental health and drug problems and the homeless.

Many of these enterprises are run like businesses to produce goods and services for the market economy, but they manage their operations and redirect their surplus in pursuit of social, environmental, and community goals. And they tend to give particular importance to citizen empowerment and social change through responsible citizenship, with control over what they and their members produce, consume, save, invest, and exchange.

Economic solidarity is also demonstrated by the ideals of not free but “fair trade”, where profit maximization is not the sole end. Rather, the emerging world of “fair trade” emphasizes greater equity in international transactions, where farmers are given a better income, international environmental and labour standards are met, and child labour is shunned.

In this technological age, we are even seeing the growth of an open source software movement as a vehicle for bridging the digital divide and an emerging model for cooperative copyright and intellectual copyright arrangements. And we are also seeing a global movement aimed at guaranteeing firm respect for traditional knowledge and folklore within the rules of intellectual property protection.

Economic solidarity holds great promise in specific development areas. Urban migrants, by tapping their traditional rural networks, can play a role in promoting urban development, in a time when rural-to-urban migration continues unabated. Overseas migrant workers, especially with the weight of remittances, can become active players in development through forms of economic solidarity. Indigenous peoples, with their traditional values of communal solidarity and mutual help and traditional skills, can increasingly reach niche markets globally, but more importantly, best serve their communities.

All of this points to the need for global initiatives and national policies that will strengthen the economic, social, and humanitarian dimensions of solidarity.

*Based on the Statement by Mr. José Antonio Ocampo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs at the Launch of International Human Solidarity Day
New York, 10 November 2006