

## Chapter 11

# The Getting of Wisdom: Institutional Reform and Personal Revolution

*'Open up, loosen up, listen up, speak up, and don't work weekends on anything you don't enjoy'*

Herman Daly, ex-World Bank economist<sup>1</sup>

*'When you get it right, it's better than sex'*

Anonymous fieldworker, Zambia<sup>2</sup>

After toiling away in the nether regions of an international bureaucracy for 20 years, most of us would probably echo Herman Daly's advice in his farewell speech to the World Bank: for goodness sake 'loosen up'. The organisation would be much more effective as a result, and its employees would be happier, though maybe not so happy as the fieldworker in Zambia who thought his work was 'better than sex' – a reference to the high that comes from helping people escape from any form of oppression. This feeling is the opposite of the paternalism that infects so much in international development. It springs, not from a sense of responsibility for the achievements of others, but from participating in a process which liberates everyone involved. This is real co-operation, but in a world of unequal power and resources it demands continuous self-development on the part of those who want to help. There is no other way of gaining the inner security we need to let go of predetermined outcomes, nor the self-knowledge to identify and deal with the interests and agendas that mark out all human relationships.

Building a political constituency for international co-operation along the lines sketched out in Chapter 10 is an essential task for the longer term. In the meantime, improving the performance of organisa-

tions already involved in the field requires a *professional* constituency for reform. All development workers have room to manoeuvre, but using it requires imagination, a willingness to take risks, and the courage to 'speak truth to power', in the words of the American academic, Aaron Wildavsky.<sup>3</sup> Effective institutions grow from developed individuals, just as institutional cultures and incentives shape the skills and attitudes of their staff. The intertwining of the personal, the institutional, and the political is as obvious as it is neglected, perhaps because professionals are embarrassed by talk of the inner dimension, or discomforted by the thought that operational problems require change inside themselves. In the international context, where the focus is always on the development of others, it is probably the most important lesson we have to learn. At the deepest level, we help by what we are, not what we know or even what we do.<sup>4</sup>

In this Chapter I look at the qualities required to help others effectively, and at how they can be fostered among NGOs, government aid agencies, and multilateral organisations like the UN. The rhetoric of these organisations already speaks volumes about the need for change, expressed in the current vogue for participation, partnership, and the primacy of local ownership over decisions. In most cases the reality lags far behind, and not just in huge bureaucracies like the World Bank. NGOs face similar questions, albeit on a smaller scale. Are they prepared to put their own house in order, and if so, what might that involve? The answer is to nurture wisdom. This may seem a strange word to use, especially in the institutional context, but the mixture of knowledge and discrimination wisdom embodies makes it the perfect description of what needs to be developed: institutions that combine technical efficiency with attitudes of service; a new generation of 'reflective practitioners' schooled in the skills of thinking as well as doing; and a better all-round balance between expertise, and the humility to use it properly. The author of *Small is Beautiful*, E F Schumacher, once said that '*we are much too clever to survive without wisdom*'.<sup>5</sup> He wasn't talking about the arrogance of international development agencies or the hubris of the jet-setting consultant, but his words ring true in this context too. Institutional reform depends on personal revolution, personal revolution depends on institutional reform, and both depend on 'the getting of wisdom'.<sup>6</sup>

Development work needs people and institutions that listen, learn, innovate and make connections. These characteristics are essential to success because development is complex and dynamic, involving constant dialogue and bargaining against a shifting background of politics, culture and economic interests. Those who

want to be useful in this process must be sensitive to real-world conditions of uncertainty, diversity, local control and extended timescales, and comfortable in dealing with them. Development professionals are *part* of the ongoing negotiations of development, so the quality of their interventions is an important influence over success. It is never possible to evaluate the impact of a development project without asking questions about the agencies involved, all the way down the line to their headquarters in Brussels or New York.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, the answers often show that they are ill-equipped and ill at ease. At the minimum, those who want to elicit co-operation must be seen to practise what they preach. Otherwise they can influence events only through coercion, which is not a strategy for sustainable change. The problem is that many have been found wanting in this respect, lecturing others on 'good governance' but being secretive and unaccountable themselves. Closing the gap between rhetoric and reality requires action in three areas: learning, accountability, and incentives.

## INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

### Learning

The underlying problem in most institutions is a view of the world fundamentally at odds with realities on the ground. Development is messy and conflict ridden, but bureaucrats thrive on prediction and control. In a world that seems evermore unstable, development agencies seek security in its mirror image, often going to ridiculous lengths to quantify, codify and plan what is going to happen in the field.<sup>8</sup> It never does, of course, since we don't even know what will happen in the morning, but reports and results can always be massaged to satisfy the donors. It's like walking through a maze whose walls rearrange themselves with each step you take.<sup>9</sup> Problems are caused by a multitude of factors that change as they interact with each other; communities are fractured by different interests and perceptions; and unintended consequences are often the most influential of all. In this context, learning is the key to results.

As successive management gurus tell us, organisational learning is vital to performance.<sup>10</sup> Learning is essential to understand what works best in different circumstances, to anticipate and prepare for threats and opportunities, and to keep the organisation alive to innovation and challenge. Because development is dynamic, connections must be made continuously between learning and decision making throughout the

organisation.<sup>11</sup> Even if we know what produced good results in one situation, we can't assume the same course of action would do so elsewhere. Knowledge advances through the observation of unexpected phenomena as well as reflection on what is already familiar.<sup>12</sup> So building the capacity to learn is much more important than accumulating information. The problem is that learning implies honesty and change, and it is difficult to admit to failure in public when fund raising is based on the image of success. Many organisations feel that learning is too expensive, until they have to pay for their mistakes.

The first step is to recognise the difference between information (the raw material), knowledge (information that is systematically analysed), and wisdom (the application of knowledge to practical problem solving). Development agencies usually spend too much time on the first of these things and not enough on the last, and that is partly because they are caught in the separation of thinking from doing that is the legacy of the Western academic tradition. In this tradition, abstract ideas are elevated and muddling through is suspect: '*it's all very well in practice,*' as someone once said of the newly-opened bridge across Dublin's River Liffey, '*but how does it work in theory?*'<sup>13</sup> Learning *requires* action because many of the mechanisms responsible for poverty are invisible until they are activated by attempts at change. Uniting action and understanding in this way requires concrete incentives to connect the two – like more resources for programmes that demonstrate effective learning, staff appraisal systems that value time spent in this way, and accountability to ensure that space for learning doesn't mean the freedom to repeat mistakes. Oxfam-UK, for example, has an innovative 'learning fund' to which any member of staff can apply.<sup>14</sup> Learning means a search for the truth, not a confirmation of what the organisation wants to hear, so relationships with universities, think-tanks and other knowledge brokers are vital to provide a source of independent challenge.<sup>15</sup> The problem is that researchers and practitioners find it difficult to work together. Their worlds are ruled by mutual suspicion, and even where they are not, they lack the practical tools required.<sup>16</sup> This is where the 'bridging' role of NGOs can be crucial.<sup>17</sup>

We know from experience that bureaucratic, hierarchical institutions find it very difficult to learn, since rapid feedback is blocked by too many layers between decision makers and the field. That's why the UN's early-warning systems are so weak, compared to the decentralised NGO systems that enabled decisions to be made very quickly, for example, in the northern Kenya drought of 1990–91.<sup>18</sup> So long as mechanisms are in place to ensure accountability for common goals

and standards, devolving authority will always pay dividends. It is no surprise that decentralisation figures so highly in the reform of international institutions. UNIDO (the industrial development arm of the UN) achieved a 22 per cent increase in productivity on the back of a 38 per cent cut in staffing and resources.<sup>19</sup> The World Bank's 'strategic compact' includes such subversive ideas as siting the Mexico team in Mexico, and getting senior managers to spend a day in a slum – hardly the stuff of revolution, but important nevertheless. In less top-heavy and more democratic structures it becomes rational for staff to co-operate and exchange information, because there is less to be gained from disguising mistakes. The writer Charles Handy likes to think of organisations as communities of individuals planning and working together for long-term goals, rather than the property of a managerial elite.<sup>20</sup> This may be somewhat romantic, but a clear and common vision is certainly more important than elaborate strategic planning models, which are often a refuge for bureaucrats with too much time on their hands and not enough immersion in grassroots realities.<sup>21</sup> The process of planning is important, but the plans themselves are less significant.

Effective institutions combine the autonomy of field units with the gains of overall co-ordination through various forms of federalism.<sup>22</sup> Task groups and multi-skilled teams work across organisational boundaries; internal structures are loose, pragmatic, and often temporary, designed to facilitate co-operation and mutual accountability for results, not make staff feel secure and protected.<sup>23</sup> The International Potato Research Centre in Peru, for example, started to produce much better research (and potatoes) when anthropologists and engineers began to work together.<sup>24</sup> Contrast that with the monochromatic nature of World Bank staff, where the ratio of economists to other social scientists is 28:1,<sup>25</sup> and the impossibly complicated and competitive subdivisions of the UN.<sup>26</sup> The rising power of information technology means that development agencies can act as hubs of networks rather than isolated hierarchies.<sup>27</sup>

No development agency can afford to be 'fundamentalist', in the sense of defending a rigid ideology or a universal set of prescriptions. They all need '*more asking and less telling*', as Aaron Wildavsky puts it.<sup>28</sup> Flexibility and responsiveness are all, and 'accompaniment' (long-term support) is a much better approach than imposing blueprints and deadlines from the top.<sup>29</sup> In this approach, staff are encouraged to follow processes on the ground rather than rush in and out on short consultancy visits, so that they can create stronger feedback loops between field realities, practice and policy. The emphasis moves from

control to dialogue, helping groups to solve problems for themselves instead of fixing on one answer that is deemed to be correct. Insiders and outsiders become '*critical friends*', as Brazilian NGOs call it, retaining a sense of loyalty so that disagreements can be accommodated in a supportive yet challenging relationship.<sup>30</sup> Effective organisations encourage debate and allow differences to coexist, so long as they generate results in accordance with the overall mission. Alfred Sloan, past-chairman of General Motors, always delayed decisions that appeared to have unanimous support in the boardroom, since this indicated that colleagues weren't voicing their true opinions. '*Without dissent, you don't know what the problem is,*' says the management guru Peter Drucker.<sup>31</sup> This may be true in theory, but dissent inside the World Bank (or even a large international NGO) is more likely to lead to early retirement than promotion.

### Accountability

Learning requires an active conversation between institutions and their clients. As Theodore Zeldin once observed, this is a quality which is absent from most modern institutions, '*distanced by their professionalism from the concerns of everyday life and lacking any sense of human warmth*'.<sup>32</sup> As a result, there is little to stop them focusing on their own survival as opposed to the needs of those they were set up to serve – a common problem among international agencies. If 'local ownership' is the key to results (as all development agencies say it is), then this is a serious problem. Correcting it requires accountability to those who are supposed to benefit from interventions as well as those who fund or regulate them. In reality, development agencies rarely take their lead from poor people, despite the problems that ensue when institutions do not listen to their customers.<sup>33</sup> This is partly because they are unsure who their customers are: are they the public or governments that fund them, the volunteers who sit on the boards, their staff, or the people in the village whose development is the real issue? The truth is that all these constituencies are legitimate stakeholders, but no organisation can be equally accountable to all of them at one time. Since 'money talks', accountability to donors tends to be the bottom line. As a result, too much attention is paid to external agendas when setting objectives and evaluating progress. Indicators are skewed toward bean counting and narrow measurements of cost-effectiveness. The '*tunnel vision of the project system*' compresses timescales and discourages experimen-

tation, and attempts to inject more room to manoeuvre into the 'project cycle' tend to be cosmetic.<sup>34</sup> Development agencies cannot be completely accountable for the impact of their interventions, since they don't control the other factors that determine what happens at the end of the line (like the wider economic and political environment). But they can and should be held responsible for using their resources in a reasonable way.<sup>35</sup> 'Always ask how we can do what we already do better,' is Peter Drucker's advice, so long as we also ask whether we should be doing other things as well.<sup>36</sup>

This has to be a consultative process, since what is reasonable to a manager in New York may be extremely unreasonable to a villager in Namibia. That means broadening the base of participation in monitoring and evaluation using techniques such as social audits, reciprocal evaluations, surveys of service users, and two-way monitoring, like the NGOs in Mexico which feed information on World Bank projects to the grassroots and reactions from the grassroots back to the Bank.<sup>37</sup> The social audit is a particularly interesting innovation pioneered by the UK-based New Economics Foundation and its counterparts in other countries. It works on the assumption that all the stakeholders of an organisation have a right to participate in monitoring its performance. A number of NGOs are using social audits (like Traidcraft, a fair-trade organisation based in Newcastle), and they have found them very helpful in improving programme quality.<sup>38</sup> Oxfam-UK has recently launched a less ambitious version of this process – an annual 'assembly' at which stakeholders can ask questions of staff and engage in a public debate on the agency's achievements. However, it is significant that none of the largest international NGOs – and certainly no multilateral agency – has agreed to a social audit. Concessions to democratic accountability made by the World Bank (through its inspection panel) and some UN agencies like UNDP (on the public disclosure of information) are limited. We have already looked at some of the ways this could be improved – like an 'international relief commissioner' to govern humanitarian assistance and an ombudsman for development NGOs – but even a simple complaints procedure with some external scrutiny would be better than what we have now.

## Incentives

Many of these problems can be traced back to inadequate or perverse incentives in organisations, and to the pervasive influence of organisa-

tional cultures. Perverse incentives are those that reward staff for behaviour that is antithetical to the stated mission of the organisation, or act as a barrier to the qualities that underpin success. In aid agencies, the obvious source of perverse incentives is 'disbursement pressure' – the need to spend the budget by the end of the financial year come what may, in order to avoid cuts next time around.<sup>39</sup> This leads to poor-quality work and the temptation to rush proposals through – the opposite of the demand-led approach recommended in Chapter 7. No one is rewarded for taking the time to get things right. High salaries (over US\$120,000 a year for middle managers in both the UN and the World Bank) and feather-bedded conditions of work encourage staff to put job retention before self-criticism, reinforcing a longstanding tendency to worship internal audiences and ignore those outside. Both the Bank and the UN's specialised agencies have issued forests of directives on social development, participation, gender and the environment, but they still lack the incentive systems to make them work.<sup>40</sup> People talk the talk but do not walk it. One way of changing this is to audit a random sample of programmes independently, place the results in the public arena, and hold staff accountable for their performance in a way which influences their future career in concrete ways.

The culture of an organisation is extremely important in sanctioning some types of behaviour and frustrating others.<sup>41</sup> Development agencies often have an activist culture which sees learning as a luxury when compared to the 'real work' of operations, or moving money. Innovation and challenge are unlikely to be valued by managers unless there is a tradition of self-criticism. This may be present in theory but is heavily circumscribed in practice. According to a recent independent study of the UN, its specialised agencies have no cohesive culture at all, apart from a love of bureaucracy and prehistoric management systems – the '*last of the organisational relics of the Cold War*' as its authors conclude.<sup>42</sup> Another independent survey found the UN civil service '*a disgrace, lacking a career structure, inflexible, under-skilled and over-manned, and alien to the concepts of productivity or rewards for merit*'.<sup>43</sup> Its recruitment procedures don't help matters, stifled as they are by the political correctness of the quota system and corrupted by patronage from member states. A broader nomination process would be a good start, inviting names from NGOs and the private sector as well as governments. Mandatory work in the field for ten years outside the UN system or the World Bank would provide another useful filter. One difficulty is that the UN's long-standing recruitment freeze (the

result of America's failure to pay its dues) has led to increasing pressure on middle managers, there being no money to pay off dead wood at the top of the system nor recruit new blood on permanent contracts at the bottom.

If things are this bad, what hope is there for improvement? Institutions never reform themselves voluntarily. Six presidential commissions have come and gone without much change in the US Agency for International Development; the 'strategic compact' is only the latest in a long line of upheavals at the World Bank; and the UN has been in continuously unsuccessful reform since 1945.<sup>44</sup> The last two attempts at management reform (led by UN Undersecretaries Dick Thornburgh and Joseph Connor) failed for want of an internal constituency to push them through. The UN's management information system is three years behind schedule and US\$60 million over budget; and its Office of Internal Oversight has only ever acknowledged one incident of fraud in public, and that was handed over for investigation by London's Scotland Yard.<sup>45</sup> Institutional reform comes from the combined effects of internal and external pressure exerted strategically and over long periods of time. External pressure often comes from NGO networks that lobby the international financial institutions continuously, since they are the main source of policy and funding.<sup>46</sup> An internal constituency is just as important, chipping away at the status quo until a critical mass emerges to push change through. Strong leadership is vital. The increasing influence of social-development concerns inside the World Bank fits this pattern particularly well, beginning with a few lone voices on the inside (like that of the anthropologist Michael Cernea) and gradually expanding its constituency both internally and in alliance with NGOs, bilateral aid agencies and academics.<sup>47</sup> This model is less likely to work inside the UN because it is a much more diffuse organisation with fewer political openings for the 'big bang' approach employed by James Wolfensohn at the World Bank. The UN is naturally more attuned to incremental change, but that is likely to be dissipated by institutional inertia. The only way to tackle this problem is for Northern governments to make sufficient funding available to push through more radical reforms – as they did with the 'strategic compact' – accepting the costs of large-scale redundancy and restructuring along the way. That might not make the UN wise, but it would certainly encourage less stupidity.

## PERSONAL REVOLUTION

It is a truism that institutions change when people do. No amount of theorising or displacement-activity by development workers can change the fact that our personal behaviour will make or break any attempt to facilitate positive change in the world. Develop yourself if you want to be of service to others should be our mantra. There is no other way of dealing with the 'unwelcome guests' described in Chapter 2, for it is us who are the guests and our own attitudes that are unwelcome. This is an unfashionably puritanical view at a time when the private peccadilloes of political leaders are not supposed to influence the quality of public decision-making: you don't need a department full of saints to administer an ethical foreign policy. But one cannot argue generally that personal behaviour is irrelevant to institutional performance, nor that it doesn't influence the trust people place in the professionals who are supposed to help them. The writer Alice Miller makes this point about the hidden agendas of parents and their impact on their children.<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup> This is especially relevant for those in the helping professions, because their motivations are always ambiguous. Adolf Guggenbuhl-Craig, the psychotherapist who has studied this issue in detail, concludes that ego and power-drives are often strongest when cloaked by moral rectitude.<sup>50</sup> Development workers who preach participation are often autocratic in their own behaviour, despite the fact that consistency between words and actions is the fundamental tenet of social organisation.<sup>51</sup> If we really want to make a difference, it's not just what we do but the way that we do it that is important.

### Learning and Wisdom

In this situation, the minimum required is to practise what you preach, and be accountable for it – just like the institutions we looked at earlier. Humility, patience, sensitivity, continual self-development, and an openness to learning are the qualities of successful helpers at any level – the peculiar combination of arrogance and ignorance which infects so many expatriates in other people's societies is a guaranteed recipe for failure. One of the biggest problems in this respect is the cult of the expert. Anthony de Mello, an Indian writer on spirituality and development, tells the story of a man who lived his life as a world-

famous authority in his field, proud of his expertise and dismissive of those who did not share it. One day he had a massive heart attack and was left for dead by his friends. The following morning he woke up and was taken to visit the local doctor. But the doctor, just as much an expert as he was, pronounced his recovery from the grave as medically impossible, re-signed the death certificate, and buried the poor chap. Nonsense, of course, but instructive in exposing a widespread tendency to pay too much respect to technical expertise. This is especially common in developing countries where, for example, one can be a bank manager in Britain but an expert on micro-finance on stepping off the plane in Malawi. The problem lies not with expertise itself (which is invaluable in development work) but with the attitudes that surround it. Expert thinking is often adversarial, assuming that facts are unambiguous and that each case is there to be won. This discourages intellectual complacency, but can also lead to the exclusion of dissenting voices and the downgrading of the new and unorthodox.<sup>52</sup> Yet creating alternatives is as much a part of development as testing out the things we already know. *'In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities. In the expert's there are few'*.<sup>53</sup> Humility turns out to be the threshold of insight.

The idea that experts know best makes it more difficult for professionals to identify and accept their weaknesses, but unless we do that it is impossible to unravel our own involvement in the power relations of international development, and put right what might otherwise interfere with our ability to be helpful.<sup>54</sup> No help is completely unconditional, but we can be honest about our interests so that they can be negotiated in a relationship between equals.<sup>55</sup> Until recently, development professionals ignored or downgraded the indigenous knowledge of people in the developing world, branding it as unreliable and unscientific – a barrier to progress, not a resource. This began to change in the 1970s with new methodologies that emphasised the value of participation, listening instead of preaching, and the untapped ability of poor people to identify and analyse problems for themselves using simple techniques and visual expressions such as maps and drawings. These methodologies go by many different names, but the most popular description is 'participatory learning and action' (PLA, or sometimes PRA [participatory research in action]).<sup>56</sup> The influence of the British scholar-activist Robert Chambers and his growing band of colleagues deserves special mention here, though 'action research' of this kind has a much longer history, dating back at least to American pioneers like John Collier (at the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the 1930s), Kurt Lewin, and Ronald

Lippitt.<sup>57</sup> What unites these efforts is a conviction that those directly involved in social change are best placed to analyse what is happening around them, and feed the results back into practice. So action research is a vehicle for both programme effectiveness and personal empowerment. This vision influenced later generations of social activists, including Saul Alinsky and his *'rules for radicals'*, and Paulo Friere and his *'pedagogy of the oppressed'* in Latin America.<sup>58</sup> The PLA movement took the basic principles of these philosophies, combined them with elements from other traditions (like farming-systems research), and codified them into an expanding menu of tools and techniques that could be disseminated quickly through the training of trainers and the production of low-cost 'self-improving' materials. As a result, PLA has spread rapidly across the world, potentially revolutionising the philosophy and practice of development work in the process. If there was a Nobel Prize for international development, then Chambers and his colleagues would be first on the list.

However, a note of caution is required here. Part of the reason for the rapid uptake of these methods is that they offer easy solutions to complex dilemmas. If people focus on techniques rather than the philosophy that underpins them, participatory research is just another way to capture information. Development workers sometimes romanticise tradition and ignore the power relations, inequalities and limitations that exist in all communities, and they can't help but be caught in the 'games people play' when the development circus comes to town. Part of the outsider's job is to help people make connections between what they know and what is new, unfamiliar, or just a better option in the circumstances. It is the combination of local and non-local knowledge that makes the difference. Donald Schon, one of the pioneers of new forms of education and training in the USA, likens the world to a swamp surrounded by the high ground of problems that can be managed using technocratic means – *'The irony is that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant...while in the swamp lie the problems of greatest human concern'*.<sup>59</sup> So professionals need to help people navigate a safe passage through the swamp, acting as a bridge between different views and backgrounds, and a channel for information. Schon describes this as 'reflective practice'. I prefer wisdom: *'the ability to think and act utilising knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense and insight'*.<sup>60</sup>

The 'getting of wisdom' is crucial to professional effectiveness, but it cannot be taught in the classroom. Important technical skills can obviously be learned in this way, but the current university system does not produce the reflective practitioners we need: people who

are skilled in both fieldwork and higher-level analysis, able to interpret indigenous as well as 'modern' knowledge, and prepared to be self-critical as well as to challenge others. This subject demands a book in itself, questioning as it does the whole basis of professional education and training in the West, but there are already some interesting innovations to build on. The key is for all development agencies to support their staff in a continuous, structured process of learning, both from experience and from more formal exposure to the cutting edge of academic research. As we have seen, this is weak at present because time, resources and incentives are absent and there is too much of a gulf between the worlds of action and understanding. Save the Children-UK has experimented with sabbaticals and end-of-contract write-ups for its field staff, joint programmes of research with universities, and job descriptions and staff development systems which emphasise thinking as well as doing. The UK Development Studies Association has a permanent programme to help academics and practitioners work together on common problems through 'framework partnerships', staff exchanges, a code of practice, and the redesign of university development management courses (making use of distance learning through Britain's innovative 'Open University' for example).<sup>61</sup> Part of the World Bank's 'strategic compact' involves doubling the amount spent on staff training using prestigious universities like Harvard, though in the Bank's case this money would be better spent in persuading reluctant technocrats to spend more time in the field.<sup>62</sup> All these innovations show promise, but they need to be scaled up dramatically.

### Personal Accountability

Ultimately, professional development requires much deeper changes in attitudes and behaviour. The philosopher Zygmunt Bauman calls this a shift to *'being and living for the other'* – a move from *'power over'* others to *'power to'* facilitate their self-development, with no strings attached.<sup>63</sup> Of course, no one wants to be the *'sort of woman,'* as C S Lewis put it, *'who lives entirely for others. You can tell the others by their hunted expression'*.<sup>64</sup> However, all of us need to find a better balance between self-preservation and selfless service. A solid sense of humour is surprisingly important in this respect, along with a 'lightness of being' even in the most difficult of circumstances and a sense of detachment from the fruits of our actions. This may seem a paradox, since most development workers are attached to particular

visions of the world as they want it to be – a certain set of economic, social and political outcomes. Without a clear vision it is unlikely that most of us would continue in our jobs, but when applied without discrimination it can make us rigid and autocratic. Real effectiveness requires a level of inner security strong enough to support a lifetime of struggle and sacrifice, without being unduly affected by the results. That sort of security comes only from constant self-development.<sup>65</sup> Unless we change ourselves, our efforts to change the world will be infected by the anger, frustration, jealousy and urge to control that lie inside.<sup>66</sup> Just because we work for Oxfam doesn't mean we are delivered from evil, but at least we can learn to deal with it.<sup>67</sup> It is in this sense that self-development and service to others are linked in a common purpose – the liberation of all parties from their limitations. 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.

This is all well and good, but it is exceptionally difficult to institutionalise at any level. Whatever else it brings, you don't get humility from an MBA (Master of Business Administration). Can anything be done to nurture these attitudes, or is it all down to the individual? In a neat inversion of Paulo Friere, Robert Chambers has called for a *'pedagogy of the non-oppressed'* to liberate development professionals from the constraints of their background, education and training.<sup>68</sup> Others see the question in feminist terms. Hilary Rose has written convincingly of *'a rationality of responsibility for others'*, driven less by the competition and hierarchies of the masculine world and more by the intimacy and interdependence that characterise relations between women and children.<sup>69</sup> There are other practical things that seem to help, like allotting a small amount of time each day for quiet reflection and meditation, and the conscious contemplation of the day's events – 'could I have done this differently?', 'what did I learn?', and so on. Long hours in a Land Rover are especially good for this technique! Most important of all is the recognition that there are limits to what we can achieve.

*'On the large scale of society no one person has enough knowledge to change one thing without creating more problems than they solve...but if each person will take on the responsibility of being open to all the information available and allow it to change them, this will bring about gradual changes in society which are vastly more intelligent.'*<sup>70</sup>



Once liberated from the conceit that we know best, we can get on with the job of using the gifts we have in a more constructive way. This takes hard work, and then more of it. *'It is only through repeated confrontations with the shadow of the Self that we can fulfil our task,'* is Adolf Guggenbuhl-Craig's advice, *'the struggle for blessing must last a lifetime.'*<sup>71</sup> In a profession that talks constantly about impact and results, personal accountability is often forgotten. But the real 'bottom line' is in our hearts, and our hearts will tell us when we cross it. Institutions may not have a heart to listen to, but we do. 'Am I part of the problem?' At some stage in their career, all development workers ask themselves this question. To answer it truthfully and with an open mind is the beginning of a journey of liberation, first for ourselves, and then for the world around us.<sup>72</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Change in institutions and change in individuals supports and flows from the other. So the important thing is to start somewhere and not worry too much where in the cycle it happens to be. After all, our plans are only 'works in progress'.<sup>73</sup> Are development agencies wise? Not especially, but at least there is more interest in being so now, and a richer repertoire of tools and techniques to help them along the way. The first priority is not to be stupid. This is more of a challenge for some in the development business than it appears, since it means no more standard solutions imposed from the outside, and an end to rushing, disbursement pressure, arrogance about who knows best, and ignorance about local realities. The best way to develop these qualities is to strengthen learning, accountability and incentives to good practice. There are some simple things that could be done in the short term, like a social audit for every development agency and ring-fencing a portion of each loan or grant for learning, analysis and debate. In the longer term, change requires much deeper reforms in institutional structures and cultures, and in the way professionals are educated and trained. Personal change is the biggest challenge of all. International co-operation requires development professionals to recognise that it is not just others that must be developed, but themselves, and to live life from this premise. If we can do that (even in the imperfect way that is inevitable), the skills, experience and resources we do have will be accepted more readily and used more productively to the long-term benefit of everyone involved. In its unconditionality, loyalty and strength to challenge and be challenged, this means that we must love

each other in our professional as well as our personal relationships. In this world at least, that is probably impossible, but there is no reason why we can't like each other more than we do, and work together more effectively as a result. And if we can't even do that, then it is better that we stay out of each other's way.



## Chapter 12

# Conclusion: How Can I Help?

*'True steadfastness sparkles with flexibility'*

Gurumayi Chidvilasananda<sup>1</sup>

*'A gift truly pure is offered without a sense of obligation,  
and with the simple feeling, this should be given'*

*The Bhagavadgita*<sup>2</sup>

How can I help? It's a simple question with no straightforward answers, even after a lengthy journey through the highways and byways of international politics and economics, personal psychology, and a few other detours along the way. The easier question is how *not* to help – by imposing ideas on others, ignoring your own responsibilities, avoiding accountability, and manufacturing universal solutions. At its worst, the international 'system' acts like the stereotypical Englishman abroad: if only we shout loud enough, the foreigners will understand, and do what we say. Laughable, of course, but not so far from the reality of bungled development projects and bucketfuls of inappropriate advice. *'True steadfastness sparkles with flexibility,'* says the spiritual master Gurumayi Chidvilasananda; the determination to work together is what matters, despite the differences and disagreements that arise along the way. Contrast that with the response of governments and aid agencies, consistently intolerant of different views and voices but inconsistent in their support for those who need it most. Heedless of the *Bhagavadgita's* instructions, the gifts of the rich world always come with strings attached. As a result, they rarely achieve the desired results. If these basic errors were put right, the possibilities of being helpful would be transformed. Since that requires confronting vested interests, this is unlikely to happen in the short term, but, as we have seen, there is no shortage of incremental

improvements waiting to be made. There *are* successes to build on, and ideas and possibilities aplenty. What we lack are the constituencies to put them into practice. 'How can I help?' The first part of the answer is obvious: if you are not already part of that constituency for change, then start work now.

Over the last 50 years, the record of international co-operation has been disappointing, for at least four reasons. First, it has failed to get to grips with the fundamental challenge of our times: reshaping global capitalism to spread the benefits of economic growth more evenly across societies, reduce its social and environmental costs, and achieve a basic level of security for everyone. Second, it has failed to establish the conditions required to make co-operation work: a sense of equality and mutual respect in international affairs, reciprocity, and the legitimacy that comes from democratic participation in setting the rules of the game. Third, it has neither halted the abuse of basic rights and freedoms, nor encouraged different ways of realising them in practice. Fourth, it has failed to engage with the forces that really change things, becoming over-dependent on action by recalcitrant governments and detached from the dynamism and innovation that marks out the best in business and civil society. Correcting these systemic weaknesses can't be engineered from the top down. All solutions start with you and me, not just by donating money to good causes but by demonstrating co-operative behaviour as the wellspring of our daily life. So don't switch off your internationalism when you go shopping, or face difficult decisions at work, or have the opportunity to be active in politics, or give to charity. If you really want to help, be an advert for the virtues of co-operation in all these arenas, and always look for connections between action at home and solutions abroad.

A conviction that we share obligations as citizens of overlapping worlds provides the key to the future of international co-operation, and chimes with the new spirit of social responsibility that is spreading rapidly through business and politics. One of the problems of constituency building has always been the unimportance of international development to the political mainstream, but the changing global context makes questions of international poverty and conflict increasingly relevant to all our futures. The need to manage the costs and benefits of global change in an increasingly interconnected world economy makes international co-operation matter in the political process. That is already happening, though pronouncements from Western capitals are stronger on rhetoric than reality, and hesitant and confused in their details. This is partly because the links between

domestic and international policy agendas have yet to be worked out and communicated in any convincing way. Now that the cold war is no more, there seems no grand narrative to motivate foreign policy, in contrast to the search for a 'third way' between free-market idolatry and state socialism that drives the centre-left in power. Prime Minister Blair and President Clinton speak far more confidently about these issues in Wisconsin or Liverpool than in global forums, though both recognise that solutions at home are inextricably bound up with a framework of international co-operation. One of the aims of this book has been to explore these links and map out a 'third way' in the international context. Crucially, this does not mean a new social and economic model to be exported across the globe, but a shared effort to create the conditions in which everyone can participate in finding their own ways forward, without imposing unsustainable costs on anyone else. It is that vision, messy and difficult to communicate as it is, that provides the philosophical framework we need to guide us into the 21st century. In place of universal prescriptions, we should focus on the things that all societies need to make choices about their future from a wider range of options: strong institutions and institutional linkages, coalitions of interest groups that use them for constructive ends, and an international setting favourable to local efforts.

Building the case for third-way policies is difficult enough in the domestic context. At the international level it is even more challenging, since short-term interests vary so much between one country and another. However, it is easier to identify solutions as the climate of ideas moves on, away from the complacency of 'globalisation as panacea' and the naiveté of 'de-linking as solution'. 'Davos man', Samuel Huntington's shorthand for the international elite who gather together in the Swiss Alps each January to discuss world affairs, seems ready to abandon his blind faith in globalisation in favour of managed markets and renewed social concern;<sup>3</sup> just as the thrust of radical critiques and NGO campaigns is turning toward constructive engagement. To be sure, the transition is slow and the details of what needs to be done are hazy, but the centrepiece of the debate is clear: globalisation has costs as well as benefits; both must be managed more effectively than in the past; and we can't do that without new ideas and institutions.

International co-operation is central to these ideas and institutions. It will not be co-operation as we have known it – a cloak for great-power interests, more or less successfully disguised – but a framework of rules and standards established and implemented through more democratic means. Peter Sutherland (one-time direc-

tor-general of GATT) has called for a 'globalisation summit' to ensure that the poorest countries have a fair say in negotiating this framework.<sup>4</sup> Otherwise there will be few dissenting voices, little real debate, and no answers that enjoy enough support to make them work. But the mood is changing here too. Calls for transparency and accountability in international institutions are mounting, participation by business and civic groups is no longer controversial (though it remains weak in practice), and sooner or later the changing balance of power will be reflected in who sits where at the global negotiating table. History does not start in the year 2000, just as it did not end in 1989 (despite Francis Fukuyama's claims to the contrary).<sup>5</sup> But if international co-operation does become the defining characteristic of the 21st century it will be a new beginning in one sense – the first time that human beings have actively codetermined their future on the world stage. Except, of course, that life is never so simple. 'The devil is in the detail', and the detail is what has frustrated substantive progress towards a more effective global system. So let's briefly review what the last 11 chapters tell us about the practice and potential of international co-operation, past, present and future.

### SUMMARY: LOOKING BACK

The first part of the book explored the role of outside assistance in promoting peace and prosperity. At the national level, success comes from a flexible economy, a polity that is strong enough to take decisions in favour of long-term goals, and a minimum level of satisfaction of everyone's basic needs. Countries that achieve these things do so, not because of a standard model, but because they have the capacity to manage change, coalitions of interest groups that push change through, and room to manoeuvre to find the appropriate balance between self-determination and outside opportunities; market competition, social co-operation and an active state. There are no universal mixtures that work across boundaries of context and culture. The best examples of this pattern at work are in East Asia, and a small number of countries or states elsewhere (like Botswana and Kerala). Despite the recent tarnishing of their 'miracle' status by the financial crisis that exploded at the end of 1997, countries like South Korea stand out from the rest in having addressed the basic questions of economic and industrial transformation that determine whether progressive social and political goals are achievable. Simplistic jibes about 'crony capitalism' cannot alter the fact that

absolute poverty has been eradicated in these countries, and in record time. The question is, what role did international co-operation play in this process?

The evidence shows that foreign aid, technology, investment and trading opportunities did play an important role, especially in the early stages of economic and social transition. External resources were needed to supplement domestic markets and skills, and mitigate the accidents of geography; temporary help with the balance of payments smoothed the way for difficult decisions; and a favourable international context provided the markets and political support that were essential for success. However, the contrasting experience of most African countries shows that none of this is automatic. Sub-Saharan Africa received as much foreign aid as East Asia (though much less in the form of investment and technology), but inherited a more difficult set of initial conditions and a less supportive global context – declining terms of trade, rising levels of debt, and a depression of world demand just at the time it needed expanding markets. Even so, it would be perverse to blame the ‘international system’ for Africa’s problems, given the shortcomings in domestic governance that underlay decision-making throughout this period. It didn’t help that outside assistance was poorly designed and shot through with the wrong incentives (*‘bad aid, badly used’*, as Chapter 3 put it), but even if it had been better, African countries would have been hard-pressed to replicate the virtuous interaction of domestic and international factors that was present in the high performers. In both cases, it wasn’t *policies* that made the difference on their own, but the *polities* that created and sustained them, and nurturing those is a much more delicate task than pushing money through the pipeline of foreign aid or forcing countries to accept the conditions that go with it.

At the project level, it is tempting to see the same pattern writ small, and in some ways this is true: the best development projects create social energy to solve development problems as well as material advances to sustain the solutions. However, national success is not simply the sum of successful projects. What really counts are the connections that develop between small-scale innovations and structural changes in economic systems and governance, and fostering those takes great sensitivity, flexibility and continuity over long periods of time. The problem is that international agencies need quick results to keep the aid funds flowing, and that leads them to prioritise the supply of external inputs over the demand to use them effectively. Rushing, lack of co-ordination, and an unwillingness to

hand over control have been characteristic of project aid for decades. As a result, outside intervention often undermines the foundations of the ‘good society’: a strong central authority, independent civil society groups, well-functioning markets, active communication to promote learning and accountability, and a framework of local ownership over mistakes as well as success.

When societies break down under the impact of famine, war, and civil strife, the need for external help may seem obvious. Yet the evidence reviewed in Chapter 5 shows that this is far from the case. Well-timed and properly-constructed intervention in humanitarian emergencies has been vital in saving lives, but in most cases both timing and strategy have been lacking. Rwanda and the Balkans are the two most recent examples, and the catastrophic loss of life in both has led some to question the future of humanitarianism as a whole. Improving the international response to ‘complex political emergencies’ rests on a combination of three things: long-term peace building (a society that accommodates differences when they are healthy and attacks them when they are not); developmental relief (short-term interventions that strengthen the conditions for long-term development), and international political action to address the external causes of insecurity and intervene with sufficient force at the right time. Unfortunately, none of these things are satisfactory at the moment, and support for relief far outweighs action on both of the others. The international response has been tardy, piecemeal and partial, creating more complications than solutions and leaving the causes of the problem to fester away. The reason is obvious – there is no consensus among the great powers on the desirability of intervention, and little stomach for the potential sacrifices involved in a more active, intelligent stance. The dilemma this creates is stark: do we intervene in the messy way international realities dictate, sure in the knowledge that this will complicate matters even further, or stay away while people suffer on the ground because we know we cannot do the job properly? There is only one moral answer: we must do better.

In all these areas, external help is never the key to internal change, and it is always a blunt weapon in the fight against poverty and violence. Yet the evidence shows that the right sort of help at the right time can be very influential in creating more space for local forces to get things right. So the obvious question is what sort of help is the right sort of help, and how do we ensure it is provided at the right time? In theory, the answer to the first part of this conundrum is simple: good help assists people to solve problems with fewer costs

to themselves and more benefits for the rest of the world by expanding the options available, illuminating alternatives, and providing more opportunities to develop and apply win-win solutions. It keeps responsibility in local hands, supports decision makers facing difficult decisions, and uses its influence to encourage more room to be 'manoeuvred' in favour of development goals instead of the interests of elites. This is partly a matter of the right support to local institutions, and partly a matter of reshaping the global context so that it is more favourable to local efforts. When these come together, the prospects for success are high.

The second part of the conundrum is more difficult, because it strikes at the heart of the problems that corrupt the effectiveness of international co-operation. Nearly all foreign aid, and most other forms of help, are based on the use of sticks and carrots to persuade the recipient to conform with conditions set by outsiders. Over time the conditions have grown, and, on the surface at least, become more progressive, but they are still applied in a framework of unequal power and responsibility that erodes local ownership over change. The results are predictably disappointing – the dysfunctional children of an unhappy marriage. What does breed success are three qualities conspicuous by their absence from the programmes of most rich-country governments, NGOs and international agencies. The first is consistency with local realities; the second is long-term continuity of support, de-linked from the volatile selectivity imposed by foreign policy concerns, unreliable funding, and donor fashions; and the third is coherence between all the things that influence development performance, from debt relief to diplomacy. Developing these three qualities means putting our own house in order and adopting an attitude of 'critical friendship': a loyal but challenging relationship in which both sides practise what they preach, and each trusts the other to find ways forward which fit their reality best. Successful collective action is difficult outside of relationships like these, but they are rare in the practice of international relations. The influence of the system created in 1945 dwindles along with its reputation, unwilling to break free from the security blanket of the foreign aid system, uncomfortable in the shades of grey that characterise development, and incapable of the reforms required to be of true service to others. Fifty years of foreign intervention have left us ill-prepared to face a co-operative future. So what's to be done?

## SUMMARY: LOOKING FORWARD

Imposing universal models never works, but for those of us who are simultaneously committed to universal human rights and to the right of others to decide things for themselves, what sort of international system should we be looking to build? The second part of the book answered that question by reversing the traditional order of things and refocusing international co-operation around a very different formula: competition between different paths to the same destinations (there are different ways of meeting social and economic goals); co-operation to reduce the costs they impose on individual societies and the world as a whole (collective action is required to protect universal rights and standards); and principled dialogue to decide which costs are acceptable and which are not. 'Principled dialogue' means an equal voice for everyone, and that is impossible without a redistribution of the skills and assets people need to participate in economic and political life, and the regulation of all exclusionary systems of power. International action in both areas can put the 'stake' into stakeholding at the global level, and build the incentives required to make co-operation work. Our leitmotif for the 21st century is simple: the right to one's own journey through life, and the obligation to support others on theirs, now and for future generations. But that implies wholesale changes in our approach to global problems and the institutions we've created to deal with them.

The first part of this new formula implies long-term support for each society to find its own ways of dealing with social and economic problems, in line with local realities. Chapter 7 explored how to do this by using foreign aid in a supporting role to a broader agenda of international co-operation, fostering the capacity of hard-pressed institutions and increasing their room to manoeuvre. The best way to achieve these goals would be a global compact for the future, supported by a world development fund independent of great-power domination: a single, negotiated framework of development co-operation for each country; consolidated funding (all assistance in one pot); and binding agreements on domestic and international action. Commitments to economic and social policies to help the poor by institutions in the developing world would be balanced by specific goals on debt relief and trade liberalisation in the industrialised world. Most important of all, the same rules would be applied to everyone: democratic participation in setting objectives and reciprocal accountability for results, whether you are the IMF or the Ugandan

government. The agencies that benefit from the current system will scream and shout, of course, about how unrealistic this is, and that requires a strategy to deal with opposition. We will come to that a little later.

A new framework for foreign aid would give countries more chance to get things right without abandoning accountability, but since change is inevitably painful and they are certain to make mistakes along the way, the second part of the formula is just as important: helping others to develop with 'fewer costs to themselves'. Chapter 8 explored this challenge in the context of humanising capitalism – preserving the growth-producing potential of markets and trade while finding better ways to distribute the surplus they create and reshape the processes that produce it. This is not because capitalism as we know it is the best economic system we can hope for, but because eradicating world poverty requires a level of growth which is impossible outside of a market economy and an integrated world trading regime, albeit implemented over time. Conventionally, 'empowerment' has been seen as the answer to poverty and social exclusion, but the real breakthrough comes from solutions that both empower people and encourage them to use some of the power they gain for unselfish ends: firms that are successful in markets but distribute work and profits more equally, for example, or collective approaches to caring which provide children with the support they need without placing an unequal burden on women. Foreign aid has a role to play in supporting innovations like these, but more importantly they need a system of rules-based co-operation at the global level to ensure that one country's sacrifices are not exploited by others. No government is likely to impose substantive 'green taxation' unless its competitors do the same. That raises fundamental questions about the future of global governance.

For sceptics, 'global governance' means 'world government', but as Chapter 9 points out, there is no necessary connection between the two. What is required are norms and standards that govern public and private behaviour across national boundaries. The costs of uncoordinated action can then be managed to reduce their impact on the 'world as a whole'. Gaining assent to rules and standards doesn't come through global regulations, but through a messy mixture of top-down and bottom-up authority; formal and informal pressure for compliance; and market mechanisms, social action, and government intervention. Reconstituting a legitimate sense of global authority (highlighted in the Introduction as one of the key challenges for the 21st century) is much more likely to come from the interaction of

these things over time, than from the decisions of the UN General Assembly, however much it is reformed. Global governance will only be effective when it is solidly rooted in ordinary people's lives, and connected upwards into international institutions that are closer to us, and which we trust. Nothing else will generate the incentives required to enforce changes in destructive behaviour. Respect for rules will come over time if they are negotiated democratically, applied consistently, and accompanied by support for compliance – unlike the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, say, or bombing Iraq while ignoring the transgressions of others.

The examples explored in Chapter 9 show how this might work. Global regimes work best when they are 'light but firm', not 'heavy and loose' – a small core of negotiated rules and standards, graduated by each country's ability to meet them, and backed by the necessary support and incentives. To be sure, there are few examples that fulfil these conditions, but on paper agreements already exist to prevent the most destructive of behaviours without interfering overmuch with market mechanisms or personal freedom: global pollution targets, minimum labour standards, rules for international intervention when populations are threatened by war or famine, and the provisions of the International Bill of Human Rights. More concerted action in these areas rests on the combined efforts of governments, business and civil society. It's not the UN that will save the earth or protect refugees – it's you and me. The international ban on landmines agreed at the end of 1997 shows how influential international civil society groups can be in exerting bottom-up pressure on official negotiations. Generally though, the problem is that 'you and me' don't feel involved in the structures and processes of global governance, nor are we likely to with the institutions we have today – a collection of overlapping mandates, top-heavy bureaucracies, and unaccountable decision-making procedures. The symbolic opportunity of a new millennium provides the ideal platform to address these problems through a simultaneous recommitment to UN principles and a deep reappraisal of their practice.

These proposals are persuasive in theory, but are they politically feasible? All change will be met with stiff resistance from vested interests, so the most that can be done is to outline a set of options that have an internal logic, linked to a strategy for generating the necessary public and political support. That was the subject of Chapter 10: how to build a constituency for international co-operation in the industrialised world. In many ways this is a thankless task, since most people's immediate interests have little to do with global citizenship.

But it is not impossible, with the right mix of moral messages and legitimate appeals to self-interest, and new communications strategies to back them up. The first step is to break free from paternalistic images of Third-World charity and the message that global issues can be tackled through foreign aid, and replace them with strategies that convince people to take action in their own lives to build a more co-operative world – as ethical consumers, agents of change in their communities, and active citizens of an increasingly internationally-minded polity.

The moral case for co-operation takes us back to the quotation from the *Bhagavadgita* cited at the beginning of this chapter. Simply put, we know that there are things in life that should be done, and one of them is making sure that everyone has the minimum required to live a life that is fulfilling. No other justification is required. '*The art of being kind is all this sad world needs.*'<sup>6</sup> However, that is not enough in practical terms. Most people need to be convinced that co-operation is in their interest, and that is a matter of making the costs of living in an uncooperative world much clearer to them. The increasing visibility of trans-boundary problems like pollution and financial instability makes this easier, but we need to work much harder to get the connections across, and be more active in compensating those who lose out from the domestic changes international co-operation demands. As the economist Lester Thurow points out, the contemporary world lacks any unifying ideology to provide a common sense of purpose to our collective struggles.<sup>7</sup> Competition offers nothing to bring us together, yet unite we must if we are to prosper in a web of increasingly interconnected relationships. The vision of a co-operative world which manages its differences and disagreements to mutual benefit could be a powerful leitmotif for the future, providing a source of meaning and a sense of purpose which does not require the wholesale surrender of self-interest or self-determination. We may never share a common vision of ends and means across so many cultures and generations, but we can all be committed to a process that allows everyone to share in defining how these different visions are reconciled. Co-operation does require some sacrifices, but once our basic needs are met they are not, in the end, very large ones to exchange for the prospect of a better future. We would enjoy it too – the global equivalent of an end to noisy neighbours and the driver who always ignores the rules on the highway.

None of this will happen without leadership, and where is that to come from in these times of discredited ideology and diminished public figures? Chapter 10 argued that this is the job of NGOs like

Oxfam, who have the contacts and credibility required to spearhead a global movement for change. What they sometimes lack are the courage and imagination to strike out in new directions, especially when these offer less security than the comfort of the foreign-aid system. Tarnished, as all heroes are, by the real world demands of compromise, pressures to conform, and internal failings, it is still civil society that reappears in every chapter of this book as innovator, facilitator, bridge builder and counterweight: providing channels for accountability and communication in the 'good society'; supporting poor people to organise and fight for their rights; experimenting with new social and economic models; and helping to underpin the norms of an emerging global polity. The challenge to civil society groups is to put their own houses in order so that they can do more of these things, more effectively: not as contractors to a shrinking supply of foreign aid, but as active partners in the broader networks and alliances that will spearhead change in the next century. To do that they must forge more equal relationships with each other across the changing boundaries of North and South, and engage strategically with states and markets to effect changes where they matter most.

An active global citizenry that uses its muscle to promote co-operation in all areas of life is a prerequisite for a positive future of this kind, but in the meantime there is much to be done to make the institutions we already have work more effectively. That requires a professional constituency for reform on the inside, as well as greater political pressure to perform from the outside. Institutional change is partly a matter of the right systems, structures and incentives; and at a more fundamental level, an issue of personal change – helping professionals to be exemplars of the qualities they wish to encourage in others. Chapter 11 called this 'the getting of wisdom', meaning a combination of knowledge, technical skills, and the discrimination required to use them effectively. That comes only from long experience and constant self-enquiry, especially in a profession fixated on the problems of others, and others as problems, and defensive about its own part in creating the world that it then tries to change. The result is a yawning gap between rhetoric and reality in all development agencies which requires concerted action in three areas: better learning, with more feedback loops into policy and practice; stronger accountability, especially to users or beneficiaries; and positive incentives to perform in ways conducive to long-term impact, not short-term financial results. Institutions succeed far more by letting go against a clear bottom line than through micro-management. There are plenty of ways this could be done, but none which ignore the most personal of bottom lines,

which is honesty. After serving an apprenticeship of self-development, we qualify to be 'critical friends' with others. Once liberated from the conceit that we know best, we can get on with the job of using the gifts we have in a more constructive way.

## NO FINAL WORDS

Much of the world has developed at breakneck speed over the last 200 years, but we are still incapable of living at peace with ourselves or with each other, and unwilling to eradicate the scandal of global poverty and hunger. We have the resources, the technology, the ideas and the wealth, but we don't yet have the will and imagination to harness these things to a higher purpose. I have tried in this book to explore what this purpose might be – the vision of a co-operative world – and how we might get there in practice. Hundreds of detailed proposals have been made, and hundreds more have been made by others, but none has the slightest guarantee of success. The only certainty is the certainty of struggle, and life, as M Scott Peck is fond of saying, '*is what happens when we plan something else*'.<sup>8</sup> What lies ahead is the still-constant movement of engagement and retreat, two steps forward and one step back, that demands the courage and conviction to carry on regardless.

Underlying all the details and uncertainties are some issues of principle that will make or break the prospects for a more co-operative world. The devil may be in the detail, but the '*power and magic*', as Goethe puts it, lie in '*boldness and simplicity of vision*'.<sup>9</sup> The first principle is this – co-operation requires the exercise of co-operative values: putting your house in order; practising what you preach; being transparent, consistent, and accountable for your side of the bargain; and showing that you have the strength to challenge and be challenged without wrecking the relationship as a whole. The world will never be secure if our goal is to wipe out the differences that exist between us; we have to find ways of uniting with our positive differences intact.<sup>10</sup> So co-operation means talking, listening, learning, and always reaching out to make connections with others. These are the foundations for a positive future. Second, co-operation doesn't work unless all those involved have the basic essentials of a fulfilling life: voice, security and equality of rights. With those things in place, people can make their own choices about the good life, and the sacrifices that are necessary to make more room for others. Eradicating absolute poverty and all forms of gross oppression is therefore a precondition

for a co-operative future, as well as the outcome of co-operative practice now. We can't make other people happy, but we can support each other in our attempts to lead more fulfilling lives and help to create an environment in which wholesome choices are more likely.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps that is obvious in our relationships with those we love, but it is no less true of relations between countries.

'*The last word is that there is no last word*,' as Robert Chambers tells us, and thank goodness for that.<sup>12</sup> It relieves me of the obligation to pull any rabbits out of hats, reveal the ultimate answer to global problems, or find the final key that unlocks the mess and uncertainty of life. However, to accept this stance without surrendering the determination to move on is itself a key of sorts, and the basis of the critical friendship on which all our futures depend – the loving but forceful encounters between equals who journey together into the unknown but dreamed-of world of the true and the beautiful. '*Any mindful action undertaken in a spirit of love will help the transformative process along*,' as the writer Elise Boulding once remarked.<sup>13</sup> We are co-creators of the world we live in, and must take responsibility for doing what we can to make it worthy of ourselves and a fitting legacy for future generations.<sup>14</sup> That is real co-operation – '*helping others to escape*' from constraints and limitations as Fredrich von Hugel wrote to his niece, not digging them further into the mud like the hermit and his friends who were cited at the beginning of the Introduction. Any relationship that is truly principled will lead upwards to a more fulfilling conclusion, even though we can never be sure what it will look like at any level of detail. Co-operation will show us a better way forward; never to a future perfect, but always to a future positive. Now, let's get back to work.