

African development: the view from the grassroots

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[Words in red are indications to change slides.]

Intro

Whether elephants make love or fight, the grass suffers. It is about such collateral damage to grassroots communities of the weak and disregarded that I intend to **speak**. **The elephants** are ourselves in various manifestations: charities, hospitals, and firms, foreign experts, and a different order of pachyderms: foreign governments that have cynically manipulated the politics of Africa since before independence, and supranational institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank that act aggressively to change the fabric of African society while knowing little of it and caring less.

A quote “ ... **the civil societies** of Africa are in great danger, largely because only one kind of scientific discourse about the social world is heard. This neo-liberal establishment of brute economic force ... leads to the destruction of a social order that has been very difficult to construct ... It is fashionable to say these days that African village society is a sort of peculiar anachronism. That is not true at all. Their kin-based community support systems, their consensual decision-making, the communitarian education of the young, their sustainable agricultural systems, all that is an altogether exceptional civilization which has been difficult to construct ... Now all this is being done away with...

I appropriate that text – which I have emended -- from the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who was writing about France. If what he said is true of a powerful, developed country such as France, how much more so of African village society.

Over the last 45 years I have often been intimately involved with African village life, and I will attempt in the next minutes to **speak for the grass**, for those amongst and with whom I have lived, to bring home to my distinguished audience, the human value, and the ultimate fragility, when faced

with the political and economic challenges of globalization, of the communities that Africans have nurtured over centuries, and which have much to teach us.

I should add that in my view the last thing we need on this earth is growth either of population or of the impact of our species on the earth. If we are to survive we require a sea change in our values. Sustainability, equitable distribution, and quality of life should be our local and global goals. Otherwise it will not be long before the only viable community will be the gated community, and a new apartheid conjures up a new and terrible resistance.

To avoid such a scenario we need a revitalization of communities at every scale. Two and a half million years of human experience are proof enough that functioning communities are a necessary condition for sustainability of society at large.

Let me put a human face on African *communitas*. This is Sukur, a remote village in the Mandara mountains of NE Nigeria where Judy Sterner and I worked between 1991 and 1996

and that is now Nigeria's only UNESCO World Heritage site.

As a community it initiates its young men into manhood with rites of passage that **emphasize** the links between mothers and sons.

Agricultural tasks are turned into social occasions,

and those funerals that celebrate a life well lived bring together friends and relatives from neighboring settlements, **linking them together** in a larger community, reinforced by lively ceremony.

But far from being merely folkloric, the Sukur have always engaged the world around them and continue to do so. They have built their own school, and their own **Museum**, even if the one is unfortunately just about as virtual as the other.

Community is also a matter of living in a shared material environment, in which **banal objects** like baskets and pots play their role in constituting culture and enculturating the young, **where hats** may be symbols of community membership, **skin clothing** a badge of manhood, and **figured pots**, representing the linkage of the living to god and to the ancestors, underpin social structure.

Community at Sukur and elsewhere is reinforced in everyday practice, working together on a dam, family care for the sick and mad, **simply being** together and sharing gossip or a calabash of beer.

All over Africa communities like these have demonstrated their ability to cope with change. They have incorporated new crops into their repertoires -- and new gods -- **have survived the** horrors of slave raiding and trading, the belittling and disparagement of their cultures in the colonial episode,

and much else. But can they survive the combined political and economic onslaughts of the development that comes with globalization? Bourdieu was pessimistic; the odds against are tremendous.

Elephants

It is time to meet the elephants.

Even well-intentioned elephants are unaware of the **suffering they** inflict on the grass. These T-shirts are sold by developed world charities and exported, tariff free, to Africa where, as “dead white man’s clothes” they are sold for pennies in the markets, undercutting local products. **The looms that** once wove currency are museum pieces, but, in Zambia’s once thriving textile industry 30,000 jobs have been lost in the past 8 yrs, and there now remain fewer than 8 of the 140 textile manufacturing firms that existed in 1991. “**I don’t know** much about the tariff” said Abraham Lincoln, “but I do know that if I buy a coat in America, I have the coat and America has the money.”

Another example. Traditional doctors and herbalists still serve their communities, as do scientifically trained health workers who climb up to Sukur to administer **vaccinations** and immunizations, But the nearest doctor – who probably serves 25K people instead of, as in Canada, 500 -- is miles away in a poorly equipped and supplied hospital. South Africa recently requested Canada to desist from recruiting its doctors -- while it recruited 350 from Cuba. Only 360 of the 1200 doctors trained in Zimbabwe in the 1990s were still working there in 2000. 23% of doctors working in the US qualified abroad. By draining poor countries of their medical personnel (not to mention other brains), the developed world is doubly sabotaging their development. In the words of American Nobel prize winner Theodore Schulz, “The decisive factors of production in improving the welfare of poor people are not space, energy, and cropland; the decisive factors are the improvement in population quality and advances in knowledge.” Yet African health and education are both targeted by institutions in the developed world.

Besides damaging the African grass we also **in our arrogance** grossly misunderstand it. For long expatriate agronomists argued that a supposed retreat of the West African forests was caused by farmers’ irresponsible practices. Recent work indicates that on the contrary during the past century “forest cover may broadly have been expanding on its northern margins under the complementary forces of land use, turbulent political dynamics and climatic rehumidification.” (Fairhead and Leach 1997:220). Belief in the inefficiency of African farmers is convenient. It makes it easier to bully them and relieves agronomists of the responsibility of recording their knowledge of soils. From the whole of sub-Saharan Africa with its over 1000 languages, fewer than five ethnopedologies have been documented. **Opposite the forest** is this landscape – desolate fields of cotton monocrop, hard on the

soil, requiring quantities of pesticides, and, **unprofitable** for the northern Cameroonian farmer who was until recently required to grow half a hectare a year. Rich countries drive down prices by subsidizing their cotton farmers to the tune of \$5bn/annum, causing a loss of cotton exports that exceeds the total value of the debt relief provided to Burkina Faso, Chad, and I suspect other poor producers. (Vieth corpwatch)

Expat agronomists introduced the plow in this area, but in a very few years most **were rusting** away. The reasons are complex; the tools were designed so that village smiths could not repair them, **and in this** region the critical labor bottleneck lies not in preparation of the soil, **but in ensuring** that crops are not overcome by weeds – another example, by the way, of communities working together.

The IMF and the World Bank are examples of a different breed of elephant that does not merely trample the grass but on occasion destroys **the soil** with its structural adjustment programs. Niger, the 2nd poorest country in the world, with only 3% of its 1.2 million square kilometers arable, used to rely on the production and export of **fine livestock**. However, privatization of the National Veterinary Office, resulting in exorbitant prices for vaccines and the absence of an effective lab to provide non-contamination certificates, has led to the collapse of prices. At the same time many communities have lost access to the market and to each other as the trucks of the National Food Products Office have been progressively replaced by private transport. This is hardly the “Enhanced structural adjustment” envisioned by IMF and the World Bank staff. (<http://www.imf.org/external/np/pfp/niger/#IVA>)

The IMF and the World Bank’s insistence on user payment for health and education is having a catastrophic impact on future generations in countries like Tanzania where official life expectancy is 52 years and falling, and a 15% death rate in the first 5 years of life is correlated with government spending on primary health care equivalent to well under one percent of GDP. One and a half percent is spent on primary education – but with half the pop earning less than the poverty benchmark of \$187/annum Primary School fees are **\$5.25 per child**. Can you imagine what kind of education these kids are getting? Multiplication of such examples is easy but depressing, so let me move on.

Africa teaches us

African communities have much to teach us, and not only by reminding us of what, in our ever more conflicted and dysfunctional societies, we have lost. Despite the disasters that Western media misleadingly attribute to uniquely regional causes, Africans are masters of sustainability. They can make iron out of materials that Westerners do not recognize as ore, and **can extract** a living from boulder-strewn slopes that strain the definition of arable. They produce food at one quarter of the energy cost of North American farmers. Their multi-cropping of **associations of plants**, and their

sophisticated scheduling of production – **for example** the transplanting of sorghum as floods retreat – have led to development of a plethora of **cultivars** and a genetic inventory the world cannot **afford to lose**, but which is at risk as the area under the cultivation of GM crops throughout the world rises from 1.7m ha in 1996 to 52.6m ha in 2001 – and let us not forget the threat of Monsanto’s Terminator gene. **Africans** have an intimate knowledge of the plants around them; a couple of months ago the San of the Kalahari desert who have long used the Hoodia plant to stave off the pangs of hunger reached a landmark benefit sharing agreement with Pfizer and other pharmaceutical firms regarding commercialization of a substance found in that succulent, which – and you may regard this as ironic or obscene – will be used to control **obesity**, the West’s fastest growing **disease**.

You may well be thinking that the sustainability characteristic of African economies is irrelevant to us. If so I challenge you to point your Web search engine at “Sustainable Communities” and see how widely in developed countries people are thinking globally and acting locally.

Neither in the view of Paul O’Neill, US Treasury Secy, is sustainability limited to a subsistence economic level. On a recent visit to Ghana he spoke of his vision for that country, “Our expectation is that all people should be able to earn \$30,000 a year. That is needed for 19M people. It can be done.”(GW 020530) Ghana’s GNP per capita is presently about \$390 p.a., LESS than it was 40 years ago, and it receives \$25.03 per head in aid. Senegal: most aid of any Francophone country - \$90 per capita. \$60 of that goes in debt repayment. Was the Secretary being disingenuous or what?

How can he not be aware of these statistics? and of the impact on Africa of the farm bill recently signed into law by President Bush that will increase domestic farm subsidies by \$19 billion a year for the next 10 years. As Mark Ritchie, president of the Minnesota Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, said, “This farm bill ... will put millions of small farmers out of business in Africa.” (Warren Vieth LA Times May 27, 2002.).

Conclusion

To conclude, throughout the continent globalization is subjecting African communities to challenges greater than any they have faced in the past, challenges that they may not overcome. I do not believe that the bureaucrats of the EU, US, IMF, WB and other acronymic elephants are evil people, but only that ideology renders them blind to the impact of their initiatives on African and other Third World communities. **If only they would** live amongst them, and get to know them rather than Africa’s five star hotels, **and be prepared** to learn from them as Ian Robertson did when he apprenticed himself to a Mandara smith.

Another Nobel laureate, Amartya Sen, in his book “Development as Freedom” argues that the most critical factor in a nation’s development is the availability of civil, political and social freedoms and the necessary institutions to protect these freedoms. Surely sustained and sustainable local communities are the foundation upon which both nations and development are built.

We in the developed world have a choice; we can either assist in the development in their own countries of the **communities** that produce self-confident, unalienated, youths like these, OR we can on our own shores man barricades **against would-be**-immigrants. The brothers and sisters of these homeless men are camped in their hundreds behind the dunes waiting for a risk-fraught voyage to prosperity, the latest version of which now leads, incredibly, from Morocco via the Canary Islands to Europe. There are millions more where they came from waiting to leave.

We in the developed world are presently afflicted by a crisis in values and a profound failure of political leadership, such that the undoubted generosity of individuals is overwhelmed by short-sighted mass selfishness promoted by the neo-liberal establishment. Let us hope that its nasty and brutish rule will also be short, and that people seeking **a better quality** of life in sustainable communities will soon be asking not what goods and services the globe can deliver, but what they can offer the globe.

Thank you, and au revoir.

Fragments

Aid

I do not have to remind this audience of the failure of

When the world's governments met at the Earth summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, they adopted a programme for action under the auspices of the United Nations -- Agenda 21. Amongst other things, this included an aid target of 0.7% of gross domestic product (GDP) for rich nations, roughly 22 members of the OECD (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development). However: Almost all rich nations have constantly failed to reach this 0.7% target. For example, USA's aid, in terms of percentage of their GDP is already lowest of any industrialized nation in the world. Since 1992, Japan had been the largest donor of aid, in terms of raw dollars. That was until 2001 when the United States reclaimed that position, a year that also saw Japan's amount of aid drop by nearly 4 billion dollars (as tables and charts below will also show).

Commenting on the change in trend in 2001, the OECD noted that: "Most of the United States' increase in 2001 was due to a \$600 million disbursement to Pakistan for economic support in the September 11 aftermath. Japan's ODA fell by nearly \$4 billion. A key factor accounting for this was a 12.7 per cent depreciation of the Yen, which fell from 108 yen to the dollar in 2000 to 122 in 2001. Other factors included the timing of Japan's disbursements

to multilateral organisations and loan repayments from Asian countries that have recovered from the Asian financial crisis. In real terms, Japan's ODA fell by 18 per cent."

Senegal: most aid of any Francophone country - \$90 per capita. \$60 of that goes in debt repayment. 200K wage earners of a working pop of 3.8M. Civil servants average \$79/month.

Food crisis

Mal, Zam, Zim high maize prices and natural disasters WFP "struggling to assist 2.6 million people in five countries" GW020502

USDA subsidies for farms in the United States totalled \$92,231,124,067 from 1996 through 2001. (<http://gsi.ewg.org/farmbill.acgi?farmbill2?regtype=country&submitted=true&whichForm=reg>)

Privatization

1993 World Conference on Human Rights proclaimed "right to food ... indivisibly linked to the inherent dignity of a human being". But this undercut by the Washington consensus – "series of gentlemen's agreements ... between the international financial organizations and the US Federal reserve... For the officials of the IMF, WTO, World Bank and the US Treasury department, the consensus is holy writ." The Washington consensus "has four precepts that apply globally at any time to any economy: privatisation and deregulation, macroeconomic stability and budget cuts." MD0111

of forests

Ogiek h/g and honey collectors of Mau forests of Kenya. Ignored by colonial govt who didn't even give them reserves while handing out the best land to whites. Remained in their forests with which they are "living in a perfectly harmonious relationship" acc Ann Sering Rodstock U. Daniel arap Moi's kleptocracy hands out title deeds to forest whenever he wishes to win an election. Export of hardwoods. Court claims: 1999 because Catholic church added its name to the suit on their behalf the court found that they had renounced their ancient trades and thereby forfeited their land rights! Results 5 of 6 rivers flowing out of Mau forest which supply Kenya with 40% of its water now seasonal, and one dried up completely. GW020328, 25

Okiek as alternative society/economy for pastoralists

of water

"Fish have a habit of jumping on to the rich man's table" (fisheries officer for the RS Protection of Birds)

Countries' sale of fishing rights has had disastrous effects on local communities.

Mauretanian and Senegal gave access to EU, Jap, Chinese fishing fleets (EU paying Maur \$426M for fishing rights for 2001-6) —251 industrial, factory style foreign vessels operating there. Maur catches of octopus halved in 4 years; sawfish and other species completely disappeared. Maur jobs in octopus fishing fallen from 5K to 1.8K people. GW020328, 26

of veterinary medicine

Niger 2nd poorest country in the world, 3% of its 1.2Mkm² arable, but 20M head of livestock. Its major exports. Privatization of Nat Vet Office – exorbitant prices for vaccines, etc.; no checks on age of drugs; no effective lab to provide non-contamination certificates, ergo prices of animals beaten down by traders from Nigeria, Benin and Mali. At the same time National Food Products Office fleet

of trucks being taken over by private transport companies – many villages no longer served. Canadians familiar with this. MD0111

There can be no sustainable development without sustaining and self-sustained communities, and there can be no sustaining of communities without understanding.

Bourdieu

I think that the societies of the West are in great danger, largely because only one kind of scientific discourse about the social world is heard. This neo-liberal establishment of brute economic force, which we have been served up for about ten years now, leads to the destruction of a social order that has been very difficult to construct ... It is fashionable to say these days that the French state is a sort of peculiar anachronism. That is not true at all. Public service, public transport, public hospitals, public education etc., all that is an altogether exceptional civilization which has been difficult to construct ... Now all this is being done away with... That is why the sociologist has to intervene. (Bourdieu 2000:4607)

Bourdieu, P. 2000 *Propos sur le champ politique ...* Lyon: PU de Lyon

It seems logical that he, the supremely literate, should speak out for those who were dominated and who could not find the proper words or audience to make their sufferings known. Anne Friedericke Müller 2002: *Sociology as a combat sport: Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) – admired and reviled in France.* *Anthropology today* 18 (2):7

Table

		US dollars (billions)		
	EU countries	USA	Japan	Canada
Official Development Assistance 2001	26	11 (+ increase of 5 per year from 2004)	10	2
Subsidies to own farmers (1999-2001)	35-41	22 (+ <u>increase</u> of 19 year in 2002-12)	BIG!	3 (+ <u>increase</u> of 5+ year in 2003)

Cost of trade restrictions to poor countries \$100 billion a year.