Social Economy Stories

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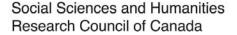
Acknowledgements

The Canadian CED Network

Le Réseau canadien de DÉC

Social Sciences and Humanities
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The Social Economy Stories Project

The Social Economy is made up of civil society organizations that deliberately address social objectives through economic action, often aimed at creating greater social and economic equality and opportunity for people and communities most disadvantaged in our current economy. Co-operatives, credit unions and non-profit community organizations, are all part of the Social Economy. The blending of social and economic objectives is taking root across the world as the best means to replace dependency and exclusion with self-determination and self-sufficiency. CCEDNet is a member of the global movement (RIPESS) that has formed to promote the Social and Solidarity Economy as the vehicle to transform global poverty and inequality. In Canada, CCEDNet and its partner organization in Quebec (le Chantier de l'économie sociale) have advocated for investment in a major national research program to generate evidence and understanding of the impact and potential of the Social Economy. This led to the creation of the Canadian Social Economy Hub with funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. The program is co-led by CCEDNet and the University of Victoria's BC Institute for Co-operative Studies, with several hundred research partners and projects throughout Canada.

The Social Economy stories published here are designed to provide practitioners' perspectives on what the Social Economy means to them and their communities. The first phase of this project produced seven stories written by CCEDNet's *Create-Action* interns, based on interviews with practitioners in Canada's Social Economy. These "stories" capture the human face of the sector and demonstrate the Social Economy as a real movement that is addressing the social, economic and environmental challenges of today in integrative and innovative ways.

CCEDNet intends to develop a second phase of this project focusing on how the Social Economy creates solidarity within the country (i.e. between non-profits, CED organizations, credit unions, etc.) and how this inspires practitioners in their work. This phase will seek to highlight the voices of Aboriginal, immigrant and women practitioners in particular.

The Canadian CED Network

The Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet) is a national, member-based organization committed to creating economic opportunities and enhancing social conditions in Canada. The membership of CCEDNet is made up of community groups, municipalities, foundations, CED practitioners and active citizens from every region of the country.

Community Economic Development (CED) is community-led action to create economic opportunities and better social conditions, particularly for those who are most disadvantaged.

To learn more about CCEDNet, please visit www.ccednet-rcdec.ca.

A Method of Transforming the World
with Dr. Greg MacLeod

Dr. Greg MacLeod is a community economic development pioneer and the director of the Tompkins Institute for Human Values & Technology in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. The Tompkins Institute has been engaged in community business research since 1974 and investigates the effect of technological change on Cape Breton and the rest of society. The institute bridges the gap between university and community and is seen as an incubator for new and alternative models in the Social Economy. Greg is also the founding chairperson of New Dawn Enterprises, the oldest community development corporation in Canada and a founding member of the Canadian CED Network. More recently Greg founded the BCA Community Venture Finance Group, a community investment company.

"The problem with the global economy is that it is controlled by absentee owners, which is why we emphasize locally controlled markets and what I call 'place-based development.' Today, the world is governed by greed and competition — the rich take from the poor. The Social Economy narrows the gap between rich and poor."

"A method of transforming the world," is Greg MacLeod's simple yet powerful explanation of his vision of the Social Economy. By embedding the values of democracy, co-operation and responsibility into a local entrepreneurial framework Greg believes that communities can be catalysts in transforming our world from a "race-to-the-bottom" into "a world where everyone has a job and lives a full and abundant life on all levels - materially, culturally and spiritually."

A well-respected leader of community economic development (CED) in Canada, Greg is an entrepreneur and author who has been active in CED for over three decades.

His work builds upon a tradition of Social Economy development that began in the Maritimes during the 1920s, with the Antigonish Movement, which was led by Father Moses Coady. Father Coady founded the Extension Department at St. Francis Xavier University to address the growing poverty and unemployment caused by decades of economic decline in fishing, agriculture, and mining in eastern Nova Scotia. Father Coady found an inspirational partner in Father Jimmy Tompkins, who is credited with establishing Nova Scotia's first regional library and its first credit union. The two priests, with help from others, implemented a visionary yet pragmatic approach by combining adult education with co-operative enterprise development and finance.

Dr. MacLeod, also a priest and educator, is carrying on the legacy of Father Coady and Father Tompkins with his compelling vision for self-sustaining community life. He sees the Social Economy and its democratic values as the social bedrock upon which cultural and spiritual well-being may flourish. He believes the Social Economy will transform the market economy and that its purpose is not to act merely as an appendage of the latter.

"The problem with the global economy is that it is controlled by absentee owners," he says, "which is why we emphasize locally controlled markets and what I call 'place-based development.' Today, the world is

> *"We created jobs and improved lives, but I also enjoyed doing these things. I think that the giver benefits and grows as well as the receiver."*

governed by greed and competition – the rich take from the poor. The Social Economy narrows the gap between rich and poor."

Greg would know. For over 30 years he has set up and managed a wide variety of community businesses with New Dawn Enterprises, a multi-functional community development corporation with $15-million in assets, 175 employees, and services that reach up to 600 people each day through its ventures. These numbers demonstrate in a real way the extent to which the Social Economy has positively impacted the community of Sydney, Nova Scotia and support the beliefs that ignite Greg's work. But he also notices the positive effect his work has had on himself.

"We created jobs and improved lives, but I also enjoyed doing these things. I think that the giver benefits and grows as well as the receiver."

This is strong encouragement to become part of the Social Economy movement, especially for those looking for real satisfaction in their work.

While Greg appreciates the value of bringing people together from various backgrounds, he recognizes that co-operation is difficult to facilitate and that people need to be willing to work with others.

"Our strategy is to recruit local people who get along with each other and who are morally committed to the local environment. If they don't get along, the project will definitely fail."

This certainly portrays a challenge for Social Economy development in a world that has increasingly

become individualistic and competitive in its conventional economic development.

But Greg is working hard against these trends and has helped to raise over $2-million for community investment through the BCA Community Venture Finance Group. While this economic growth is exciting, Greg reminds us that within the Social Economy monetary returns are not the only incentive.

"The benefits to communities are not only material - there are deep bonds made in terms of friendship and the formation of communities; a sense of renewal and community pride emerges."

For more information on Greg's work, visit: www.ced.ca/gregmacleod. Watch an interview with Greg visit: www.euskosare.org/komunitateak/forokoop/video_blogs/entrevistas/greg_macleod.

A Place to Find Your Inner Flame
with Stephen Ameyaw

Stephen Ameyaw has researched and written extensively on women and socio-economic development, Aboriginal CED, regional/community planning, and sustainable community development. A native of Ghana, he coordinated a study of his home country for a six-nation report entitled 'The World Experience in Community Development.' Stephen has served as a consultant to many organizations and communities, including the Inuit Circumpolar Council and several Aboriginal communities. He is an active member of the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO), a member of the Canadian CED Network's Policy Council and a research associate to the Centre for Sustainable Community Development (CSCD) at Simon Fraser University. Stephen holds a PhD in Regional Planning and Resource Development from the University of Waterloo, and has taught at Simon Fraser University, the University of Calgary, the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, and Arctic Colleges in Rankin Inlet, Arviat, and Iqaluit, and several Aboriginal colleges.

"Communities must be able to have control, to plan their vision for their own future, and protect and control their resources. Only through community action can you achieve community control."

"It made me mad, mad, mad!" Stephen Ameyaw jokes. "I felt so deprived." In Ghana, women traditionally do all of the housework, but with four boys and no daughters Stephen's mother had to rely on him to contribute while his brothers went out to play soccer with the other boys. Stephen laughs as he recalls the story but he is serious about the feeling of 'deprivation' that he and many women experienced in being required to work at home. His childhood experience of gender inequality was the initial catalyst for his research into women's empowerment and lit what he calls his inner flame for justice, equity, sustainability, inclusiveness and participation.

Today, Stephen's anger has been converted into fuel for social change. He teaches his First Nations students that each one of them is "a flame in the dark" and he encourages them to bring light to their communities by transforming their own anger and frustration into positive action.

Stephen is devoted to developing the Social Economy. He believes it can fill in the gaps in today's market economy, which has left groups of people underrepresented and excluded. While he admits that our current market system is "the best one we have," he reminds us that it was originally created in a class-based society and remains class-based today. By leaving the means of production in the hands of the affluent who run monopolies, the cycle of inequality continues. The Social Economy, on the other hand, involves a "continual process towards achieving and sustaining social and economic assets, programs and enterprises for all community members." It represents a shift in our values from self-interest to community-mindedness. By empowering the entire community through enterprise and skills development, local citizens are able to take charge of their own futures.

"Communities," says Stephen, "must be able to have control, to

> *"Continued pursuit of the conventional growth model as the focal point of development has been a failure. We must move beyond concerns for profit to address the social, cultural and spiritual dimensions of human nature."*

plan their vision for their own future, and protect and control their resources. Only through community action can you achieve community control."

In Canada's Social Economy, communities are propelled by the desire to control the solutions to their own social, economic, and environmental challenges. Stephen identifies four key values that provide a framework for the activities within the Social Economy: inclusiveness, accountability, knowledge-based action, and active citizenship. With these values, individuals, families, and entire neighbourhoods can become actively engaged in revitalizing local economies.

Market activities within the Social Economy are not driven by profit. Rather, the goal is to build and strengthen community assets, which are neither private nor public, but owned by the community. Examples include small-scale enterprises, co-operatives, NGOs and non-profits, says Stephen. The future of the Social Economy will depend upon activities that foster solidarity between these enterprises, creating a collective voice loud enough to change policies.

Many organizations have grown with the support of both the private and public sectors while, conversely, many others have been able to develop despite a lack of support. Ultimately, Stephen sees the Social Economy as a balancing force, filling gaps in social services neglected by government and business, while working to bring these two sectors

together to contribute in a meaningful way. He calls this an "associative economy" because it uses co-operative and mutually supporting mechanisms that promote win-win situations for the business community, universities, civil society, government, the environment and most importantly, community members.

Stephen argues that the economic growth model developed by neo-liberalism and the New Right starts with the premise that "if economic growth can be sustained, the poor will be swept along with the tide of rising income." The Social Economy model, however, acknowledges that the "continued pursuit of the conventional growth model as the focal point of development has been a failure. We must move beyond concerns for profit to address the social, cultural and spiritual dimensions of human nature," he adds.

To learn more about Stephen's work with SFU's Centre for Sustainable Community Development, visit: www.sfu.ca/cscd/bio/stephen_ameyaw.html.

BYTE: Sinking its Teeth into the Social Economy
with Rachel Parks

Rachel Parks is the Executive Director of Bringing Youth Towards Equality (BYTE), a youth initiated and directed Social Economy organization located in Whitehorse, Yukon. BYTE's work extends into the Northwest Territories and Alaska. The organization uses the arts, creative public actions, performance, forums, and camps to help youth develop skills, confidence, and a strong voice within their communities. Rachel came to BYTE in October 2006, with degrees in education and social sciences and a strong background in environmental studies. Since childhood, she has dreamt about becoming an alternative teacher.

"Social Economy is working with all facets of the community to make it a better place."

"If you can connect with a Social Economy organization than you are connecting with your greater community," says Rachel Parks. The concept of Social Economy is very new for Rachel but one to which she has already begun to relate.

From a very early age Rachel was drawn to teaching. While her earliest role models were teachers within the public school system she has developed a strong appreciation for alternative approaches to education through working in group homes for at-risk youth. "You're not restricted as much [in a non-profit] as working in the school system," she says. "I'm not given top-down curriculum that I have to teach and have to get into the minds of the youth. I'm teaching youth what they actually want to learn."

BYTE recognizes the impor-

tance of involving youth in the decision making process and empowering youth to take the lead in getting what they need. In this way, BYTE is involving those who are the focus of development in the decision making process, an important Social Economy principle. And by addressing the social needs of the youth within these small communities, they are also developing employable skills and economic opportunities for the community at large.

Since 1998, BYTE has been providing a wide variety of programs throughout the Yukon to involve multiple levels of community to help engage youth in educational, social, and economic activities. Rachel links this type of activity to what's happening in the Social Economy: "Social Economy is working with all facets of the community to make it a better place." With their community action camps, BYTE staff talk to community youth workers, Aboriginal Peoples, other stakeholders in the community and, most importantly, the youth themselves to find out what youth are dealing with and what they want to learn.

Rachel recalls holding a community action camp in a small town where youth were not using the youth centre or other resources available to them. They were also drinking heavily and generally disengaged from the rest of the community. BYTE brought the youth together and held a workshop which focused on how to deal with the issues they were facing.

One of the things that came out of this meeting was that "they wanted a welding program to learn how to weld. So, BYTE involved Skills Canada and they said they would fund it," says Rachel. As a result, youth became engaged in their community and actually began developing employable skills and a program that could be used by youth and adults in the future.

Rachel understands the importance of youth engagement in developing the social and economic sustainability of the Yukon. One of the greatest struggles local communities are dealing with is the migration of youth to larger urban areas outside of the territory. One of the ways that BYTE is trying to develop a sense of ownership and belonging for youth is by providing avenues for their voices to be heard. The youth voice has been represented by BYTE in the development of a fifty year sustainability plan for the city of Whitehorse and on "different local, national and international steering committees in town as well, with different organizations or coalitions."

When Rachel first read the definition for Social Economy she discovered an immediate relationship with the work she was doing with BYTE. "If this [definition of Social Economy] didn't exist we'd still be doing all of these five points because this is defining what we do, there's such a strong connection here." While she is excited to be learning about Social Economy and what it means to her she also recognizes a need for broader education around what the sector is and how it is affecting people's lives. "I don't think that the majority of people know about Social Economy. But does it influence them? Yes."

Rachel is dedicated to her work and is constantly looking at ways to improve and expand BYTE's programs and vision. She is optimistic about the future of BYTE and its goals to improve life for youth in the Yukon. "I hope that BYTE can increase its funding so we can reach out to more youth and do tailored workshops to more community groups. I also hope BYTE will never lose sight of its goal to be socially, ecologically, and ethically responsible."

To learn more about Rachel's work with BYTE, visit: www.yukonyouth.com.

"I don't think that the majority of people know about Social Economy. But does it influence them? Yes."

The Complex Web of the Social Economy
with Pascale Lavoie-Scott

Pascale Lavoie-Scott is an Economic Development Officer with the Société de développement économique de la Colombie-Britannique (SDÉCB) in Victoria, BC, an economic development organization that represents the economic interests of the Francophone community in the province. She encourages entrepreneurship and provides technical assistance to community economic development initiatives and the community at large by sharing economic information and offering training in subjects such as business planning and market research. The SDÉCB also represents the Economic Development and Employability Network of B.C. in which they manage the Community Economic Development (CED) Program for Francophones in BC. Pascale also sits on CCEDNet's BC/Yukon Council and is a faculty member of the Community Economic Development Centre at Simon Fraser University.

"Just as the private market economy declines so can the Social Economy. The more people become isolated in suburbs and the less in tune they are to each other, the weaker the community is and the less the Social Economy can grow."

"The Social Economy is a complex web of grassroots civil society organizations that work in different ways to increase community control over social and economic assets," says Pascale Lavoie-Scott. But it is also more than a set of organizations and their transactions; it is embedded in the way we communicate with each other and live together. "Social Economy is another way of conducting business which places human values around relationships, trust and reciprocity at the forefront," she says.

Often the Social Economy is defined in contrast to the private market economy, and certainly there are acute differences particularly in the organizational structure and objectives. Although the two economies are not mutually exclusive, as a consumer it can be difficult to distinguish one from the other. Similarly, the Social Economy is not safe from the diseases of which the private market economy suffers. Pascale explains, "Just as the private market economy declines so can the Social Economy. The more people become isolated in suburbs and the less in tune they are to each other, the weaker the community is and the less the Social Economy can grow. The more we become individualistic, the more social capital crumbles, the more the Social Economy dies."

But the Social Economy also shows signs of increasing community connectivity and solidarity. Pascale and others like her are increasingly realizing that community plays a large role in our health, livelihood and happiness. The Social Economy has been amazingly adaptive in addressing the various community needs that have not been met through other means. Just as Pascale's work with the SDÉCB is very important to the community she serves, others are working to improve the lives of often marginalized groups and are applying a wide range of approaches to developing the Social Economy.

One of the key approaches to growing the Social Economy is through CED. Pascale explains that "the Social Economy uses CED as the methodology and the tool that

"The private market framework is failing us. When everything fails, you take things into your own hands. Eventually, the community expects solutions from within, and takes control."

communities can use to gain control of their own future. It is a way of doing business, it is a lens and it is a belief system. CED comes under the Social Economy umbrella. The Social Economy is the super structure, which in its multifaceted and intricate way is abstract; CED is the tangible and definite aspect."

Academics and practitioners within the Social Economy have noticed that communities decline as their control over local economies dwindles. Members of declining communities characteristically grow more "depressed, isolated and lonely," says Pascale. "The private market framework is failing us. When everything fails, you take things into your own hands. Eventually, the community expects solutions from within, and takes control. When put in certain circumstances and situations you will find that people will act in a way that creates Social Economy - they want to build up lost capital again."

Despite the evidence that CED is effectively creating change within communities and that people are finding acceptance and renewed self-esteem within the Social Economy, it is not always an easy task to promote this movement as an alternative to the private market economy. One of the biggest challenges to advancing the Social Economy is that "people may not know the term nor identify with it. It is not a part of the common language in all levels of Canadian society…and [people] have to be able to see themselves in the light of this very language."

Another challenge Pascale identifies is the dissimilarity between the structures of the Social Economy movement and the current governmental system, which is structured much more like a private sector organization. "To combine the decentralized nature of the movement – with its different groups advocating for the same things – with a milieu where the power is extremely centralised, you find yourself in a bind," she says.

"We have a lot of work to do to create an atmosphere in which the Social Economy can flourish, expand, be beautiful, grand and appreciated by all concerned," she says. "And this, in many ways, is happening both through individual and community interest and through growing tension in our society." Pascale reminds us that before every social movement a period of social unrest exists.

"When you look at the extreme environment around us, characterized by unemployment, inequality, economic disparity, you see they form a Molotov cocktail for change," she says. But the social change being brought about in the form of Social Economy is a peaceful one, distinguished by a sense of belonging and a willingness to work together. "For me the Social Economy is about finding balance and making choices, such as buying from co-operatives or having a volunteer life, [so that we can make] relationships and connections that are necessary for a healthy community."

To learn more about Pascale's work with the Société de développement économique de la Colombie-Britannique, visit: www.deccb.ca.

Communication: The Undeclared Soul of the Social Economy
with Silver Donald Cameron

Silver Donald Cameron is an accomplished author of plays, films, radio and TV scripts, non-profit and governmental papers, magazine articles, non-fiction books and novels. He has served as a consultant to many corporate, government and non-profit clients. Silver Donald is also a distinguished educator, having served as the first Dean of the School of Community Studies at the University College of Cape Breton and having taught at Dalhousie University, the University of British Columbia and the University of New Brunswick. He helped found Telile, Isle Madame's community television station, and Development Isle Madame, a community-owned, non-profit company creating economic and community opportunities. He has served as Vice Chairman of the Writers Union of Canada, a director of North Isle Madame Credit Union and the first Executive Director of Centre Bras d'Or in Baddeck, N.S. He owns and operates two companies, Paper Tiger Enterprises Ltd. and Arichat Apartment Rentals Ltd. in his home town of D'Escousse, Cape Breton.

"When we think of prosperity we don't think about government, or the public sector, or the potential of the Social Economy. Instead, we have been taught to always think about private enterprise."

Silver Donald Cameron can see the development of his work in the Social Economy stemming all the way back to his childhood. His parents, who were both teachers, taught him from an early age "to try to leave the world a little better of a place than we found it." This understanding of public service grew as he entered university and became involved in the 1960s peace movement and when he arrived in Halifax and began to make friends with the likes of late-

mayor Allan O'Brian and current Halifax MP, Alexa McDonough.

Silver Donald's strength is in communication. In his own words: "I am a communicator; I communicate community." He has dedicated his life to writing and to media such as radio and television, both from sheer enjoyment of the art involved in these avenues of expression, and out of a strong desire to inform and engage community. Right now, however, he notes that the private sector has completely monopolized the field of communication. "It is amazing to note what a good job the corporations have done portraying the world in terms that are favourable to them," he says. "When we think of prosperity we don't think about government, or the public sector, or the potential of the Social Economy. Instead, we have been taught to always think about private enterprise."

Practitioners in the Social Economy have a long way to go to educate and inspire the general public, and they need to use every mode of communication. "Part of the reason that Isle Madame is seen as such a success story is that it has had a professional writer telling its story," he says. But it hasn't just been Silver Donald's writing that has made an impact. In 1994, realizing that TV was the main channel of information in his bilingual community, Silver Donald spearheaded the founding of Telile, a community broadcasting station which continues to flourish.

Silver Donald identifies a strong

"If you don't have good communication, you can't have effective collective action."

pragmatism as another requirement for success within the Social Economy sector, which he saw first-hand when the fishing moratorium struck Atlantic Canada. "Our ruthless realism and real understanding of our community has allowed us to survive. The fish have not come back but people have found other ways to prosper," he says. Isle Madame's leaders had foreseen the fisheries collapse, and had already begun to develop new enterprises and training opportunities. When the moratorium came into effect, islanders had already begun new projects.

"The Social Economy meant survival," he says. "With the collapse of the cod fishery we could have lost so many [people] that the community would also have collapsed. Yet, because of our deep investment in community, in people rather than profit, we have replaced the jobs lost from the fishery closures with comparable, meaningful work. Without the Social Economy our relative prosperity would not exist."

Some of the new opportunities Silver Donald speaks of came in the form of aquaculture, tourism and boat building, to name just a few. And this only scrapes the surface of what community economic development can mean because "the people themselves develop when the community does the development work needed to ensure its own future," he says. The skills and the imagination exist in every community to develop their own sense of sustainability and worth. Part of the challenge is moving away from passive economic
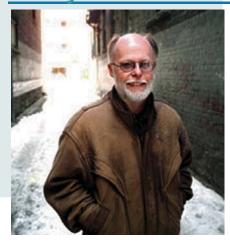
development, such as bringing in employers from outside the community, towards more active economic development, which recognizes the community's knowledge and interests and creates opportunities for the development of employability skills and local enterprise.

And that requires communication, particularly within the community, but also communication with potential supporters elsewhere, such as government agencies, potential partners, markets and so on. "If you don't have good communication, you can't have effective collective action," says Silver Donald.

"The thing I like best about the Social Economy is that people are doing these things for all the right reasons," he says. "Instead of inadvertently causing damage, we are engaged in work that actually benefits our home communities. The Social Economy is about providing goods and services that people need; it is not about the chase for profit."

To learn more about Silver Donald's work, visit: www.silverdonaldcameron.ca.

Accumulating the Small Achievements
with Jim Silver

Jim Silver is a full-time professor in the politics department at the University of Winnipeg and is co-director of the university's new Urban and Inner-City Studies program. This new program has a strong community development curriculum and is aimed at attracting non-traditional students — such as inner-city residents, urban Aboriginal people, and immigrants and refugees. Jim is also a founding member of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in Manitoba (CCPA–MB) and is very involved in Winnipeg's inner-city initiatives. He has been active in affordable housing development through the Winnipeg North End Renewal Corporation and has published research on public housing projects. Jim has also helped to set up an employment resource centre and an adult learning centre where Grade 12 equivalency programs are offered to mature students. These centres will provide childcare and parenting programs in the near future.

"We all share the work and we work together. That is how I think about CED and the Social Economy and that's why I love it."

Jim Silver's interest in the Social Economy and community economic development (CED) as a way to ensure social justice was developed at an early age. He grew up in a working class family with trade unionist parents who were supporters of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), and later the New Democratic Party. In his early twenties he went to Africa as a volunteer with CUSO and says he "became curious as to why people who were so bright and hardworking were also so poor." Jim did his PhD in African development policy but "came full circle to look at these same issues, right on our door step in the inner-city of Winnipeg."

For Jim, the Social Economy is about providing people with the opportunity and support they need to take charge of their own lives. It's grassroots, it's collective, and it's community-based. "I work face to face with people in the community," he says. "We all share the work and we work together. That is how I think about CED and the Social Economy and that's why I love it."

But Jim admits that often his work within the Social Economy is not about fast change and large achievements. Rather, "A lot of times, in doing inner-city community development work, the victories are small ones in the grand scheme of things," he says. "It's keeping at it and the cumulative impact of the number of small achievements that really add up."

And these efforts really are adding up. The CCPA's State of the Inner City Report: 2007, of which Jim is a contributor, shows that the lives of people in Winnipeg are being improved by community organizations, often in small ways such as raised self-esteem or higher volunteerism in local organizations by community members. These are small steps towards people taking control of their own communities. Adult learning centres can often make a dramatic impact on people's lives and creative, innovative education strategies work well where traditional methods fail.

"The community in-volvement creates benefits for my work as an academic. I do my job as a teacher, for example, better be-cause I'm involved in the community."

In the last decade Jim has developed a research method that evolved from his experience working with community members and organizations. "My community activism becomes research; the research feeds back into the community," he says.

For example, in offering courses to individuals from Winnipeg's inner-city through the University of Winnipeg's Urban and Inner-City Studies program Jim is able to develop new skills and knowledge with those individuals while at the same time improving his own understanding of inner-city issues. "I see it really as all being very much tied together," he says. "The community involvement creates benefits for my work as an academic. I do my job as a teacher, for example, better because I'm involved in the community".

In Winnipeg, the progressive community, the university community and the CED community are working closely together, which is vital to the Social Economy movement. "Universities have significant resources, and if we can direct them towards the Social Economy in various kinds of ways I generally would say that's positive."

But sometimes it can be difficult to find a common vision within the Social Economy. As Jim points out, the Social Economy "is a big tent within which there are lots of people with different ideological orientations. Some of that may be problematic. For me personally, I don't find it even remotely inspiring to know that somebody's opened up a new business making tiny widgets and

now they are earning $13,000 a year. I don't particularly see that as the way forward, but that orientation does exist under this big tent."

Nonetheless, many organizations and practitioners are making positive progress, developing new employment opportunities, developing new skills and finding new ways to work together. And despite the ideological differences that may exist within the Social Economy, the movement is not divided in its goal to eradicate the degrading poverty from which so many people suffer. For Jim, "that still remains the goal: a greater degree of equality for all people and being able to live a dignified life,"

To learn more about Jim's work with University of Winnipeg's Urban and Inner-City Studies, visit: www.uwinnipeg.ca/index/urban-inner-city-studies-index. To find out more about his research with the CCPA, visit: www.policyalternatives.ca.

Walking on the Strength of One's Own Legs
with Roberto Lay

Roberto Lay is the Executive Director of the Institute for Development and Peace in the Amazon (IDPA), a social justice NGO located in San Martin, Peru. Born on the former Portuguese island of Macau to Chinese-Mexican-Peruvian parents, Roberto traveled extensively in Latin America before settling in Tarapoto, Peru. His deep appreciation for the Amazonian way of life has led Roberto to become a tireless champion of its cause. In the early 1990s, he was one of the first to denounce the human rights abuses connected with the involvement of the Fujimori government in the drug trade in the region. For more than 30 years Roberto has worked to foster sustainable community development based on food security and community empowerment.

"First we had to produce what was ours – the crops which we consumed – and then we could see which of these crops would help us have a productive relationship with the market."

"Economy is necessary and so is striving after economic success, but the problem is that this success is being pursued to the exclusion of other concerns. The fruits of economic success are being accumulated and not distributed uniformly. The challenge is now to carry out a redistribution, and the means of this redistribution is the Social Economy—whereby economic activities are embedded in a strong matrix of solidarity, the person and the heart."

When Roberto moved to Tarapoto, the region was enduring a period of economic decline. People were lining up for sugar, rice and other basic goods while "local products were being left to rot in the fields, because the prices they would fetch were so low that it was not even worthwhile to harvest them," explains Lay.

In order to meet their most ba-sic needs in the face of almost complete governmental inattention to the problems of the region, farmers soon turned to the cultivation of coca, a plant which is a source of cocaine. The outrageous incomes generated by the drug trade created a situation of delinquency, violence and corruption in the public sector. It also created an ideal set of conditions for the entry of armed groups such as the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) and the Shining Path, to which the government responded with increasing militarization, eventually sparking an armed conflict in the area. As is often the case, the greatest victims of this conflict were civilians living in the affected regions, who fled their rural communities to settle in the town of Tarapoto. In a very short time, Tarapoto's 15 neighbourhoods swelled to over 100, all lacking in basic services and infrastructure.

The Institute for Development and Peace in the Amazon (IDPA) was founded in 1993 in order to address the extreme poverty in which these internally displaced persons found themselves. As their work progressed, the IDPA team began to realize that to achieve any measure of success they needed to respond to the particular circumstances of the communities and gain the full support and direct participation of the local people.

"The objective was to identify the items that we could work on together," says Lay. After much reflection and trial and error, the IDPA began to favour a development approach founded on food security. "First we had to produce what was ours - the crops which

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we consumed - and then we could see which of these crops would help us have a productive relationship with the market." A key element to the proposed agricultural development was the diversification of products to meet the needs of rural families during the lean periods.

But the changes brought by new methods of production could not be limited to the merely technical; they also had to be accompanied by a more radical shift in values which - through a recovery of the Amazonian identity - re-created communal relationships with values of solidarity and mutual help.

This type of change is embodied in the concept of Choba Choba, which is central to the approach of the IDPA and recovery of the Amazonian solidarity model. Choba Choba is a system of mutual help where each person works for the benefit of everyone. "The solidarity expressed as Choba Choba is an Amazonian unity which produces food, cleans fields, sows seeds, harvests crops and shares knowledge and technologies through a friendly social grouping. Lay explains that the idea can be synthesized with the phrase: "I help you and you help me."

This type of structure reveals the importance of garnering the support of the public sector. "We believe that it is no longer possible to have a solidarity economy without breaking into the public sphere in a serious way, without prevailing upon government with community development strategies and having them sign on to common commitments." Solidarity shops and fairs, both of which act as vehicles for local culture and consumption, are

examples of common commitments between communities and government which the IDPA has helped to implement.

For Lay, the Social Economy helps shorten some of the distance which currently exists between producers and consumers, and between these groups and their local governments. It is a process of continual coordination between individual actors which allows communities to be in control of their own development and to regain their economic sovereignty, because:

"To consume must not be just to swallow, to fatten oneself. What sense does this have? Where is the heart? To the contrary, correct consumption is an opportunity to develop new potentialities in solidarity with those who produce and who are elaborating a new alternative for their country, their region and the world. This is the meaning of ethical consumption: supporting communities in the creation of their own economies, their own development. In this way, communities are learning to walk by themselves. It's like the young child who says to his father 'you know what, I don't want you to hold my hand anymore; I want to walk with the strength of my own legs.' And that's what the Social Economy is about. It's walking on the strength of one's own legs."

This story is a summary of a longer article that will soon be available on the CCEDNet website at www.ccednet-rcdec.ca.