

NGOs, Social Change and the Transformation of Human Relationships:  
A 21st-Century Civic Agenda.

*Michael Edwards*  
*Director, Governance and Civil Society,*  
*The Ford Foundation,*  
*320 East 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York,*  
*NY 10019, USA*  
*Tel: 212-573-5219*  
*Fax: 212-351-3653*  
*Email: M.Edwards@fordfound.org*

*Gita Sen*  
*Professor of Economics and*  
*Social Sciences,*  
*Indian Institute of*  
*Management,*

**Abstract**

**Globalisation shifts the balance of power from public to private interests, including NGOs. However, sustainable development requires a change in power relations that runs much deeper than this: a shift from using power over others to advance our selfish interests, to using power to facilitate the self-development of all. This demands constant attention to personal change, and a series of reversals in attitudes and behaviour. In this paper we argue that NGOs - as explicitly values-based organisations - have a crucial role to play in supporting these changes through their programme activities, constituency-building work, and organisational praxis. The decline of paternalistic foreign aid and the rise of more genuine international co-operation provide an excellent opportunity to advance this agenda. The paper provides a detailed rationale for these claims and a set of examples that show how power relations could be transformed by civic-led approaches in economics, politics and the structures of social power.**

## 1. Introduction.

Changes in the distribution of power and authority are characteristic of the processes we call globalisation (Edwards 1999). The erosion of state sovereignty and the weakening of workers' rights are two obvious examples, but globalising capitalism also re-shapes relations between women and men, adults and children, people of different cultures, and those with varying levels of technological competence. This is not just a "power shift" from public to private interests, as Jessica Mathews (1997) has claimed, but a deeper and more complex process in which large numbers of people see their position systematically eroded by economic, social and political forces which work to the benefit of a small proportion of the world's population. Left unchecked, these forces will create an unprecedented degree of inequality and insecurity within and between societies, which will never be sustainable. NGOs who wish to promote "sustainable development" must therefore decide how they are going to address this situation.

At one level, the answers to this question are already apparent: those who are marginalised by global processes must have a "fairer deal" in economics, politics and social policy. However, at another level this is clearly insufficient without much deeper changes which encourage people to conserve scarce resources, share their wealth and opportunities, protect each-others' rights, and co-operate to advance the "common good" - the long term health and welfare of the planet and its social fabric on which all our futures depend. Making people "more competitive" and increasing their voice on the political

stage will not promote the changes we seek unless we all learn to use the power we gain in less selfish and self-centred ways.

The individualism and materialism that characterise globalising capitalism make this exceptionally difficult, for they undermine the co-operative solidarities and institutions we will need to confront the collective problems that will shape the 21<sup>st</sup> century - trans-boundary pollution, global trade and capital flows, conflict and the mass movement of refugees and displaced persons. It is one of the paradoxes of globalisation that the more we succeed as individuals in the global marketplace, the more we may fail in other areas of our lives and our relationships with others, a failure which destroys the possibilities of similar success for millions of people now and many more in generations still to come. We cannot compete ourselves to a co-operative future, and if the future of the world depends on co-operation then clearly we must try something different.

Our argument in this paper is simple:

“something different” requires a fundamental shift in values; to be sustainable that shift must be freely-chosen; that choice is more likely to be made by human beings who have experienced a transformation of the heart; NGOs have a crucial role to play in fostering those transformations in the 21st century.

The core of our argument is that personal or inner change, and social or outer change, are inseparably linked. This is as obvious as it is neglected in development thinking, including the praxis of most NGOs. We know that this is difficult and sensitive ground on which to tread, and we realise that our arguments are preliminary. However, we are convinced that any realistic vision of sustainable development must tackle the question of personal power relations head-on.

## 2. How does change occur?

From the perspective of change, all social systems rest on three bases: a set of principles that form an axiomatic basis of ethics and values; a set of processes - the functioning mechanisms and institutions that undergird the system; and the subjective states that constitute our inner being - our personal feelings and intuitions in the deepest sense.<sup>1</sup> The first of these bases of change describes how we understand and rationalise the workings of the social order, while the third describes how we understand ourselves. Some of this understanding revolves around our own place in the social order, but it also concerns the deeper questions we ask ourselves about the meaning of human existence and the nature of reality.

When we explore any episode of historical change, we can identify how these three bases of change have worked together to produce a particular set of power relations. For example, the evolution of capitalism was built on the axiomatic basis that individual self-interest leads - by and large - to collective

welfare. Its institutional structures are rooted in private property and market-based incentives. And the subjective state of being most compatible with capitalism is a commitment to individual advancement and competitive behaviour.

The interaction of these three bases of change determines how different forms of power are exercised in society. Economic power is expressed in the distribution of productive assets and the workings of markets and firms; social power is expressed in the status and position awarded to different social groups; and political power defines each person's voice in decision-making in both the private sphere and public affairs. These systems of power combine to produce a "social order", and transforming this social order is the task of social change. The social order that is emerging under globalising capitalism is one which excludes or oppresses certain groups of people, especially those already on the margins, women in labour-rich economies, and those with less access to skills and education wherever they live.

However, the linkages that develop between these different bases of change are not immutable. Considerable room-to-manoevre exists to alter the ways in which they interact, in order to produce a different framework of power relations, a better set of outcomes, and a new social order. It is this room-to-manoevre that NGOs are trying to exploit in their work, though as we shall argue later, they rarely do so consciously. For example, people may rebel against the subjective state that is promoted by a particular set of social transformations, as they have always done in relation to capitalism and the

selfish values it breeds. Or, working from a different subjective or axiomatic base, they may experiment with new processes and institutions that try to produce the same economic outcomes with fewer social and political costs - much as NGOs are doing today in their work with multi-national corporations and corporate codes of conduct. The point about these experiments is not that they generate ready-made answers to questions of economic and social life, but that they consolidate a new bottom line of values, principles and/or personal behaviour from which better models may evolve in different ways in different contexts. Any relationship that is truly principled will lead towards a more fulfilling conclusion, even though we can never be sure what it will look like at any level of detail.

Our conclusion from this section is that social change requires a recognition - and conscious integration - of all three bases of change, and each of these systems of power. The problem is that few theoretical systems acknowledge this, and even fewer institutions use it as a framework to guide their practice. For example, social theories generally emphasise the axiomatic and institutional aspects of change, assuming that the related subjective states are simply universal descriptions of human nature, or that changes in subjective states follow automatically from changes in institutions and incentives. At the opposite extreme, many of the world's religions focus on the subjective states of persons and their transformation, and attach less importance to the institutional basis of social change. Of course, not all religions are identical in this regard. Some assign more importance to outer behaviour; others to the inner motivations that lie behind it. But the tendency

to privilege one category over another remains, condemning both social theories and religious teachings to a partial approach that downgrades the links between social change and personal transformation.<sup>2</sup> A fresh look at the links between value systems, institutional processes, and subjective states is therefore essential, especially at a time when the processes of globalization are altering each of these things and their relationships with each other.

### 3. The importance of integration.

Against this background, it is clear that social change requires us to adopt an integrated approach that looks for positive synergies between different bases of change and different systems of power. When change in one area supports change in another, there is more of a chance that the outcome will be sustainable, as when ethics of co-operation are matched by institutions through which they can be expressed, and the deeper personal commitment required to put those ethics into practice. Such self-reinforcing cycles of co-operation, sharing and stewardship are the key to a social order that enables all people to meet their basic needs for security, voice and equality of rights, with less of a risk that in doing so they will deny others the same opportunities for a fulfilling life.

It is important to recognise that integration is an exercise in re-balancing, not the wholesale replacement of one rationality by another. Not all competition generates overweening selfishness, nor do markets always exploit the poor

or powerless. There are many examples that show how well-regulated markets and open trade can benefit the poor, and how economic growth can contribute to poverty-eradication, the improved provision of social goods, and the conservation of natural and social capital (Edwards 1999). If it is unrealistic to focus on economic systems to the exclusion of personal change, it is equally unacceptable to call for inner transformation unless we can show how material needs will be met in less damaging ways.

However, the general point we wish to make remains valid: the emergence of a new social order requires those who gain power to make room for those with less; and all to use the power they gain in more responsible ways - not submerging their own self-interest entirely, but modulating it so that individual advancement is not bought at the cost of the broader conditions required for a secure and prosperous world. This may sound highly abstract, but as we shall see in Section 5 there are already concrete examples to draw on.

History offers us at least some examples of such an integrated approach to social change, notably the Indian nationalist movement under Mahatma Gandhi. There, a powerful underpinning of personal belief in the power of universal love and non-violence energised and sustained large numbers of ordinary Indians in the movement's tumultuous struggle for political independence. The testimony of those who participated in this movement suggests that ordinary people not only behaved and believed differently, but that they *were* different in a more fundamental sense. The failure of Indian politics and society to sustain these transformations in the post-



Independence era suggests that the process of integration was far from complete, but it does not invalidate the basic principles involved.

Indeed, there are many more examples of incomplete integration which show why social change is so hard to achieve even when many of its component parts are in place. We have chosen the example of “development-as-empowerment” because such strategies are central to current NGO practice. By doing so we are not suggesting that NGOs are worse offenders in this respect than other institutions - merely that even the socially-committed will be unsuccessful if they ignore the inner basis of change.

Democratising the ownership of productive assets, capacities and opportunities continues to be a priority under globalisation, even if the nature of these things is changing (Edwards, Hulme and Wallace 1999). NGOs have been enthusiastic advocates of this form of empowerment for a decade and more, yet rarely do they question how people use the power they gain. The assumption is that greater material security, organisational capacity and political voice will be used to promote the common interest as well as the advancement of those individuals who benefit directly. Is this true?

In industrial societies, we know that rising wealth and democratic strength tend to produce a “culture of contentment”, or the ebbing away of the “habits of the heart” (Gailbraith 1992; Bellah 1985). In these circumstances, rising incomes may act as a block against more fundamental changes which are necessary for the rest of the population to attain the same level of satisfaction

of their basic needs. The same pattern is evident from many Third-World communities, though it is often mediated by cultures which do encourage sharing and co-operation, especially in times of crisis. All over the world, broader economic participation breeds selfish and competitive behaviour unless it is accompanied by a deeper shift in values, and by new institutions which allow those values to be expressed in collective action. This is especially true in a world of integrated markets where the temptation to cut costs and “race each-other to the bottom” is particularly strong (Korten 1995). Even when successful, economic empowerment may leave the structures of social power untouched, or even reinforce them, especially discrimination based on gender and age. Equally, social advancement may be unsustainable unless political power is also re-distributed to the benefit of those who have less voice. Rarely do empowerment strategies make the links that could generate shifts in inner values strong enough to ensure that improvements in one area are not bought at the cost of damage done elsewhere.

#### 4. Why is personal change imperative?

Generalising from a theoretical situation like this is clearly dangerous, but the problem it describes is familiar: change at the subjective level is exceptionally difficult to achieve. It is rarely possible to generate sustainable changes in human behaviour simply by altering the rules and institutions that govern our

lives. The missing ingredient is personal change, which acts as the wellspring of change in all other areas. Why?

A common lesson of experience is that processes of social change can easily lose touch with the values and principles that originally motivated and sustained them in the rough and tumble of the struggle. As a result, attempts to generate a new social order can unwittingly be poisoned by the “thieves of the heart” - the negative feelings of personal ego, jealousy and fear that destroy one’s inner tranquillity. If people are not caring and compassionate in their personal behaviour they are unlikely to work effectively for a caring and compassionate society. Resisting these feelings, and developing the inner security required for a lifetime of co-operative endeavour, requires a disciplined process of self-reflection and contemplation about the values and purposes of our lives, and the desire and willingness to change ourselves. Undertaking this inner journey with courage can reward one with inner peace, greater energy and more effectiveness in one’s actions, an expansive compassion in our attitudes towards others, and a tenderness of the heart that, on a mass scale, can have profound social implications.

We are not so naïve as to believe that a simple recognition of such things will change people’s behaviour. But acknowledging the fact that the absence of personal change can impede the social transformations we are searching for can be salutary in the search for a more integrated approach. Nor are we speaking of social indoctrination under duress, exemplified by the Chinese Cultural Revolution or Maoist self-criticism sessions. Inner change cannot be

forced by the self-righteous; when hearts and minds are brutalised into submission or silence there will be little energy left for social engagement. Our vision is a positive one: the energies unleashed by serious and deep-rooted personal transformation can fuel the search for more humane social and economic systems as little else can.

What kind of personal changes could energise the move towards an economic order which re-balances competitive and co-operative rationalities, a politics of dialogue rather than unrepresentative democracy, and a social policy that works against marginalisation and values the care and nurture of all human beings? The first principles for such change lie at the heart of the teachings of all the great religions – “Love thy neighbour as thyself” in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, “See God in each other” in Sanskrit.<sup>3</sup> It is fascinating to recognise that the core of religious teaching concerns our feelings towards each other – a deeply social statement as much as it is profoundly personal. But to love our neighbours as ourselves, we must come to understand our own inner being - to recognise that in our deepest essence we are compassionate, capable of giving love, and worthy of receiving it.

Even when imperfectly established in this positive self-knowledge, we can identify more easily with the same inner being in other people - what the Hindu *Vedanta* calls “unity-consciousness.” It then becomes easier to empathise with what it means to be the “other” from whom we usually distance ourselves in subtle or overt ways. That shift is crucial because it provides the foundation for personal behaviour which is more expansive and

less damaging to others - for why would we damage the life-chances of someone who is as much a part of our Selves? The irony of today's globalized world is that, as knowledge about each-other grows, so do the criteria of "otherness" that breed selfishness, greed, anger and hatred – the fault-lines of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, caste, class, nationality, region, and economic blocs.<sup>4</sup> We will return to this theme when we come to the role of NGOs in constituency-building.

One question that often comes up in this context is whether more attention to inner transformation will divert one's energy away from social change. A related question is whether greater personal tranquillity will sap the angry energy needed to struggle against injustice. Anger is certainly a powerful form of energy that can be harnessed, particularly in the struggles of the socially oppressed. But over time it can be corrosive of those who use it, becoming a deadly and increasingly-uncontrolled weapon. Inner centredness, on the other hand, can take more controllable but no less powerful forms. Those who have espoused non-violence, in India, South Africa, the USA and elsewhere, have not been weak. Their courage and energy have often been startling, and their example has sometimes and unexpectedly catalysed a process of transformation in their opponents. Inner-centredness can release enormous energy for the struggle against social injustice without having to draw upon the destructive legacy of anger or hatred.

Are there other dangers in the call to link social to personal change? Throughout the ages, organised religions have often spawned fundamentalist

bigotry and a narrowing of the realm of personal beliefs to accord with what is considered by some to be “moral” conduct. Our own age shows us the dangers that religious fundamentalism brings to social institutions when it spills over from the private to the public realm. Social conservatism is rarely more dangerous than when it cloaks itself in religious garb that cannot adequately be challenged by rationalist arguments for social justice because it assumes an other-worldly authority. The rising tide of religious bigotry across the world in recent decades is one of the reasons why space for serious discussion of the links between social and personal change has been so narrow. The other is a woolly-headed and self-indulgent “new ageism” that confuses material detachment with a wholesale retreat from social engagement.

However, disciplined self-enquiry of the kind we have described provides a way out of this impasse, by constantly exposing attitudes and behaviours that masquerade as compassionate or detached. Paradoxically, the expansive compassion and tenderness of heart of which we speak calls for all the toughness of mind, courage and flexibility that are also required in the outer struggle for social change. Our conclusion then is clear: personal transformation is essential if we are to see society change in the directions we espouse. Confronting this challenge squarely and with honesty is the need of the hour.

5. What can NGOs do to foster personal change?

NGOs are unlikely vehicles for the direct transformation of the individual, though the best traditions of the sector - like selfless service among volunteers and the courage to undertake the seemingly-impossible - sometimes generate experiences that come close to the spiritual realm. However, the model of social change we have described makes it clear that there are many indirect ways to encourage the transformation of people's subjective states, so long as our approach to processes and institutions is properly-integrated - in other words, that the goal of personal change is a conscious and explicit element in all that we do. Most of us know that our true Self is loving and compassionate, but feel we must disguise it in the street-fighting of everyday life. However, when we consciously create more institutional spaces for inner transformation, we can begin to exercise our economic, social and political responsibilities in ways which both draw from and encourage the personal changes we are looking for. It may sound romantic to call for an economics or politics that is loving and compassionate, but this is exactly what we can shape through conscious action.

We want to look briefly at three areas in which NGOs have a crucial role to play in fostering these integrated changes: their programme activities (the work they support in the field, directly or through others); their fund-raising and constituency-building work; and their own organisational praxis - the ways in which values are expressed in structures, systems and management. Constraints of space mean that we can only mention a small number of examples.

a) Programme activities.

As we see it, the overriding challenge for NGOs in the 21st century will be to help re-balance the competitive and co-operative forces that motivate each one of us, whether in economics, politics or social life. They can do this by regulating - and ultimately re-constructing - all systems of power in ways which achieve three things: a more equal distribution of what they deliver, less costly ways of producing it, and more co-operative values and behaviour among those involved as producers or consumers. When we talk of “costs”, we explicitly include damage done to ourselves, the social fabric that sustains us as fully-human beings, and the environment we all depend on for our future.

Although NGOs rarely see their work in this way, there are plenty of experiments already underway which show how such integrated transformations might work at a much larger scale (Edwards 1999):

- In economics for example, new forms of enterprise are competing effectively in open markets but distributing work and profits with a social purpose, backed up by codes of conduct to level up working conditions and supported by a growing movement for “ethical consumption.” The links that are developing between peasant production systems in Latin America and supermarket campaigns in industrialised countries provide a good example of this wave of the future. The best NGO credit schemes provide another.



- In politics, Latin American municipalities are inventing new forms of “dialogic democracy” in which representatives from civil society and business share in decision-making with local government. Similar experiments are underway in other parts of the world - like India’s “Panchayati Raj” system of decentralised governance - and around Agenda-21 planning, post-conflict re-construction, and the elaboration of national development strategies. These innovations give everyone a voice in decision-making and reduce the dangers of “elected dictatorships” which favour the interests of the rich. At the same time, they build new capacities for dialogue and co-operation across old institutional boundaries.
- In the area of social policy, organisations like SEWA in India and the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh are promoting different ways of sharing the costs and responsibilities of child-care so that women can increase their incomes and assets without sacrificing their own health and welfare to the interests of their children. These innovations achieve a better set of trade-offs between social and economic outcomes, challenging the structures of social power in the process and building the material security people need to participate in dialogic politics.

Although personal change is rarely an explicit element in these experiments, there is a clear linkage between the processes and institutions they foster, and the subjective states they grow from and reinforce. Ethical production systems are not viable without ethical consumers, for example; equitable

social policies are impossible if men and women are unwilling to share the burden of paid and unpaid work. Such experiments can consolidate their gains by making personal change a more explicit part of their agenda, so that new, more co-operative institutions can be backed up by corresponding innovations in values and behaviour.

Mainstreaming these experiences will require pioneers in all walks of life, but government and business are unlikely to spearhead moves for radical changes which involve reduced consumption or the ceding of authority to non-state actors. The major pressure must come from those parts of civil society who are committed to new social and economic models. It is NGOs and other civic groups that are already lobbying corporations to be more responsible, organising collective approaches to welfare, and acting as a counterweight to vested interests in decentralised politics. We believe that these activities will dominate civic action in the next fifty years.

#### b) Constituency-building.

Although there are many interesting experiments like these to report on, they do not add up to much when compared to the forces that really drive change in the contemporary world. What are missing are scale, depth and sustainability - to make these innovations the norm rather than the exception. Achieving those goals requires a mass base to support radical change, and that in turn requires an inner transformation on a scale not realised in any period in history. Motivating large numbers of people to shift to more co-

operative behaviour and persuade those in power to create more inclusive institutions goes against the heart of the current socio-economic order. Without personal change towards more caring and compassionate ways of being and dealing with each other, it will be very hard to generate the momentum to bring about such a shift.

At first sight this might appear to be the job of the churches and other faith-based groups in civil society, not of development NGOs. It is no accident that dissatisfaction with current models of development and foreign aid has coincided with a resurgence of interest in the developmental role of the Faiths, even in such non-spiritual organisations as the World Bank.<sup>5</sup> However, there are a number of reasons for thinking that development NGOs also have a crucial role to play, not least because the established religions so often fail to live up to their theology. More broadly, it is the secular world of environmental and social activism that forms at least as powerful a connection in most people's lives between the "personal and the political." We no longer reserve our moral expressions for church on Sunday; indeed, the increasing diffusion of moral action through civil society and beyond is one of the most heartening developments of the late-20<sup>th</sup> century.

Development NGOs have been an important part of this expanding moral space, but they have never fulfilled their potential as constituency-builders on the wider stage. In contrast to environmental NGOs, they rarely use their high levels of public trust and extended fund-raising networks as channels for personal transformation and lifestyle change, and their membership of civil

society (both domestic and international) is increasingly called into question. Consequently, we still lack institutional expression for the exercise of conscience on the scale that would be necessary to resolve world poverty or intervene against fundamental abuses of human rights. Without such mass-based institutional pressure, there *will* be another Rwanda, and then another.

One of the key problems here takes us back to the discussion of “unity-consciousness” in Section 4. This is that traditional fund-raising images - and the paternalistic cloak of foreign aid - elicit sympathy, but not solidarity. Under the guise of bringing people closer together they force them further apart, increasing the psychological distance between donor and recipient, and reinforcing the conviction of separateness that lies at the root of our failure to act. “Caught in the models of the limited self, we end up by diminishing one-another. The more you think of yourself as a philanthropist, the more someone else feels compelled to be a supplicant”, and the less inclination they both have to co-operate together as equal partners (Das and Gorman 1988). Fifty years of foreign aid have left us ill-prepared to face a co-operative future.

Paradoxically therefore, the decline of foreign aid provides a window of opportunity to advance a transformative agenda, by re-focusing attention on international co-operation and the values that make co-operation work. There won't be a constituency for international co-operation unless there is a commitment to co-operative living generally, for why should people co-operate with distant strangers if they do not do so with their neighbours?

Global regimes impose clear limitations on personal autonomy, so it won't be the United Nations that will solve global warming, but you and us - by reducing the energy we use in our homes, cars and factories. Co-operation requires the constant exercise of co-operative values, rather than the peddling of stereotypes about other people who need a "sponsor" to "save" them. This implies relationships among equals, and the acceptance of responsibility to put our own house in order. And at root, that is always a matter of personal change.

c) Organisational praxis.

The claim that development NGOs are explicitly "values-based" organisations is something of an article of faith these days. There is less evidence that NGOs put these values into practice in their organisational structures and behaviour, or even that they are clear what their core values are (Edwards 1998). This is a major weakness, because it is the link between values and actions that is crucial in generating legitimacy when arguing the case for change. Institutions must be seen to implement values as the bottom line in their own practice if they are to build a coalition in support of those values on the wider stage. The best way NGOs can help to foster the mass movement that has been missing from the field of international development since the end of the Cold War is for them to be exemplars of the society they want to create - to show that it is possible to be an effective organisation which values its employees as it does its partners, fights discrimination, practices

internal democracy, and always uses the organisational power it has in liberating ways.

Unfortunately, few development NGOs have done this. For one thing, high levels of dependence on foreign aid and the limitations of contractual relationships make it very difficult to expand into real values-based action - there are simply too many compromises that have to be made. For another, NGOs are not immune to class, race, and gender problems, nor the oppression and sexual exploitation they breed. Behind the screen of progressive attitudes toward social change in the world outside, the world inside the organisation can be an ethical morass. Such organisations cannot be the basis of far-reaching social change.

Fortunately, this point is beginning to be taken to heart in many NGOs. The link between personal change and organisational effectiveness is increasingly being recognised (Kaplan 1997; Chambers 1996), even though its practical application remains weak. These pioneers stress that it is certainly possible to help others effectively, but only if we realise that in doing so they help us to grow to a fuller, more independent knowledge of ourselves - closing the circle once more between personal change and change in the wider world. If our own practice is autocratic, closed, and chauvinist it is unlikely that we will be able to encourage others to be democratic, open and egalitarian.

What remains is for NGOs to experiment more seriously with management practices, organisational structures, and personnel policies that create the feedback loops we are looking for between personal change, institutional performance, and wider impact. A start has been made in this direction, but a huge area remains unexplored (Fowler 1997). Perhaps a re-visioning of NGO strategy around values-based action in programme work, constituency-building and organisational praxis would be a useful place to start.

## 6. Conclusion.

This paper is only a beginning in our exploration of what are clearly some complex and personally-demanding questions. However, we are convinced that the journey is the right one, and that the responsibility to undertake it is inescapable. Although questions of personal transformation and spirituality may appear threatening to mainstream NGO activity, the roles and relationships we have sketched out above constitute an exciting agenda for civic action in the 21st century. Transforming systems of power is the key to a sustainable future in which all people can live in dignity and fulfilment, but it is impossible unless we ourselves are also transformed. Such an agenda would simultaneously help NGOs to make a reality of their stated mission for social change; provide a clear focus for civic action in a world where foreign aid looks set to decline still further; and establish a genuine leadership role in society at large. It would therefore meet both the “institutional and the developmental imperatives” that all NGOs must manage (Edwards 1996).

In a profession that talks constantly about results, the importance of personal accountability is often forgotten. Yet as we have argued in this paper, the willingness to confront the shadow of the Self is the secret of all sustainable progress.

#### References.

- Bellah, R (1985) *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley , CA: University of California Press).
- Chambers, R (1996) *Challenging the Professions* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications).
- Dass, R. and P.Gorman (1988) *How Can I Help? Stories and Reflections on Service* (New York: Knopf).
- Edwards, M (1996) *International Development NGOs: Legitimacy, Accountability, Regulation and Roles* (London: Commission on the Future of the Voluntary Sector).
- Edwards, M (1998) NGOs as Values-Based Organisations, in: D.Lewis (ed) *International Perspectives on Voluntary Action: Rethinking the Third Sector* (London: Earthscan).
- Edwards, M (1999) *Future Positive: International Co-operation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (London: Earthscan).
- Edwards, M, Hulme, D, and Wallace, T (1999) NGOs in a Global Future: Marrying Local Delivery to Worldwide Leverage, *Public Administration and Development* .
- Fowler, A (1997) *Striking a Balance: a guide to the management of NGDOs* (London: Earthscan).
- Gailbraith, J K (1992) *The Culture of Contentment* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson).
- Kaplan, A (1997) *The Development Practitioners Handbook* (London: Pluto Press).
- Korten, D (1995) *When Corporations Rule the World* (West Hartford, Conn: Kumarian Press).
- Mathews, J (1997) Power Shift, *Foreign Affairs* (Jan/Feb).
- WFDD (1998) *Key Issues for Development*, Occasional Paper 1, World Faiths Development Dialogue (available from email wfdd@btinternet.com).



## Michael Edwards

Michael Edwards is Director, Governance and Civil Society at the Ford Foundation in New York, and a former Senior Civil Society Specialist at the World Bank in Washington DC. His writings have helped to shape the debate about foreign aid, international co-operation and the role of NGOs over the last ten years. They include three books co-edited with David Hulme: *Making a Difference: NGOs and Development in a Changing World* (London: Earthscan, 1992), *Beyond the Magic Bullet: NGO Performance and Accountability in the Post Cold War World* (London, Earthscan and West Hartford, Kumarian Press, 1995), and *Too Close for Comfort? NGOs, States and Donors* (Basingstoke, Macmillan and New York: St Martin's Press, 1997). His latest book is the highly-acclaimed *Future Positive: International Co-operation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (London, Earthscan, 1999).

---

<sup>1</sup> We are not trying here to put forward a theory of social systems or of social change, but simply to find a way of talking about the links between inner and outer change.

<sup>2</sup> A sharp literary intuition of the importance of all three bases of change is present in George Orwell's *1984* in which the rebellious protagonist is forced to submit not only outwardly but in his inmost sense of himself through a subtle use of terror.

<sup>3</sup> "Paraspara devo bhava."

<sup>4</sup> We are referring here not to the struggles of the oppressed against their "otherness" (although this may take the form of fierce identity politics), but to the creation of "otherness" as a way of establishing dominance or justifying social inequality or injustice.

<sup>5</sup> For example, the "World Faiths Development Dialogue" initiated by James Wolfensohn and the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1997 (WFDD 1998).