

Proposals for a Fair and Sustainable Economy

contribution to the theme: production, distribution and consumption:
access to wealth, common goods and a transitional economy
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On the path to the Thematic World Social Forum in Porto Alegre and Rio+20

Introduction

The seriousness of the current environmental crisis is an expression of a deeper-reaching crisis, a crisis of civilization afflicting modern capitalism, characterized by the predominance of the unregulated market, financial speculation, frenzied consumerism, the constant quest for growth, economic injustice and widespread poverty. The current and foreseeable destructive consequences of a convergence of systemic and recurring crises stress the urgent need to make far-reaching changes to the economic and political organization of contemporary societies and open the door to a sustainable, fair and united world.

There is clearly an urgent need not only to abandon capitalism, but also to change the model of civilisation. Humanity has entered into a prolonged period of transition wherein a change of civilisation is not a merely rhetorical solution, but an historical challenge facing the human race in the 21st century. We therefore have to begin by exposing and dismantling the mechanisms of the dominant capitalist model, a system based on appropriation, private control over production and consumption driven by the quest to maximize profit. At the same time, we need to set in motion alternatives for change. This then raises various questions: what shape will the new economic models for the 21st century take? What will the new financial, production and distribution systems be? Using which energy mix? A great many ideas and initiatives already exist on the territorial and regional level concerning the new economy that needs to emerge. We must give concrete form to a viewpoint that links up local with global dimensions in order to strengthen the first steps towards the new economy that people and the planet need.

It is therefore essential to delegitimize the myths of the official economy and switch from neoclassical economics to political economics, in other words, a new economy with different ideas, concepts and visions that take into account the complexity of the processes at work during this transitional period. Political economics should be reclaimed and rethought as a human and inexact science, overthrowing the myths of a supposedly transcendent economy whose laws are set in stone.

1. The fundamental principles of a new economy designed to satisfy human needs while respecting the natural systems of life and the planet

The principles underpinning this new vision are care, cooperation, solidarity, participation and satisfaction of basic needs. The fundamental pillars upholding the new model to be created are the strong focus on the human dimension, from the territorial to local level, on the need to reduce wealth in order to diminish poverty, on fair redistribution, co-responsibility and the ethics of equality. Although, on the one hand, initiatives on the territorial level must and can support the transitional process, on the other hand, the longer the delay in agreeing on the principles relating to regulation and policies on a large scale, the longer it will take to implement the proposals for change at the global level—with disastrous social and environmental consequences. In this scenario, we must not forget that the forces governing the current system will seek to ensure that any attempt at radical change remains nothing more than a purely cosmetic reform—in the event that any sort of reform is achieved at all. The challenges are in any case so vast and decisive that the wisest course of action is to face up to them and overcome them.

Changes in the economic sphere must go hand in hand with the transformation of the political system. We need to advance on all fronts at the same time. Furthermore, the link between the economic and political spheres must be rooted in the ethical principles of a biocivilization for the sustainability of life and the planet. The idea is of a complex whole linking ethical, economic and political principles wherein all the different dimensions depend on each other and mutually strengthen each other.

Three aspects of the current economic model need to be tackled as a matter of some urgency: the tyranny of financial and speculative capital, the instability of a monetary system concentrated on the currencies of the dominant economies, and the irrationality of the paradigm of unlimited growth as the fundamental criterion conditioning societies' well-being.

2. Tackling the tyranny of financial and speculative capital

How can we regulate the financial system, masked as it is by banking confidentiality, tax havens and the concentration of power in plutocracies and closed clubs?

It is now increasingly clear that financial capital is strangling society and destroying the rights of citizens, workers and small and medium-sized business struggling under the weight of debt. Before the controversial public debate generated by the 2008 financial crisis, it was unthinkable that the people running the financial institutions and state organizations responsible for the crisis would not be made to assume their civil and criminal responsibility. But the reverse has happened: they have been given new posts as consultants and specialists in charge of resolving the crisis they themselves have caused!

In this context, heightened by the quagmire the US economy finds itself in, the risk of the European economy collapsing is growing ever stronger. The deterioration of the European economic situation could lead to a new worldwide Great Depression and an unprecedented degree of chaos with unforeseeable consequences. In the face of this situation, saving the banks, shoring up debts and developing desperate actions for last-minute financial aid is not enough, and will only serve to put off the inevitable: the need to radically change the rules of the financial system, before the crushing force of this system destroys the social progress that cost the lives of millions of European citizens throughout the last century.

A number of policies for regulating the financial system have already been identified:

- get rid of tax havens and banking confidentiality once and for all. The Achilles heel of the banking system, particularly in Switzerland, is the code that hides speculators' and traffickers' bank accounts. Accounts need to be transparent and the names and addresses of everyone depositing money in the banks must be declared to the banks and to the tax systems in the countries where depositors should pay taxes;

- a tax needs to be levied on banking and financial transactions. This tax (based on James Tobin's proposal in 1971, forty years ago), even if it remained low, concentrated on financial transactions and without affecting investments, would represent a significant source of financial resources. A great many calculations have been carried out on the resources that this solution could generate in order to reduce poverty, provide access to drinking water for millions of people, prevent large-scale diseases, etc. It would be important for these resources to be administered by a non-bureaucratic body providing a space for citizen organizations to express their needs directly, exercise control over the allocation of resources and check that the financed programmes operate correctly;
- this relationship between taxing financial flows and the transparent and democratic organization of the resources generated underlines the importance of the necessary link between economic measures and the social and political organization of a new economy. To put it bluntly, there is no point imposing a tax on financial transactions if the resources it raises are then managed by the banks—or by the IMF! We need to create a new organization, a sort of World Economic and Social Fund, comprising an across-the-board body that is not dependent on the most powerful governments, but rather on a broad-based group of governments, workers, social organizations and businesses responsible for the transparently-defined allocation of financial funds;
- banks can be state, private or mixed. It is important that they play the role of facilitating transactions without becoming agents for creating money or vehicles for speculative operations. The loans they award must therefore be limited to the amount of their reserves in order to avoid setting in motion a speculative process of currency creation that would multiply the real reserves they hold without any solid basis. In this context, it is vital to support banking networks at the territorial level and cooperative credit systems applying to socio-professional sectors and population groups. This type of human-scale financial system has already proved to be efficient and to better meet the needs of millions of citizens and families in middle-class and poor sectors;

3. Organizing a new monetary system linking together multiple currencies and strengthening the pillars of solidarity-based, sustainable and democratic monetary exchanges

The proposition for banks to give up their role of generating money necessarily raises the question of monetary creation and the link between different currencies. Who then should create money? How should currencies be interlinked? These questions strike at the very heart of financial and monetary systems. They also open the door to reflection and proposals for deliberating on and radically changing the rules of the game played by the dominant economy, thus promoting the initiation of new mechanisms oriented towards the new economy that the sustainability of life and the planet require.

In this context, it is important that the bodies creating money are not centralized in the central banks of dominant economies. We need to promote a broader range of currencies, regionally and sector-based. Such currencies already exist in certain countries and region, providing a better response to the specific requirements of trade and commerce. Currencies could be created by various public bodies, democratically elected and operating with transparent information and decision-making mechanisms. This will ensure that, critically, citizens will be able to trust in their currencies.

Furthermore, the diversity of currencies should not only correspond to regional diversity, but also to diverse categories of goods and products. The dominant economic model has thrown all goods and services together into the same bag, standardizing them and setting the capitalist market up as the exclusive and excluding means for attributing their values. The reality is far more complex, and cannot be forced into the limiting framework of the capitalist market, which, as we know, is controlled and manipulated by the practices and interests of plutocratic and speculative groups. In addition, the capitalist market has demonstrated that, if left to itself, it not only produces inequalities but is also incapable of meeting the new challenges of regulating climate change and ensuring the sustainability of life and the planet.

The vital regulation of the capitalist market must thus go hand in hand with the promotion of alternative trade systems that encourage the circulation of goods and services that do not enter into the paradigm of the dominant model. There are goods and services that must be identified using other currencies because not all goods and services circulating in society have the same character. It has been a long time since economists and philosophers—and common sense—first recognized that goods and services should not be measured with the same yardstick. It is impossible to compare long-lasting and ephemeral products, services for private use and public services, products that are used up in the act of being consumed and goods that increase when put to the service of other people, such as care economy products and the learning of shared knowledge.

A diversity of currencies that reflect the different types of goods and services and the world's different regions raises the difficult problem of currency exchange. The dollar is still the dominant currency, with only two or three other currencies contesting its economic and political hegemony: the euro, the yen and, increasingly, the yuan. The forms of exchange between these currencies, between them and other existing currencies and with the new currencies that need creating is a key question that highlights the need to build a new governance, a new regulation of exchanges at the local and regional levels, but also, and especially, at the global level, since that is the where the battle for control of the economy and the world is fought in this age of increasingly omnipresent globalization.

It is clear that the basis of this new governance must overcome the limits of the current system, which has entered into a prolonged period of crisis. The financial and monetary systems regulated by agreements between G20 governments with interventions by the IMF and central banks in the dominant economies are showing recurrent signs of collapse. The current system is so fragile that the debts of the main economies, from the USA to Europe, are damaging even the foundations of the economies of so-called emerging powers, dragging everyone into the dead-end situation represented by the current crisis.

The disparity of social and economic systems and labour structures between the various regions and countries creates differences in productivity between economies. The wages

earned by Chinese workers—mainly female—cannot be compared with German workers' wages; the productive systems used at coal mines in northern China and southern India cannot be compared with US car manufacturing. Roundup-ready soy monoculture in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso is far more competitive than farming and livestock polyculture in France's Cantal region. There are thousands of examples, and the differences in work productivity are enormous, leading to disparities between different countries as well as within countries. Since it is not possible to homogenize them, the standardization sought by a capitalist market that is deregulated but controlled by transnational corporations and oligopolistic practices is, from all points of view, inefficient as well as inequitable.

New governance of financial and monetary systems should be underpinned by democratic, sustainable and solidarity-based principles. This is not a purely ethical question, although it certainly has a strong ethical element, since the fair, solidarity-based and sustainable economy is built on ethical foundations that can sustain life and the planet. However, these principles are also effective thanks to their capacity to respond to the financial and monetary crisis, by making it possible to avoid the whole range of dumping practices—monetary, fiscal, social and ecological—that cause the imbalances affecting populations' living conditions and creating division between workers in different countries and regions.

A new economy would therefore need some sort of *Financial Solidarity Fund*, devised democratically by all actors directly involved: governments but also unions, employer organizations, solidarity economy networks, cooperatives and other popular and peasant groups. This form of authority would be capable of regulating fluctuations in these types of exchanges and avoid disparities that not only trigger social and economic inequalities but also damage the solidarity so vital between all economic actors, particularly between workers.

We therefore also need to remodel the debt system by cancelling all the debts generated by speculative activities and promoting payment schedules and interest mechanisms that do not obstruct the capacity for economic development of numerous countries or put the heavy burden of illegitimate debt on the shoulders of civil servants, workers and the poorest sectors. The weight of this debt becomes unbearable when it is combined with the huge efforts that

impoverished poor and middle-class sectors have to make, people who take on responsibility for contributing their labour and their limited means to generating the local financial resources vital to policies governing education, health, housing and other social necessities.

Finally—although this may be the first proposal in this field—a question of historical justice is raised by the legitimate demand of southern peoples, mainly the poorest among them, for a reversal of the principle of indebtedness that entails paying off the debt that the capitalist expansionist powers from Europe and the USA contracted during hundreds of years spent exploiting these countries' riches, subjugating the people and producing forced migrations and bondage. This debt contracted by expansionist powers comprises economic as well as ecological dimensions, since nature has been so badly damaged and the agricultural, mineral and marine resources that abound in the planet's southern regions have been so extensively exploited. In this context, the so-called development aid that rich countries have to grant to poor countries should increase rather than keep dropping as it has done in recent years. In reality, it is not actually a form of aid, but a fundamental moral and financial reparation that the governments of rich countries should respect. Likewise, aid programmes being implemented by emerging countries must not establish new dependency-based relations that reproduce the mechanisms of the imperialist posture espoused by dominant powers.

4. Moving from unlimited growth to “differentiated degrowth” and “organic growth”

The current economic model continues to base itself on unlimited growth. The official world economy continues to use GDP as a measure instead of other indicators that have proven to give a far more reliable picture of human well-being. We need to let go of this culture of unstoppable growth along with the obsession with technology in the service of unchecked accumulation and consumption. Ecological and social externalities, which continue to be ignored by this model, have reached dangerously untenable levels: to the point of no return in the case of environmental impact, and to the point of a violent and uncontrolled social explosion in societies. Moreover, the emergence of new technologies and the trend to relocate production have transformed the relationship between capital and labour, eroding the

economic and social conditions of most people.

Various specious alternatives include the belief that geo-engineering, nano technology and other technological innovations could not only reduce environmental impacts but also solve current problems using technical means. Since time immemorial, alchemists and, more recently, certain scientists have been convinced that the solution lies in dominating and manipulating nature and the human species. These modern-day scientists and engineers, closely linked to transnational corporations in the food, pharmaceutical, transport and energy sectors, are developing research and promoting projects that constitute a real danger, since it has been proved that these processes and products have damaging and irreparable effects on life and the planet's ecosystems.

There is clearly no question of rejecting technological innovation. New products and technologies are necessary. The point is that when these products and technologies are left between the hands of pseudo-scientific circles and put to uncontrolled use by transnational corporations, they can only exacerbate problems. Hence the vital need for a new governance of scientific innovation and transparent regulation of the sector's private and public financial means and research projects.

Elsewhere, theories have emerged positing degrowth and growth-free prosperity. However, generalized degrowth is not viable; it needs to be adapted to each situation. Adopting degrowth is impossible for vast sectors in poor countries and regions marked by extreme shortages. Imposing limited consumption on those who do not consume when others have consumed, and consumed avidly, is neither fair nor viable. However, we are not proposing that southern peoples take “revenge” on the rich of the north in order to raise wealth levels in so-called developing countries. This idea has taken root in the imaginations of the middle-class and poor sectors in southern countries, conveyed by advertising that promotes the lifestyle of well-off classes as the model for human well-being. However, this concept not only exacerbates ecological and social problems, but is also increasingly coming under challenge. There is no covering up the fact that an increasing number of people in northern countries are impoverished and living in precarious conditions, further proof of the

inequalities and limitations that mark the dominant model.

Rather than degrowth, we need to regulate where and how growth takes place and pursue a “differentiated or selective degrowth” within which regions and countries can continue to grow for a while, avoiding as far as possible the harmful effects of the current production and consumption model, while they meet the urgent needs of their populations. Differentiated degrowth calls for new and equally differentiated standards. GDP no longer has a purpose, neither does a “broader GDP”. A possible alternative could be what are known as the 3Ps: production, people and planet. They could provide the overall scope for complex indicators focused on organic, human-sized growth wherein production, consumption and distribution respect the needs of people and the planet, by means of a fair and sustainable economy. Only by moving in this direction can we plan for a fast decrease in carbon consumption, with variable compensations according to the social and human costs in relation to regional differences and countries' wealth levels.

The idea of “organic growth” could then be explored, as a type of growth adapted to meet the needs of societies that also have to adapt to the possibilities offered by the environment they inhabit. In this domain, the ecological footprint measurement is one of the tools that can be used to calculate and manage growth or degrowth qualitatively as proposed.

However, who would regulate such differentiated degrowth? Without new world governance this is a difficult, not to say impossible, task. This is why a new architecture of power at the global level—based on recognition of the interdependency of peoples, with each other and with the planet—is vital to any attempt to curb the current speculative casino and growth model that is taking us to the edge of the precipice.

5. Production and consumption must be driven not by the market but by satisfying needs. Reducing inequalities and eradicating poverty is the urgent priority

At a time when production and consumption need to be rethought, we cannot ignore the fact that 1,200 million human beings live on less than a dollar a day and another 1,800 on less

than two dollars a day. In this context, stating that the recent boom experienced by so-called emerging countries is a means of geographically redistributing global resources is an incoherent argument, since in reality the boom is not the solution to the problem of growing inequality whereby the rich keep getting richer and the poor keep getting poorer in all countries, especially emerging countries. The poverty that affects vast rural regions as well as the big cities of China, India and Brazil, for example, is a reality that cannot be hidden behind the showcases and neighbourhoods of a rich middle class in cities that are fractured, both socially and in terms of urban development.

The current economy is based on the belief that it is necessary first to accumulate then to distribute. This is a fallacy that does not stand up to the obstinate reality of growing inequality. What is known as the trickle-down theory has proved to be nothing more than a profoundly unjust ideology. It has resulted in higher levels of poverty for a great many people and individual accumulation for just a handful. We also need to put an end to the belief that growth automatically produces well-being and happiness, overlooking the high social and ecological cost that societies are paying to achieve such growth. Environmental liabilities need to be included in public and private accounting. Growth at any price, even when painted in ecological colours, is no longer a viable model.

Production processes need to be regulated according to criteria based on ecological and social sustainability. This global and complex vision, by focusing attention on the links between the various economic and productive dimensions, will enable us to avoid productive and technological processes such as replacing fossil fuels by biomass, a solution that claims to meet the need for replacing polluting fuels with less damaging products; these processes cause deep-reaching unbalances in agricultural and food systems.

We need to reject the ideology that, along with the belief in production growth, posits consumption as the single dominant development model and the key to social inclusion and cohesion. The lifestyle that promotes consumerism as the means for individual fulfilment has to be radically questioned. Advertising that promotes this lifestyle is not only an irresponsible lucrative activity, but also a violation of human dignity. It is now vital to create a new lifestyle

based on the notion of “living well”. This does not mean returning to an idealized, and non-existent, past. It implies a deep-reaching individual change rooted in an awareness of life, of what constitutes happiness for oneself and for one's dear ones. It also entails significant economic and social changes to labour systems, the time spent working and impacts on pension and health systems.

In this context, it is also important to denounce the programmed obsolescence mechanisms that constantly reduce the useful life of commodities and to demand obligatory information on products' lifespans. Finally—although this list is not exhaustive—we need to reduce growth in the consumption of superfluous and luxury goods, instead promoting the considered consumption of high quality and tasteful goods that go hand in hand with an agreeable life but respect people and the planet.

The current economy can only be replaced by a new version via a gradual process wherein human-scale local initiatives multiply and link up.

Proposals that strengthen this movement, based on existing initiatives, include:

- develop and link up initiatives that are working towards an alternative economy, projects that are part of the alternative, social and solidarity economy that are already developing on every continent and that give environmental and social dimensions priority over the economic factor. In this respect, there are a number of valuable initiatives, at both the local and international level, that illustrate the new economy that is needed. Developments such as ethical funds, advances in certain areas of social protection law, basic salary programmes and other forms of remuneration for work organized on a community basis, and fair trade networks not only provide an answer to the needs of the populations concerned, but also constitute innovative economic systems that involve thousands of people, demonstrating that another economy is possible—it since it is already up and running;
- implement forms of production at the local level with sustainable and organic technologies that are not restricted by intellectual property law, which strips local peoples of their ancestral knowledge and their capacity for innovation.

However, we need to look further than the territorial and local dimension. It is clear that actors other than states have a key role to play in the world economy. International networks from civil society and social movements along with businesses that respect the environment and workers' rights are more important than ever. Multi-stakeholder forums, formed by groups of actors from a specific business sector or circle, represent a promising innovation. The advantage of exploring this kind of structure is that it goes beyond a purely territorial framework. It strengthens the territorial foundations of the actors, workers, businesses and local authority managers, but is positioned within the global framework of the business sector, cutting across territories by putting the emphasis on the actors and providing them with a space where they can meet, from the local to the international scale. However, in this context multi-stakeholder forums must not serve as an agent for legitimizing transnational corporations' power. Structures linking together institutions and organizations from the local to the global level where the power of transnational corporations can be effectively controlled need to be devised and created.

6. The relationship between human beings and nature must be re-rooted in a cooperation paradigm

Possibly one of the most destructive paradigms underpinning the construction of modernity is Bacon's belief that we need to torture nature to force her to reveal her secrets. This axiom is an aberration that has caused incommensurable damage to life and the planet. We need to construct a new paradigm rooted in coexistence and cooperation between humanity and the biosphere, establish it as a fundamental norm in international law and build on it to develop objectives and related agendas for creating a state of "balanced coexistence". This balance must be seen as a process of mutual and permanent adaptation between human activities and the biosphere, wherein both continue to serve successively as dynamic processes in themselves. However, this is not about an illusory quest for an impossibly static situation embodied by a return to nature in some sort of pre-modern idealized stage.

In this context, seeking to modernize the structure of capitalist accumulation and colour it green is contradictory at the very least. The official model advocating a “green economy” is nothing more than a new ideological form of domination whereby nature and the destiny of the poorest populations are sacrificed in the name of a new type of development, to be justified in the future by certification from an “ecological” authority. Green labelling must not serve as a new pretext for economic domination in a competitive context wherein big businesses seek to impose their own idea of sustainability. To paraphrase a popular saying, “no matter how green a capitalist economy tries to be, it remains capitalist.” We therefore need to avoid falling into the trap of claiming that a green economy, with the emphasis on renewable technologies, will create green jobs, transport and housing. It is clearly not a question of colour. The new economy that we need to promote must be fair and sustainable.

In the specific case of product certification, we need to promote mechanisms resulting from a process, agreed between actors, that takes into account social and environmental issues. Product certification often favours the big transnational corporations and is incompatible with the reality of the needs of peasants, workers and consumers.

7. The care economy must be developed so that it can respond to vital and fundamental human needs

We need to change the conception that governs productive and reproductive work by measuring and regulating it. To do so requires taking the family economy back into public hands and remunerating domestic work.

There are successful experiments of policies relating to the care economy, where social and territorial organizations have taken on most of the childcare structure and the state has granted childcare aid to fathers and mothers and encouraged public and private companies to provide facilities for workers who wish to balance work with childcare. However, this development has not achieved the goal of reconfiguring traditional roles.

The care economy does not only apply to children and parents. It also covers the essential

tasks of caring for old people, handicapped people and those suffering from a diverse range of ills.

Incorporating the care economy fully into the process of formulating economic policies would imply developing a broader range of proposals, including:

- incorporate unremunerated domestic care work into national accounting and assigning it value;
- public provision of care services: increase and administer spending on the provision of care-related social services and incorporate it into an inclusive system of social protection;
- introduce highly active public regulation of care services by means of mechanisms for stimulating and controlling the services' functioning in order to avoid oligopolistic practices;
- labour market regulations: extend parental leave for fathers, revise and extend the obligation to provide nurseries at the workplace, promote policies for balancing work and family life;
- raise awareness of the fair division of care responsibilities with the aim of fostering a cultural transformation;
- grant people who undertake care tasks the same social rights as everyone else;
- redesign social institutions in order to guarantee people's socio-economic security via the public provision of job services for women in the care domain or subsidies for those who already carry out care work.

8. Promoting and developing food security and sovereignty

Food security consists of ensuring that adequate food is permanently available for a given community. Food sovereignty is the capacity of communities (including states) to make decisions about the food model they wish to establish. Naturally, the idea is not to seek self-sufficiency or prevent the commercial exchanges of information and technology that are so vital between different territories. The goal is to promote ties rooted in cooperation and complementarity and not to make differences into a tool of exploitation and domination.

One of the most pressing problems is that food industry transnational corporations and other similar businesses interfere in public policies and in territorial development with the aim of continuing to expand their commercial interests, disregarding the social and ecological costs of their expansionist strategies. It is therefore vital to develop new means of controlling and regulating these businesses' actions in the various territories.

To do so, we need to start by regulating food prices on the international market. We must give priority to communities' capacity to identify their needs and manage the resources available in their own territories, sweeping away currently dominant global dynamics that are driven by an incessant craving for profit. This should apply to the food sector as well as other sectors of international trade that tend to be concentrated in just a few hands.

For food sovereignty to be viable, a number of actions are required:

- declare food to be a fundamental human right guaranteed by the constitutions of all countries and by international law;
- implement agrarian reforms that favour landless rural populations, especially women and native peoples;
- ensure the protection of ethnic minorities, native peoples and rural populations;
- put an end to forced displacements and land and water grabbing;
- protect natural assets, especially land, water, seeds and harvests. Guarantee the right to practice sustainable management of these assets and of biodiversity protection;
- deprivatize and decommercialize seeds and water, common goods that are key to any attempt to ensure food security and sovereignty;
- reorganize the food industry: priority must be given to self-sufficiency and production for domestic consumption in the face of price distortion by international markets;
- promote participation by peasants and city inhabitants' social organizations in formulating agricultural and food policies at all levels of decision-making, from the local level to international negotiations;
- promote and develop organic farming by outlawing genetically modified foods and toxic agricultural chemicals and protecting and reinforcing biodiversity;

- create a body for regulating food stocks;
- reinforce localization and territorialization by producing and consuming within integrated circuits, thus bringing production closer to consumption. The goal is also to use less energy and material resources by producing locally for local consumption via short circuits;
- this shift should be seen as a process that will lessen the environmental impact on the planet and invent new forms of social and citizen participation. It should not be confused with isolationist relocation that opposes the functioning of trade flows and hinders food security between countries;
- promote the reorganization of big businesses so that they serve populations and not shareholders and their owners. Transnational corporations have a major role to play in this sphere given their capacity for global management. However, this needs regulation tied into international bodies, states and territorial organizations in order to prevent practices that are oligopolistic or damaging to ecosystems;
- establish obligatory codes of conduct for transnational corporations and define sustainable contracts between states and these businesses that include transparent and participative assessment and control mechanisms;
- in the domain of production certification, reach an agreement that takes into account the interests of farmers, government and businesses to avoid labels becoming a form of domination exerted by the big businesses over medium- and small-sized companies and over peasant farmer organizations.

9. Developing and promoting an economy of common goods

The neoclassic economy has privatized a significant section of common goods, including water, seeds, communications, education, knowledge, culture and health. These are goods that should serve to ensure the basic essential services seen as public or in the public interest. We therefore need to refuse the privatization of these and other common goods. However, the scope and limits of the public interest need to be legally formulated at the local and global level and inscribed in international law and constitutions. This would promote the development of an economy of common goods with its own regulations, different from the

private goods market.

For example, knowledge needs to be managed as public goods that cannot be privatized, with patents serving the collective interest and management of the risks related to their use. The process of technological development must not be monopolized by businesses or private sectors since it is a collective construct. Innovation has to be considered and treated as a public good and not the creation and property of a specific business or scientist, since the business or scientist would not have been able to come up with the innovation without the collective experience and accumulated knowledge of communities and people.

10. Facilitating the transition to a biocivilization for the sustainability of life and the planet

The crisis caused by the accelerated and probably irreversible character of the impact human activities have on nature call for collective responses from government and citizens. Nature takes no heed of political or social barriers, and the global dimension of the crisis cancels out the effect of any action taken unilaterally by governments or sector-specific institutions, however powerful they may be. Climate change, oceanic and atmospheric pollution, the risks raised by nuclear energy and genetic manipulation, the reduction and extinction of resources and biodiversity are among the various manifestations of this accelerated and probably irreversible impact.

Tools to tackle these serious problems do exist. Possibly one of the most absurd aspects of the current situation is that scientists, political leaders, business managers and many civil society organizations are not only aware of the gravity of the situation, but are also familiar with and understand the economic, technological and financial policies needed to facilitate the transition to a sustainable world. Another aspect, equally if not more absurd, is represented by military spending and the financing of militarization in terms of weapons, technology and military machines, which not only fail to bring a lasting solution to conflicts, but also, and especially, cause the population to suffer the deep-reaching and harmful economic, social and psychological effects of war and armed conflicts. Although this may appear to be a futile

observation, it is important to point out that the funds destined for military spending could be used to avoid the deaths of millions of human beings every day and solve urgent health problems, providing access to water, vital food supplies and the basic education of thousands of millions of people who live in extremely precarious conditions.

There is an urgent need for a new social contract for the sustainability of life and the planet, bringing together governments, leaders of big businesses, citizen organizations and territorial communities. However, the principle of competition and blocs could raise insurmountable obstacles that would impede such a contract. In the face of this uncertain outlook, civil society organizations and social networks and movements need to take responsibility for putting forward and driving proposals for tackling these challenges. These efforts might well be supported by governments and the people running big businesses and multi-lateral institutions seeking to get beyond short-term and excluding approaches.

It would now be useful to describe some of the possibilities explored by proposals promoting the sustainability of life and the planet.

The key element in any decarbonization strategy seeking to promote sustainability has to be an initial and massive extension of renewable energies and their necessary infrastructure. In addition, to ensure an effective transition from fossil to renewable energies, efforts must not focus exclusively on the quantity of new energy produced. Changing energy sources is a slow process, held back by technological, cultural and institutional inertia. Sustainability can only succeed if this technological effort goes hand in hand with a gradual but deep-reaching change in wasteful lifestyles, especially in industrialized and recently industrialized countries, making energy savings and energy efficiency a real possibility.

It is vital that countries that are planning to use or increase use of nuclear energy abandon these projects as soon as possible. The risks of nuclear installations have already been fully proven and it is impossible to overlook the still unresolved problems of final storage and the danger of uncontrolled proliferation. Existing installations must be replaced by renewable technologies or simply closed down as soon as possible. Naturally, the gradual but

accelerating elimination of nuclear energy must not be compensated for by an increase in energy from fossil sources, particularly coal-based sources.

We need to implement public policies that stimulate investments in industry, technology and research into renewable energy sources. In parallel, subsidies to businesses producing fossil energy should be abolished and taxes raised. States can use their purchasing power to influence prices so that they favour businesses producing renewable energy and penalize those producing energy based on fossil sources. In support of these technological and industrial developments, states as well as businesses and social and solidarity economy organizations need to implement industrial or circular ecology mechanisms that foster synergies between productive processes. Similarly, we need to promote new businesses that offer functional services for meeting housing, transport, communications and other needs that do not require burdensome installations, but that promote a *functionality economy* wherein the accent is on free-flowing service rather than onerous machinery and infrastructure.

This industrial, technological and institutional coordination requires the development of a broad-based space by means of a transnational reconfiguration of territories that corresponds to new renewable energy sources. The key element here is the linking up of various sources that require an integrated supply system for wind, photovoltaic, solar, thermal, tidal and biomass energy, among others. This “energy territory”, as we could call it, would extend far beyond national frontiers.

Climate protection is absolutely key to sustainability. This is why global decarbonization goals need to be established straight away and met before the end of this second decade. A sustainable world can only be built with new energy sources and climate protection. We also need to take special care to ensure the survival of systems comprising other natural assets, such as fertile land and biological diversity.

Nonetheless, we cannot overlook the fact that the drastic and accelerated reduction of carbon emissions can only succeed if it is based on a shared objective applied simultaneously in most parts of the world. And herein lies the weak link in the chain. Neither governments,

anchored in a state system delineated by frontiers and interests that do not correspond to ecosystem-related factors, nor transnational corporations, focused exclusively on their specific strategies, are capable of meeting the challenges of energy transition, climate protection and the planet's sustainability.

It is therefore important to take a firm stand and implement energy policies right away with a number of goals:

- achieve fully decarbonized energy systems by 2050 at the latest. World demand for final energy should not increase and should not rise above the levels vital to life and the planet by 2050. This challenge is a crucial imperative. Without seeking to be alarmist, there is plenty of scientific and empirical evidence proving that humanity has exceeded the limits of our ecosystems' physical viability;
- during this period, prioritize access to renewable energy for over three thousand million people currently living in conditions of energy poverty;
- channel urban development away from accelerated urbanization and towards sustainable urban policies;
- ensure that use of land and fishing resources respects conditions compatible with climate protection, particularly forestry and farming;
- as regards land use, land grabbing must be curbed and controlled and the priority given to putting a rapid end to deforestation and damage to forests and fostering low-carbon agriculture;
- support research into sustainable technologies and promote the international transfer of low-carbon technologies;
- encourage education that is respectful of life and the planet, especially for the children and young people who are the planet's future and will be the inhabitants of a sustainable world.

On the path to the Thematic World Social Forum in Porto Alegre and Rio+20

In the run-up to the Thematic World Social Forum in January and Rio+20 in June 2012, it is important to develop coherent solutions that will serve as deep-reaching and viable alternatives to the official attitude of inaction, evasive rhetoric and commitment to more so-called green technologies. Elaborating concrete proposals and deciding on the how, when, in what form and for whom is essential. The possibilities explored in this document are designed to feed into this endeavour and put forward specific proposals for tackling and overcoming present and future challenges.

It is possible that certain governments, more open to social demands, could help to implement some of the proposals covered here for furthering a new economy. However, it is more likely that the system of intergovernmental negotiation will fail to take the proposals into account, and even if one of them takes off, will not be capable of implementing it. For over 20 years now, hundreds of declarations, agreements, protocols, conventions and other assertions and legal texts have been published and signed, without having any effect on the problems or providing an effective answer to the successive crises marking the transitional period that the world economy and societies have entered into during these first decades of the 21st century.

The key thus lies in linking up the answers to the serious and urgent problems characterizing the current situation in the short term, implementing proposals in the medium term and continuing to apply principles designed to guide changes towards a fair, sustainable and solidarity-based economy in the long term.