

Building
a Fairer
World

Introduction—Roy Culpeper

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Is the glass half empty or half full?" The question is thought to separate optimists from pessimists. Does it? Or is it when the glass, so to speak, is only one-quarter full that optimists really come into their own? When the odds seem stacked against the possibility of a favourable outcome, when the forces of evil seem to be everywhere and insurmountable—that is when optimists show their mettle. And they demonstrate optimism not just in their beliefs and spirit, but in their actions. That we are here, as one of our guest authors puts it in this report, proves that history is a succession of small victories, not defeats.

The appalling terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 on New York and Washington, resulting in the deaths of over 5,000 innocent civilians had just taken place at the time of this writing, and military reprisals by the United States were widely expected. If it was difficult to maintain a sense of optimism about the future of our planet previously, it is surely even harder now, in the wake of these horrific acts and of the violent events they have consequently engendered.

Pessimism about the future is spread, in large part, by the mass media, for whom good news is typically *not* news. The shocking suicide missions of the terrorists in New York was surely the most dramatic instance we have ever encountered of the media's obsession with disasters. The images of the two hijacked aircraft destroying the huge towers of the World Trade Center were broadcast to horrified

television viewers all over the world, and replayed endlessly during the following days and weeks. While the human and physical carnage caused by such acts was obviously immense, it is much more difficult to calculate the devastating impact of such images on the human psyche.

The media's focus on the negative is most glaringly evident when it comes to the developing world, on which there is an inexhaustible supply of reports on man-made and natural disasters, and only an occasional glimmer on improvements to human welfare. But the media are also joined by some of the "development establishment" comprising aid agencies, non-government organizations and those doing business with the Third World. How many fundraising campaigns have dwelt on starving babies, or relief for the victims of pandemics, floods, earthquakes and civil wars? How much of the arms trade would be possible without customers, or how much of the illicit drug trade would be possible without suppliers, in the developing countries?

This 25th anniversary edition of *Canadian Development Report* does not shy away from the fact that the proverbial glass may in fact be, at best, one-quarter full. It would be extremely naïve to overlook the horrendous misery inflicted by human beings on each other and by natural events. Moreover, it would be misleading to deny that life has not improved—indeed, that living conditions have actually

deteriorated—for millions of people in the developing world. Nonetheless, these sobering facts do not wholly represent reality, even if they do seem to amount to three quarters of it. In order to correct the negative bias of the media and the development establishment, this report seeks to emphasize the developing world's tangible achievements, and identify plausible grounds for hope in the future, as daunting as the setbacks and challenges may be.

To that end we invited five noted writers and researchers, one each from Africa, Asia, Canada, the Caribbean, and Latin America, to speak to the palpable achievements, trends, or forces that in their view are helping to make the world, particularly the developing world, more peaceable and just. We encouraged them to be bold and imaginative, to think “outside the box”, because therein lies the pathway to change for the better.

Our guest essayists have rewarded us with rich and considerably varied insights into what has gone right with the world. Not only do they attest to the significance of the achievements which have actually made life better for the planet's inhabitants, but they also give us points to consider in a future agenda. And although these essayists hold much in common, they each speak in a unique way, illustrating how the well-springs of hope are not only to be found in the world at large, but also within each of us. In this introductory essay it is not my purpose to summarize their contributions—they speak eloquently enough for themselves. Rather, I would like to refer to some of the salient conclusions emerging from these very different perspectives.

Declining poverty in the world's poorest region

Four decades ago, the Indian subcontinent, rather than Africa, was the principal focus of concern among development specialists such as the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal.¹ The prognosis for the region among such experts was very pessimistic: caught between rising population and lagging food production, the future facing Indians, Pakistanis and Sri Lankans was said to be one of widespread famine and deprivation.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the subcontinent is still home to 500 million of the world's poorest people. But much has changed for the better, and the outlook is now very different than in the 1960s. In her essay, Khadija Haq reminds us of the significant economic and human achievements of the countries and people in the region over the past thirty years. Agricultural productivity has increased significantly; the region's economy has diversified there are now industrial centres founded on new technologies. Meanwhile over the past half-century, literacy rates have increased dramatically, from 32 to 51 per cent, and life expectancy is twice as long.

It is worth noting that, among the countries in the subcontinent, Sri Lanka has experienced some of the most impressive declines in poverty, despite relatively low economic growth and the disorder caused by a long and bloody civil conflict. These achievements have been eroded somewhat because of the civil disorder.

The efforts in Sri Lanka (and other parts of the subcontinent, such as the Indian state of Kerala) to promote “human development” reflects Amartya Sen's dictum that development should be seen as much more than the growth of GNP, or the rise of personal incomes, or industrialization, or technological advance. According to Sen, development is ultimately about expanding the real freedom that people enjoy, thanks to education and health care, and the observance of their human and political rights.²

Africa today and tomorrow

Let us turn to the region which, today, is the greatest focus of concern in the development community—Africa, or more specifically, sub-Saharan Africa. It is not difficult to find “Afro-pessimists”, for example the American journalist Robert Kaplan. In *The Coming Anarchy*,³ Kaplan presents a sustained argument about the hopelessness of Africa. The legacy of colonial history, tyrannical governments, civil disorder, corruption, HIV/AIDS, recurrent drought and famine, economic decline—all these factors conspire, according to observers like Kaplan, to guarantee that Africans will suffer economically and socially for decades to come.

But there are reasons to believe that there is a new mood in Africa, expressed in the belief of Africans that they should take the lead in resolving their own problems, after a half-century of post-colonial dependence on foreign assistance. Our guest essayist Yao Graham cites the agreement, reached in July 2001, to create an African Union to succeed the moribund Organization for African Unity (OAU). Modelled along the lines of the European Union, this new continental entity will place considerable emphasis on the enforcement of human rights within and among states, allowing neighbouring countries to intervene when necessary. The agreement also acknowledges an important role for civil society in official policy-making.

The visionary nature of the African Union no doubt means that it is a long-term project; the European Union, after all, has been a work in progress for the last 50 years. While the African proposal could easily be dismissed by skeptics, it is important to point out that it is not an isolated development. Just as agreement on the African Union was being reached, Presidents Mbeki of South Africa, Obasanjo of Nigeria and Bouteflika of Algeria, later joined by Presidents Wade of Senegal and Mubarak of Egypt, launched a major initiative aimed at eradicating poverty in their continent, by putting Africa on a path of sustained growth and development. Equally this initiative aims at the consolidation of democracy and at a new resolve to dealing with conflicts. It recognizes that a new and effective partnership with the international community is essential to its success, even as it stresses that African governments and people have the primary responsibility for its implementation. Accordingly, the invitation to partnership was taken up by leaders of the Group of Eight industrial countries meeting in Genoa and promises to be a key issue for discussion at the 2002 G-8 Summit in Canada.

What is more, evidence that Africans are determined to seek change can be found at the national level. For example, Graham refers to the repeal in July 2001 of the criminal libel and sedition laws in his native Ghana, which were enacted during the colonial era. But Graham also acknowledges that if new free-

doms are to flourish, it is now crucial to ensure that the judiciary becomes truly independent and that the media get access to the resources needed to elevate the professional standards of journalism.

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Civil Society engagement in local and global decision-making

Over the last two years, some Northern media have painted a picture of civil society that is both misleading and unbalanced.

The coverage of street demonstrations by non-government organizations at the 1999 meeting of the WTO in Seattle, at the World Bank-International Monetary Fund meetings in Prague and Washington, at the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City, and at the G-8 Summit in Genoa (among other fora) has conveyed the image of a fractious, unruly and dangerous movement, posing a threat, possibly violent, to civil order.

Our guest essayists take a very different view. They each refer to the enormous improvements in people's lives brought about by an active and engaged civil society, from the local to national and global levels. The examples they cite include the Aga Khan Rural Support Program in Pakistan, the Self-Employed Women's Association in India, the Sarvodaya Sharamdana Movement in Sri Lanka, the Institute for Sustainable Development in Ethiopia, the Consumers' Association of Penang in Malaysia, the Bisan Center for Research and Development in Palestine, the Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation, and Corporación Región in Colombia.

These and other civil society organizations (CSOs) are working at the local, national and global levels to effect change and improve people's lives and livelihoods. Jocelyn Dow presents a compelling account of the "long march" of the international women's movement, starting from the preparations for the UN Conference on Environment and Development held at Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which brought many women

activists together for the first time from around the world. She came to see the struggle of women for bread and justice as part of the wider struggle of humanity for sustainable livelihoods in the subsequent UN conferences in Vienna (on Human Rights) and Cairo (on Population and Development). But how to turn these advances made through international conferences into practice, into making a positive difference in people’s lives? Dow responds with a very practical example of how she has changed her own business enterprise in Guyana.

Pat Mooney provides illustrations of civil society engagement at the global level, for example on the issue of crop genetic resources, in the face of an alarming decline of genetic diversity within the world’s food supply and the appropriation of Southern genebanks and seeds by Northern companies or agricultural research centres. A particular concern is the increasing claim of “ownership” through the patenting of plant varieties by large Northern corporations, making farmers dependent on such corporations for seeds and other agricultural inputs. Through a three-year consultative process with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), civil society organizations, allied with farmers in the South, have succeeded in obtaining a legally binding international treaty which, among other things establishes “Farmers’ Rights” that protect their right to save and exchange seeds.

Mooney also refers to the challenge posed by CSOs to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), an aid consortium chaired by the World Bank and dedicated to crop and livestock improvement in the South. Notwithstanding its noble mission, in engaging with CGIAR, CSOs discovered that the key decision-making positions were dominated by the North and accordingly pressured the group to ensure that at least half were filled from the South. Moreover, CSOs also obtained the withdrawal of a policy that would have allowed the 16 research centres of CGIAR to claim intellectual property rights over germplasm bred from its genebanks. Mooney describes the half million samples of farmers’ traditional seeds in these genebanks as “CGIAR’s greatest treasure”.

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These and many other examples show that, far from simply decrying “the system” with nothing better to put in its place, when allowed to engage in policy discussions on specific and concrete issues, CSOs make a very positive contribution by helping to shape alternative policies.

Another example offered by our guest essayist Roberto Bissio also reveals the cutting-edge work of CSOs. Bissio refers to the work of Edward Oyugi in Sodnet, a Kenyan NGO. In waging a campaign against the corruption of Kenyan politicians, Oyugi and his colleagues were drawn into an exercise involving the monitoring of the government’s budget, since the budget process is central to the mobilization and allocation (or misallocation) of resources. Particularly interesting is the fact that the monitoring of government budgets by NGOs is now being undertaken in many countries, including India, South Africa and Canada.⁴ Perhaps the most in-depth exercise is that of the “Alternative Federal Budget” in Canada, which actually proposes a comprehensive and coherent economic plan, focused on reducing unemployment and poverty and giving high priority to social sector, regional and community development.⁵

What is at issue in these budget-making exercises is nothing less than the democratization of economic policy at the national level. Civil society groups are going beyond merely challenging the economic policy choices of their governments, to proposing credible alternatives. Ironically, these efforts are not inconsistent with current attempts to broaden participation in national economic policy-making by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and their major shareholders (the G-7). Specifically, in order to qualify for World Bank assistance, all poor countries are now required to prepare a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) through a process of participatory dialogue. Although there is a great deal of skepticism about the PRSP process, it does provide civil society with an important window of opportunity through which to ensure that their country’s economic policies and objectives are supported by the citizenry.

Technology can be a powerful asset in improving the human condition

It is inconceivable to imagine improvements in the human condition without thousands of technological discoveries and their applications over the centuries, starting from the first experiments with agriculture many millennia ago, to the information and communications technologies of today. Technological progress contributes to “development” in Amartya Sen’s broad definition. It augments the capacity of people to lead longer and more fulfilled lives, and has helped to limit the extent of the age-old threats to human existence: disease, hunger, and ignorance. But technologies, like most medicines, often have side effects, or even pose dangers if they are wrongly used.

The frontiers of technology are continually being expanded. The September 2001 edition of *Scientific American* was a special issue entitled, “Nanotech: The Science of Small Gets Down to Business”. Nanotechnology—the study and manufacture of structures and devices of about the size of a molecule—defines part of today’s frontiers. According to the magazine, U.S. federal funding of nanotech research has quadrupled since 1997 to \$519 million, while other industrial countries are now together spending \$835 million, and there is every sign that such funding will continue to increase rapidly.

The potential applications of nanotechnology include yet smaller, higher-capacity electronic chips, drug-discovery research, medical diagnostics, and the design of environmentally-friendly manufacturing processes and products. Such applications could help make our planet more prosperous and ecologically sustainable. But there could be profound downsides, as Pat Mooney points out, from the possibility of devastating technological error, to other troubling social consequences.

Another example from the leading edge of technology, this one drawn from our new knowledge of the human genome and advances in neurosciences, is in

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the area of Human Performance Enhancement (HyPE) drugs and therapies. These technologies can help counter obesity, or sharpen the senses of visual and hearing. Mooney alerts us to the downsides and urges civil society to join the debate on the development and ethical use of this technology—before it is too late.

One of the challenges posed by the rapidly-expanding frontiers of science and technology is the complexity of the subject matter. If only well-trained experts (usually scientists) are thought to be qualified to contribute to the debate on how the new technologies impact on society, society could be seriously short-changed. Again, Mooney argues that there are grounds for optimism in the increasing alacrity with which civil society recognizes the threats posed by new technologies. There is an immediate awareness, for example, of nanotech by civil society organizations and a possibility of a new Convention on the Evaluation of New Technologies to be established at the Rio+10 conference in 2002.

Individuals can make a difference

In his essay, Roberto Bissio’s “five vaccines against despair” turn out to be five individuals. Edward Oyugi, mentioned above, was drawn from a fight against corruption into analysis of the Kenya’s budget. Meena Raman uses her training as a lawyer to ensure that government and corporations are held to account for their impact on the environment in Malaysia. Izzat Abdul Hadi is working to build civil society in Palestine in an unstable and dangerous political climate. Genoveva Tisheva is a Bulgarian lawyer who works to establish a framework of laws and rights that protects women and promotes gender equality in Bulgarian society. Finally, Alberto Yepes works under life-threatening circumstances to promote human

rights in Colombia. These are hardly household names anywhere, even in their own countries. But Bissio’s point is simply that there are many, many such individuals working, under difficult or dangerous conditions, for little personal reward other than to improve the lives of their fellow-citizens.

Among the individuals who make the world a better place through their work, creative artists surely have a special place. Artistic expression—in the form of music, poetry, literature, the performing and visual arts—has always been an essential part of every civilization. Through the ages, artists have expressed the hopes, fears and dreams of their communities, and voiced the passions of ordinary human beings. It may seem out of place to mention artistic expression in a report about “development”. But a community without artists, musicians, poets and writers, is indeed a “poor” community; likewise, we often refer to the “rich” cultural life enjoyed by a certain city, region, or country.

In her essay, Jocelyn Dow cites two artists who have given her inspiration and hope: the Jamaican rock musician Bob Marley and the Guyanese poet Martin Carter. There are many other examples. Poets like the Chilean Pablo Neruda, painters like the Mexican Diego Rivera, novelists like the Nigerian Wole Soyinka, filmmakers like India’s Satyajit Ray, and musicians like the South African group Ladysmith Black Mumbazo, to mention only a few, have been the heart and soul of their society. Their search for truth and beauty adds immeasurably to the richness of human experience, and our understanding about ourselves and the world in which we live.

Individuals can and do make the world a better place, whether they are social activists or artists, or have regular jobs in bureaucracies, organizations and enterprises throughout the world. Many such individuals walk among us today, recognized or not, and many more will be born among future generations. For every terrorist, there are thousands of such individuals.

Where do we go from here?

Our guest essayists offer grounds for optimism, but they are also realists. Their optimism is qualified by concerns that whatever has been gained for the human community can also be lost or offset by new threats.

These qualifications offer some ideas for further research and reflection, which was one of the objectives of the exercise in this year’s *CDR*. These are set out below, as hypotheses to be tested in the coming months:

1. Equitable development in a globalizing economy

The struggle for human development in the two poorest regions of the world—South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa—indicates the enormous difficulty of this multi-dimensional challenge. Our guest essayists argue that the role of government is crucially important, both in mobilizing and allocating resources efficiently and equitably, and even more so in exercising political leadership. Unless development is led by local leaders

and commands the support of the people, in other words unless there is genuine “ownership” of the process by the country as a whole, it is unlikely to succeed or be sustained. In that context, the recent initiatives by African leaders (the New African Initiative and the establishment of the African Union mentioned above) are encouraging, and warrant the support of Africa’s partners in the North.

There are, however, two issues that require urgent attention. The first is the degree to which individual developing countries can choose their own policies in a globalizing economy. Should developing countries seeking access to global goods and financial markets simply adopt the policies and institutions of the industrial countries? The

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toward “one size fits all” approach—for example, after the Asian financial crisis, the emerging market countries were urged to adopt an array of financial standards and codes in order to reduce their vulnerability to financial crises. It turned out that this was easier said than done. The laws, regulations, and institutions required to supervise the financial sector in the G-7 industrial countries have taken over a century to be developed and refined, and they are still far from perfect (for example, they are grossly inadequate in dealing with the large-scale money-laundering of drug dealers and terrorists). Therefore, much greater realism, and much more time, is needed in expecting institutional reform in the emerging market countries, and each country should be given sufficient latitude to develop a legal and institutional framework appropriate to its own circumstances.

Likewise, access to global goods markets the centrepiece of trade negotiations—is fraught with the asymmetries in negotiating power between countries of the North and South. The industrial countries have been terribly slow to implement the agreements of the Uruguay Round by liberalizing access to the sectors of most interest to developing-country exporters, namely in textiles, garments and agriculture. Meanwhile, the North has imposed its own kind of protectionism (as Pat Mooney puts it) in the form of agreements on trade-related intellectual property (TRIPS), the result of which has been to multiply the costs to developing countries of desperately-needed drugs. There are many other examples. If developing countries are expected to engage in future trade negotiations in good faith, the industrial countries must recognize and remedy these asymmetries.

The second issue requiring urgent attention is the relationship between equitable development and conflict. The Sri Lankan case is surely very sobering. Despite the success of governments to invest in people’s health and education and to accelerate human development, ethnically-based civil strife has deepened, resulting in growing violence and bloodshed. And there are many other examples of such conflict, in the Indian subcontinent itself and throughout the world (the Balkans, Africa, and Latin

America). The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington have precipitated considerable soul-searching as to whether or not we need to deepen our understanding of the “root causes” of such violence, typically based on ethnic or religious divisions, or whether the perpetrators should simply be found and brought to justice. The latter course, adopted by the United States and its allies, could be considered “attacking the symptoms”. It seems obvious that these are not alternative paths but necessary complements. Greater understanding of the roots of terrorism and civil strife can only help prevent or deal with future attacks and reduce the toll on innocent people.

2. The use and misuse of technology

Knowledge is a public good, in the sense that my “consumption” of knowledge does not decrease anyone else’s ability to benefit from the same knowledge. Indeed knowledge can be thought of as a “global public good”:⁶ its benefits are not

necessarily constrained by political boundaries. Technology, as a form of applied knowledge, is therefore also a global public good.

Markets are not well-suited to producing or distributing public goods, including knowledge and technology. A good example is the failure of pharmaceutical companies to invest in developing drugs to prevent or cure malaria. The reason is that malaria is endemic in the world’s poorest countries and those who suffer and die from malaria are typically the world’s poorest people. Accordingly, there is not a huge “market” for malarial drugs, if that market is measured by the purchasing power of those who would benefit. Meanwhile, the human need for such drug therapies is enormous.⁷ Another example is the current dispute over gene patenting. A private American company, Myriad Genetic Laboratories Inc. of Salt Lake City, Utah, has patented two genes which are used in predictive screening of women for breast and ovarian cancer, and has challenged the right of hospitals in Canada to undertake these tests.⁸

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At the centre of today’s debate about the control and impact of technology is the question of ownership. Reference has been made to TRIPS, which have intruded into the trade agenda and which many developing countries are justifiably criticizing. It seems urgent to deepen our understanding of this issue through research, so that private actors (transnational corporations and their laboratories) continue to contribute to the production of beneficial technology without the harmful consequences brought by claims of ownership.

Knowledge and technology can also produce public “bads”, whether intended (e.g. more sophisticated weapons) or unintended (e.g. the negative environmental consequences of large-scale irrigation). These considerations point strongly to the need for public oversight of the production and distribution of technology, and the need for constant monitoring of new forms and applications of technology. The question is how such oversight should be organized. Certainly, the public sector (at the national and international levels) has a key role. But public sector actors can also fail to protect the public interest, particularly if private interests have greater access to and influence over such actors.

Therefore, accountability in this area requires broader participation in the process of oversight to involve members of civil society who may be affected (positively or negatively) by new technologies. This will require, on the part of public agents at the national or international level, willingness to engage with members of the public who have legitimate reasons to be concerned. And it will require, on the part of civil society, greater awareness and sophistication in understanding new technologies and their potential impacts.

3. Governance and Civil Society

In the early 1990s, in the wake of the ending of the Cold War, a new concept burst into the development discourse. Equitable and sustainable development, it

was then believed, was not possible without “good governance”. At first, the term referred to the transparency and accountability of government, and the absence of widespread corruption. Subsequently human rights and democracy were added to the essential attributes of good governance, which has led in turn to further debates as to which human rights (do all countries uniformly enforce core labour rights?) and what constitutes democracy (beyond periodic multiparty elections, and independent judiciary and free media)?

The truth is that good governance is truly a “work in progress”. Rights and freedoms cannot be assured simply through constitutions and laws; nor can the accountability of governments and their officials be guaranteed through periodic elections and the process of parliamentary debate. Some institutions, for example the media, are key to ensuring freedom of expression and to holding both public officials and others (e.g. corporations) to account. The media can be either in the public or private sector, but it is entirely possible for publicly-owned institutions, such as television and radio broadcasters, to be independent of government, while privately-owned newspapers can reflect some viewpoints (for example, business perspectives) more than others. No observer is truly “neutral”; the best guarantee of a free media is sufficient competition leading to a plurality of viewpoints.

The point is that non-government institutions, or more generally civil society, plays a crucial role in bringing about and maintaining good governance. But if civil society is to play such a role, new processes of engagement will be required at the local, national and international levels. The street demonstrations during recent world conferences, and the tensions they have provoked over security and civil order, are symptomatic of the inadequacy of such processes.

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There is an urgent need for governments and inter-governmental organizations to examine and define the rules of engagement with civil society in the coming years. Many governments falsely regard “consultations” as adequate—as long as civil society organizations have an opportunity to be heard, they should not complain. Correspondingly, many civil society organizations wrongly believe that the views they present should always be accepted and acted upon.

Research and policy debate are urgently needed on the processes and rules of engagement between civil society, the formal organizations of government (including international institutions), and the private sector. Upcoming trade negotiations, meetings of the Bretton Woods Institutions and meetings of the G-8 will likely provoke further demonstrations and disorder, unless and until such rules are devised.

There will be efforts to reject civil society pressures for better rules and processes, in the wake of the recent terrorist attacks. This would be a mistake. As all the essays in this report attest, the engagement of civil society with the public and private sectors will continue to be vital in shaping a more peaceable, equitable and sustainable world community in the 21st century. The key questions relate not to whether civil society should play a role, but how, and what that role should be.

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Notes

- 1 *Asian Drama; An inquiry into the poverty of Nations*, (Twentieth Century Fund: New York, 1968)
- 2 *Development as Freedom* (Alfred Knopf: New York, 1999).
- 3 *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the dreams of the post Cold War* (Random House: New York, 2000)
- 4 see Gagatay Nilufer; Mumtaz Keklik; Radhika Lal; and James Lang, *Budgets as if People Mattered. Democratizing Macroeconomic Policies*. (New York: UNDP, Social Development and Poverty Elimination Division 2000).
- 5 see Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and Choices, *Alternative Federal Budget Papers 1998* (Ottawa).
- 6 see Inge Kaul, Isabelle Grunberg, Marc A. Stern (eds), *Global Public Goods: International Cooperation in the 21st Century* (Oxford University Press, 1999)
- 7 see Jeffrey Sachs, “Helping the World’s Poorest”, *The Economist* (print edition) August 12th, 1999
- 8 Richard Mackie, “Harris takes on firm over gene patenting,” *Globe and Mail*, A-14, Sept. 20 2001.