

Global Learning and our commitment to follow what unfolds

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"We are leaving a century which has made remarkable achievements in human development", is the conclusion of Gro Harlem Brundtland, Director General of the World Health Organisation. "Global life expectancy has increased by more than 30 years."

She also points at the unfulfilled task and the critical trends: "Absolute poverty is spreading - rising well beyond 1 billion, with one-third of all children going hungry and undernourished to bed, which undermines hour by hour their own future, if indeed they ever reach adulthood. Inequities are growing, between and within countries, in poor and wealthy countries alike." There is another disturbing shadow she draws our attention to: "Seventy percent of the absolute poor are women".¹⁾

Preparing the balance sheet at the turn of the century

As the rest of the world Susila Dharma will prepare the balance sheet at the turn of the century. Different from other organisations we take into account on the side of assets the appearance of Subud and the guidance of the Latihan. Should the balance of achievements be nevertheless unsatisfactory - as it undoubtedly is when we look outside at half a century of development aid - we may cheer up ourselves with the conclusion that it may be the wrong question, a task beyond our means.

However, we hardly ever find the time to reflect peacefully on what we do in Susila Dharma in order to answer the fundamental questions beginning with "why and what", "who and when", "how and what...for". We know that we often do not care enough to account for the aims of our development efforts and cannot deny that help may easily become mechanical, compulsive, rule-bound, moralistic, even selfish and destructive. That's why I want to express my thanks to Kumari for taking the time to write the essay "Do we care?"²⁾ - aspects of which she has presented to us.

We don't do this in order to fight for intellectual positions or to impose ideological concepts on others, nor do we want to moralize or educate anybody (although we sometimes do). One of Kumari's key statements in her paper is that SD work is characterized by **"a commitment to follow what unfolds"**. We rather look retrospectively at our work to better understand how we actually do it, why some programs turn out to be as they are and how we can communicate our way of working to others.

When asked what Susila Dharma is, what we are aiming at and how we work we try to explain (as in our new SDG-leaflet) that Susila Dharma means "to be guided from within towards a truly human life", that "our aims unfold from the cooperation between partners who often represent different cultural backgrounds", and that we experience partnership as a "mutual learning process with high demands".

The underlying question of our SD work is, of course, the question about our understanding of human life - about the "ethical possibilities of development" - as Kumari put it.

The challenge to balance evolution and intervention

Etymologists retrace the original meaning of "development" to "unfolding", a self-determined process comparable to a flower resting in winter, budding in spring and blooming in summer

in accordance with its nature and environment. Psychologists and reform educationalists have elaborated this concept realizing, however - as we do in Susila Dharma - that in the case of human development *evolution* and *intervention* have to be balanced.

To overcome this theoretical problem education has taken recourse to a system of **pedagogical antinomies**, that is a positive concept of contradictions. *Complexity* and *reduction* are not taken as mutually excluding antipodes but as constituting a productive field of tension - a milieu promoting learning processes. The same with *openness or uncertainty* and *the need for security and identity*. Similar *guidance from within* need not conflict with our *search for external solutions*.

The ability to calmly accept seeming contradictions

It reminds of the Indonesian State motto "unity in diversity". Experts call this "**inclusive (or as-well-as) thinking**", the ability to calmly accept seeming contradictions. It is nothing more than the sincere admission that in spite of fast growing knowledge human beings have a limited understanding. Many of us, grown up in an intellectual western cultural setting, are guided by exclusive thinking, i.e. by the habit of constantly deciding between right and wrong, good and bad, inner and outer, against or in favour - i.e. by a binary system similar to a powerful computer. Hans Bühler³⁾, an expert in development theory, points out that inclusive thinking is much more common outside the western intellectual hemisphere. It is used as an alternative to exclusive statements where complexity is still impenetrable, responsible action not yet possible, and waiting the best alternative. You will easily find examples from your own experience, for instance the manifold possibilities of saying "no" without actually using the term in languages like Bahasa Indonesia. This need not be a matter of politeness only. Realizing this has been an interesting learning process in our cross-cultural project partnerships, initially often misinterpreted at our end as lack of commitment or insufficient analytical power of our partners.

Parallels to far-reaching concepts in education are striking at first sight. There are quite a few educationalists who claim that in an increasingly complex world main targets of education must be: learning to live with uncertainty, to appreciate diversity and to be open.

SD-work as learning process

Another striking parallel between development cooperation, or SD-work in particular, is the **emphasis on participation and empowerment**. Kumari reports in her paper on the dawning awareness that "the eradication or lessening of poverty is not going to be achieved by the application of money, but by the participation of the people themselves." This does not really surprise if development is understood as what it actually is: a learning process.

This was testified, as Kumari points out, among others by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who was a revolutionary social developer at the same time. His example of education as a cultural action for freedom and development together with many other pioneers such as Rebeca and Mauricio Wild with their non-directive education has become widely accepted (though rarely implemented) in many schools. From our SD experience we encourage this open, active and self-determined learning process because it reflects respect for the powers of development within each human being.

Susila Dharma when compared to other NGOs is a surprisingly participatory business. A comparative study of German NGOs in the field of international social development pointed at our unusual structural setup. People in charge of projects are usually subordinated to executives and board members in the organisational structure with the consequence of much fighting to get their proposals pass - resulting in frequent disappointment and even frustration. Within SDG (and maybe other national SDs as well) members in charge of projects sit on the Board and take responsibility for all our decisions. When asked why this form of basic democracy seems to function well whereas in other organisations it did not we have to say that this is one of our secrets.

Globalisation demands new approaches and skills

The close parallels between social and development work on the one side and education on the other must be seen before the backdrop of fast and radical global changes deeply affecting all human beings. We are used to talk about **globalisation** in this context, which in spite of its mind-boggling complexities promotes a move towards unity. We talk of the One World and begin to feel the curse of specialization and fragmentation, the hallmarks of modern civilisation. *Cohesion* and *wholistic approaches* have become key words. Not *more* knowledge is needed by graduates but better developed emotional and social competencies and key skills, most of all the ability to organise a lifelong individual learning process and to communicate with others.

Those who do not fatalistically look upon globalisation as a natural disaster will ask: lifelong learning and development - towards which end?

The suggestion *to follow what unfolds* would not be satisfying at this point. We begin to experience that **SD-work has a political dimension** beyond the caring relationship between individuals and groups. Our new SDG-leaflet states: "Common aim within SD are the efforts towards sustainable development for all, i.e. towards a just and equitable society in line with the Agenda 21."⁴

A unique consensus in need of content

The paradigm of sustainability prepared by the Brundtland Commission in 1987 and further developed in the Agenda 21 of the 1992 Rio Conference on Environment and Development - signed by some 187 heads of state - is probably the most important consensus about values and objectives that has ever been achieved in human history. Religious leaders, politicians, teachers, development specialists, townplanners, environmentalists, NGOs as well as Governments, minorities as well as trade unions and employers and even the global players can and do refer to it.

Sustainability combines the need for a more coherent or wholistic approach with the ideal of social justice and environmental responsibility and reflects an understanding we had arrived at in many of our SD-projects - albeit at a modest scale.

It aims at a balanced and coherent consideration of economic, ecological and socio-cultural needs and interests and pursues global justice for all people and nations as well as intergenerational justice by limiting the use of resources to a sustainable level.

This, however, entails the fundamental question: in how far can this be achieved by efficiency and how much sufficiency, i.e. change of our life styles is needed?

Any project - Subud or Susila Dharma is involved in today - has to stand this test, especially when it is of a large dimension as some of the Kalimantan projects. The discussions on them reflect the tremendous changes and the growing awareness within Subud towards a concept of sustainable development.

The Rio consensus could not be more than an empty frame. Susila Dharma is beginning to play a part in contributing towards its content. This happens at various levels, from our involvement in UN activities down to the establishment of a local Agenda 21 in our towns and communities. In the Agenda 21 communities are called upon to initiate a participatory process of setting up their own local agendas for the 21st century. This has become an encouraging process of networking within the civil society in many places - more dynamic in some countries, such as Norway, Sweden or UK, than in others.

Message lost but strategy refined

However, as we all know, there are still many who use the term development without association to the principles of sustainability. Although the negative aspects of globalisation have become widely evident in the growing disparities between poor and rich, public awareness still equates *development* with *economic progress*.

The question is: **Whose reality counts?** as Robert Chambers⁵⁾ put it. It is largely decided by the media, still dominated by President Truman's "bold new program" for bringing progress to the world by scientific advances and market strategies. 50 years after this declaration the belief in the truth of the message got lost while the strategies have been refined.

Education for sustainable development

I draw your attention to the Agenda 21 and the principle of sustainable development not only because we are in need of it but also because it is another example of convergence between social or development activities and education. There are strong political moves in a number of countries to reform public education under the umbrella of "Education for sustainable development".

This finally brings us to **the concept of Global Learning** which has its roots in development NGOs such as SDG and reform pedagogy. It has recently been developed from an educational concept into practical programs which are implemented in many of our European schools. The idea is also widespread in the USA, supported worldwide by UNICEF and UNESCO and subject of a document called "Global Education Charta" to be passed this year by the 41 countries in the European Council. As with other innovations triggered by needs in locations far apart they spring up simultaneously building on specific cultural traditions and reflecting local structures. I cannot therefore claim that the concept I briefly present to you is the original one, it is, however, one of the most elaborate and has been put to test at school level for some years.

Global Learning as pedagogical response to globalisation

A short definition of it, which you can find on the website "Globales Lernen"⁶⁾, which I produced for the Teachers Training Institute in Hamburg, reads:

"We understand Global Learning as pedagogical response to globalisation. It makes sustainable development a lifelong learning aim and can be seen as a development of Third World or One World Education - a synonym of Development or Global Education with new accents."

The term Global Learning is in so far programmatic as it underlines the active role of the learner (instead of using the term Education). It points to the fundamental challenge of globalisation, i.e. to the global horizon of our activities, the need to think and feel globally, to relate our individual life to people and events far away and to transcend the limits of our immediate personal, local and national needs and interests.

Global Learning focusses on two decisive aspects of globalisation: complexity and the growing importance of the media.

The methodical approach does not take didactic reduction (without doubting its importance) to be the key to understand our world. Good teaching and ideal school books had been for centuries masterpieces of reductions - models and simplified theories which people did not find in reality once they had the chance to leave the narrow circles of their homes. Global Learning tries to make complexity and interdependencies perceivable and diversity a positive asset - as a counter movement against the narrowing of horizons in the realities of politics and media.

As our globalized existence can no longer be exclusively discovered in our immediate environment, Global Learning does not only encourage the exploration of the individual space of life (the 3rd grades to discover the world by exploring their local market) - it also stresses the importance of the new media and the acquisition of media competence.

Global Learning is explicitly value orientated. This does not mean that values should be taught, nor do I believe that fundamental values which are often called "universal" are equally interpreted universally. Any learning process, however, should be linked to human values, allowing the learner to reconfirm and develop his ethical foundation and identity.

Global Learning has initiated a broad theoretical discussion and produced a great number of teaching materials, which prefer an interdisciplinary approach placing social communication into the centre of a diversified learning process.

Inspite of the wholistic approach it is not a new super-subject, nor just an educational principle but rather a field of learning with its own themes in social and economic development and human rights and with indefinite borders to neighbouring fields such as intercultural learning and environmental education.

Responding from within to the changes outside

From the themes chosen and especially the educational methods preferred you will recognize the parallels between Susila Dharma experience and Global Learning, which is to be a

lifelong performance and not only a new toy for our kids. It shares with Susila Dharma the lack of consolidated principles and the commitment to follow what unfolds.

Educators of all schools of thought use to refer (at least in theory) to Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and his pedagogical postulate to combine heart, hand and intellect. Pestalozzi also felt that the teacher's role can only be one of an assistant in the de-velopment (i.e. "unfolding") of a human being.

Today I'm more willing to believe Bapak explaining more than 35 years ago to an almost unbelieving audience that humanity until then had only unfolded 10% of its intellectual capacities. He urged young people like me to study hard. With the multiplication of knowledge and the growing complexity of the global society within the last decades I'm convinced that the need for Global Learning is a far greater challenge to our intellect than we may be willing to accept. Evolutionists tell us that our emotional responses and attitudes have been formed in more than 50.000 generations, that is for most of the time as hunters and gatherers with the ability to relate to not more than some 30 people and within a horizon limited by the savannah trees our ancestors could see from the edge of their cavern. Kumari has referred in her paper to the problem of transferring the concept of ethical caring based on individual relationship to the public domain or even to the global level. From this point of view we are not well prepared for globalisation and the agenda of the 21st century. Even the tools we used a few years ago often turn out to be of little use in a fast changing world. But as we know, there is nothing wrong in learning and developing our understanding as long as we succeed in following what unfolds from within.

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3. Hans Bühler: Perspektivenwechsel? - unterwegs zu "globalem Lernen", IKO- Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, Frankfurt/Main 1996
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5. Robert Chambers: Poverty and Livelihoods: Whose reality counts? In: People: From Impoverishment to Empowerment, ed. Üner Kirdar and Leonard Silk, New York University Press, 1995, p. 1-16
6. www.hh.schule.de/globlern

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