

## **THE EMERGING SOLIDARITY ECONOMY: SOME COMMON THEMES**

### **Solidarity Economy Working Group for USSF 2007**

**The Solidarity Economy** constitutes an alternative economic framework to the model of neoliberal capitalism. A framework which is grounded on solidarity and cooperation, rather than the pursuit of narrow, individual self-interest, and that promotes economic democracy, alternative models of local economic governance, equity and sustainability rather than the unfettered rule of the market.

**While noncapitalist, cooperative forms of economic organization have always existed, solidarity economy is a recent and evolving concept and practice, which is being defined from the bottom/up:** The term “solidarity economy” emerged about 10 years ago, and solidarity economy organizations and networks now exist in Latin America, most European countries, Africa, Asian, and Canada. While the U.S. has many solidarity economy practices, institutions, and networks, the term itself is not well known in the US. As of yet, we do not have either a framework that unites them conceptually as an overall system, or an overarching network of solidarity economy organizations.

#### **Solidarity economy involves three overlapping but distinct types of solidarity:**

- Values-based solidarity: solidarity with people, movement groups, NGO's, worker cooperatives and other businesses who share economic justice values – e.g. Fair Trade, ethical consumption, and socially responsible investment practices
- Anti-oppression solidarity: solidarity with oppressed countries or with oppressed groups of people, especially the poor, women, indigenous peoples, people of color, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered peoples, and workers
- Vision-based solidarity: solidarity among people, economic organizations, and social movements based on shared visions for local and global economic development that are economically, socially, and environmentally restorative, and shared advocacy of transformative institutions and policies such as Bolivia's People's Trade Agreement, participatory budgeting and labor-based investment funds

#### **Solidarity economy involves two levels of solidarity:**

- Micro-solidarity: egalitarian and participatory economic behavior by individuals, workers, and producers, such as by an individual who is an ethical consumer, worker, or investor, or by a worker-coop, fair trade business, or progressive union
- Macro-solidarity: the development of networks aimed at supporting and growing the solidarity economy among individuals and institutions. This involves networks of organizations involved in micro-solidarity, such as the Fair Trade Federation, SAS (Students Against Sweatshops), and national, regional, and international networks of solidarity economy organizations such as RIPESS (The Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social Solidarity Economy), and NANSE (North American Network for the Solidarity Economy). A key aspect of macro-solidarity is organized activity by these networks, in coalition with other progressive groups, aimed at transforming the state and global institutions so as to make them supportive to the growth of the solidarity economy.

### **Reform and Revolution:**

Solidarity economy involves both transforming current economic institutions, and growing alternatives to them. Solidarity economy values, practices and institutions currently coexist with neo-liberal capitalist ones in all sectors of the economy. The ultimate vision is 1) to grow these values, practices and institutions through conscious activity designed to transform civil society, the market, and the state, and 2) to link these solidarity economy activities in a network of mutual support, such that they transform neo-liberal capitalism into a just, democratic, and sustainable economic paradigm and system.

### **Solidarity economy involves a continuum of forms of relations of production, and different solidarity economy networks link various subsets of these:**

- From landless workers to family farmers to agricultural cooperatives
- From self-employed entrepreneurs and local small-scale businesses, to high road businesses and corporations, to worker-owned cooperatives and collectives and community businesses
- Indigenous, collectivist forms of production

### **Solidarity economy involves a range of social sectors and focuses:**

- The Canadian social economy involves cooperatives and non-profit enterprises in many sectors, which are often supported by government programs obtained through the mobilization of social movements, especially in Quebec province
- The Brazilian solidarity economy relies heavily on unions, landless worker organizing, and the creation of cooperatives among those living in informal settlements
- The European platform for ethical and solidarity-based initiatives focuses on anti-materialism and ethical consumption
- NANSE (The North American Network for the Solidarity Economy) is committed to organizing against the neo-liberal vision on all levels and in all sectors

### **Solidarity economy simultaneously promotes unity and diversity:**

- Unity around shared values of equality (especially gender, race, and economic equality), participatory democracy, cooperation, sustainability, community
- Diversity is not only accepted but valued, encouraged, and celebrated, including diversity of culture, of conceptual frameworks, of ways of structuring economic institutions, of priorities, and of ways of movement building

### **To Read More about the Solidarity Economy:**

Some basic links on the solidarity economy include the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social Solidarity Economy website <http://www.ripess.net/en/>; the Alliance 21 website [http://www.alliance21.org/2003/sommaire\\_en.php3](http://www.alliance21.org/2003/sommaire_en.php3); the Workgroup on Solidarity Socio-Economy website <http://www.socioeco.org/en/index.php>; the Canadian Social Economy Hub website <http://www.socialeconomynetwork.ca/hub/>; and an article by the Brazilian Forum of Solidarity Economy on Brazil's solidarity economy movement [http://www.fbes.org.br/docs/Brazilian\\_Solidarity\\_Economy\\_Movement.pdf](http://www.fbes.org.br/docs/Brazilian_Solidarity_Economy_Movement.pdf); see also [www.geo.coop](http://www.geo.coop) and [www.transformationcentral.org](http://www.transformationcentral.org).