

INTEGRATIVE
STRATEGIES
FORUM

**Promoting Integrative Strategies
for Building Just and Sustainable Communities**

by Jeffrey Barber

What Are Integrative Strategies?

Integrative strategies are rooted in the ecological principle of interdependence of human and natural systems. In contrast to social change strategies which focus on single-issue goals such as overcoming a specific type of environmental degradation, or alleviating poverty in a particular place, or gaining legal recognition of the human rights of an oppressed group, integrative strategies link these different struggles and campaigns through a common frame of action. The aim of an integrative strategy is not to replace specific issue campaigns with a more general one. The idea is to identify the common long-range goals which underly these different issues and design a framework for coordinating and multiplying the effectiveness of these seemingly separate campaigns. Agenda 21, for example, linking environment, poverty, gender, health, human rights, and a range of other issues, is one such attempt to develop and implement an international integrative strategy.

Local or regional sustainability plans, especially if they include not only environmental concerns but also those of economic security, human rights, gender equality, population dynamics, health, and peace, are other examples of integrative strategies. An effort by local residents to develop a set of sustainability and quality of life indicators, if the intent is more activist than academic, may also be considered an integrative strategy.

Building Just and Sustainable Communities

The Integrative Strategies Forum (ISF) was formed in 1992 to promote integrative strategies for building just and sustainable communities and societies. In conjunction with Co-op America and other organizations, ISF works both internationally and locally to encourage integrative thinking and action strategies in the effort to achieve sustainability and a higher quality of life for all.

"Sustainable communities" and "sustainable societies" are pivotal, integrative concepts in ISF's work. To focus on the notion of **sustainable community** requires putting the more widely used notion and methods of "sustainable development" into a specific geographic, social, economic and political context. Whereas sustainable development can too often be reduced to a matter of technological and economic efficiencies, the idea of a sustainable community requires looking at the sustainability and quality of life of a specific human community that is part of a natural bioregion, with its own history and culture, and serving as a nexus of various flows of money, people and products from and to other places within the larger national and global community.

Achieving a sustainable community is logically one of the goals of a local sustainability plan or Local Agenda 21. The concept of sustainable community serves as an instrument to mesh concrete targets for clean water, clean air, and reduced wastes and pollution, the instituting of anti-discrimination and human rights protection mechanisms, job creation and credit access programs, and increased public participation and decision-making processes. The concept is particularly important to offer in contrast to the expanding global economy. However, in addition to helping focus public vision and policy, the concept of sustainable community has its serious caveats. The concept must be clearly defined so that it cannot be used to justify anti-immigration campaigns or the creation of high-security eco-compounds or corporate townships.

In the metropolitan Washington region in the Chesapeake Bay bioregion within the US, ISF works with a number of local organizations to advance the goal of creating sustainable communities. Through the Washington Regional Network for Livable Communities, ISF works to link the campaign for sustainable transportation and land-use with wider regional sustainability efforts. Through the Metro Washington Community Indicators Project and its offshoot, the Sustainable Washington Initiative, ISF works to help articulate and move forward community-based sustainability and quality of life indicators and targets.

Towards Sustainable Societies

While economically self-reliant, sustainable communities cannot be independent; rather, they are necessarily interdependent with the larger society of sustainable communities making up the national and global community. Thus, an understanding of local-global connections is critical. The concept of **sustainable society** can serve to articulate the ultimate goal and context for the many local and regional social and environmental justice and sustainability efforts taking place throughout each country. This concept represents the central goal for any national plan of action prepared for the CSD or any of the other United Nations action plans.

Being a relatively small organization without the level of resources of a Worldwide Fund for Nature or Red Cross, ISF relies on the powers of flexibility and collaboration to realize its particular mission. At the World Summit for Social Development this past year, ISF worked in partnership with a wide range of northern and southern NGOs to establish a

voice for sustainability through the **NGO Environment Caucus**. In Copenhagen, the Environment Caucus actively pointed out the key role of environmental protection in social development and the importance of looking beyond sustainable development to the goal of creating and protecting sustainable societies (as noted in *Declaration on the Right to Sustainable Societies*.)

Sustainable Societies Initiative

Continuing this work, ISF agreed to help coordinate communications among the various NGOs involved in the **Sustainable Societies Initiative**. One of the goals of the Sustainable Societies Initiative, which began at the Social Summit and continued at the 3rd Session of the U.N. Commission on Sustainable Development, is to serve as a kind of neutral meeting ground for NGOs at United Nations and other international gatherings, to carry forward dialogues and exchange of knowledge and experience regarding the common goals and interlinking visions of southern and northern NGOs working in environment, human rights, development, peace, health, and other issue areas. Whereas the different NGO caucuses serve to analyze and develop strategies addressing specific issue areas or regional or group concerns, the meetings of the Sustainable Societies Initiative intend to provide an additional opportunity to examine the linkages among issues and different groups, to address the larger North-South differences and commonalities, and to explore the kinds of NGO strategies that might integrate these different concerns through common action frames.

NGO Dialogue on Human Settlements

Through the U.S. Network for Habitat, ISF is currently working to help coordinate US NGO comments and dialogue around the U.N. Conference on Human Settlements in Istanbul. ISF is looking forward to participating in an expanding international dialogue in the upcoming months on defining and implementing a global sustainable community agenda.