

# Sustainable Cultures – Cultures of Sustainability

## BACKGROUND PAPER 6

by

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### **Sustainable Cultures**

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According to the Macmillan dictionary culture is the ways of a people like art, belief and sustainability is the ability to hold up or keep going. Simply summarized we are talking about the way people live and their beliefs and how they hold on to them. That means a group of people organizes the way they think and do things together and create an identity that will make them distinctly different and unique from other people. It can be religious, ideological or racial or ethnic based and many other things.

As a group they become a more powerful force than individually and can attract or force others to be part of the group. On the other hand sustainability is the co existence, the perfect harmony or balance between and among all creatures of the universe that keep all of them going. Sustainability calls for every cultural group to respect the ways and beliefs of others so that they can co exist and benefit from each others endowments.

As an Afrikan I believe in the human race, but am opposed to racial superiority and gender domination and am suspicious if there is a political will for equality and equity. We still have human beings who believe they are more precious, endowed and beautiful than others. These people are not aware that all of us are entitled to share equitably the resources that are found on planet earth and above without destroying the natural harmony and balance that already exists between human beings and other species from time immemorial.

My contribution in the dialogue starts from where Anja-Riita Ketokoski said in the Tampere Dialogue “The domination of homo economicus is a major challenge. We in the North need development aid from the South to become more sustainable”.

This is a very important observation and it points to the direction which we in the south want the dialogue to go. For centuries Afrikans have been the focus of research, the topic in all forums where nations discuss development issues, has been the scene of violence even though they don't produce or sell arms. In 2001 at the Helsinki Global village I gave a presentation on the “voices in the margins” and called on the governments and global institutions to focus on the North to find the causes of impoverishment, violence and suffering in the world.

When you examine The WTO processes and especially the ongoing Economic Partnership Agreement you will see legalisation of inequalities begin there. For example even though all WTO members are supposed to be equal, it is clearly stated trade between the EU and the least industrialized countries LIC (better known as Least developed Country LDC) shall not involve LIC selling arms to the EU-Everything But Arms (EBA).

We don't have a culture of producing arms of mass destruction, but we have been buying arms since slave trade days. Wars especially proxy wars are fought in our countries, one country after the other, none of us are immune as long as we have precious resources which the rich want! If we sincerely want solutions this is time for truth, no diplomacy. In the dialogue we should discuss these issues and there is nothing personal apart for the survival of Mother Nature! Mother Earth!

Sometimes rich people or governments think CSO exaggerate issues, so I always like to quote the woman from the DRC who decided to pour petrol and burn herself to death because she was refused by the Belgium authorities to set up a store in one of the streets! This frustrated Afrikan woman could not understand how come the Belgians have been looting DRC east west, and centre for more than two centuries are refusing her such a minute request!



*A woman from DRC committing a suicide in Brussels. A picture from the internet.*

The rich and our governments are the ones that exaggerate! When they say business is booming, they actually mean now they have captured the youth market and their income is guaranteed for many years! They mean they have been successful in making the youths and impoverished addicts and consumers of their goods and services.

Tell me one youth who will not wish to smoke cigarettes, drink beer, eat fast foods, drive a car, wear the latest fashions from Europe and be counted as a modern somebody! By consuming what we do not produce we are slowly digging our graves because the day we miss them we shall take up arms against each other. That is the way of all who have been and are at war, and its all thanks to those who have introduced to us neo liberal policies as the saviour of our ailing economies!

Is it by coincidence that the WTO weaver for ACP-EU came to an end December 31st 2007 ushering in the progressive dismantling of all trade barriers? Suddenly Afrika can compete equally with those who have enslaved, colonized and exploited us for centuries. This is the biggest scandal of the century! Hilikka Pietilä noted in the Tampere Dialogue that “the

whole human economy should be seen from the subsistence perspective where the household and cultivation economy are the basis of human economy”

Monoculture exists in Afrika by shipping one or two major products by small producers into what they call a buyers market. The people to whom we sell these products set the prices. For the same products we are now paying less and less than say just 30 years ago. But when they sell back the processed good the price keeps getting higher! Is this the culture we want to sustain as civilised people?

For a long time now an Afrikan as beautifully dark as night can become a cosmetic French, Dutch, Finnish, Swede, British, Canadian or Danish in a day as long as they have a talent that will bring prestige especially in sports and music. Sports and music have become a lucrative money maker and a useful tool for corporate globalization to make Afrikans believe that they are treated equally in those countries.

The treatment is different when an ordinary Afrikan wants to visit Europe, or a Zimbabwean civil servant for that matter it is pure humiliation! But us, even if an European official or priest has declared he is a homosexual which is against the law in Tanzania they will be allowed without any problem and do his/her business!

The human race needs to be rejuvenated with new energy, new hope and strong belief that a better and alternative world is possible in our lifetime. We need power to act, to behave in the corporate world, to deal with the corporate world. That is why the development agenda is no longer the prerogative of the governments alone; it should not be business as usual. Let's not talk about AID, let's talk about reparation and an economic affirmation action for Afrika! Why waste time talking about Global peace, who manufactures guns, where are they sold, where are wars fought, and who dies and who benefits?

Nothing much has changed in global relationships, some people are still living and feeding on other people's miseries. For every flower a European woman wears, a woman in Tanzania or Kenya has become contaminated with chemicals, has been raped and fired and is dying slowly living children orphaned. For every Nile perch fish fillet from Lake Victoria which they feed their animals with, the Afrikans who catch them are left with rotting carcasses and an ecological disaster.

The investors reap the benefits of the harvest, while the natives can longer support themselves by living off the lake or the land. Structural Adjustment Programmes advocated by the IMF/WB have been re-baptized many times but the content still remains the same. Most foreign investors and their capital go into strategic sectors: mining, banking, insurance, finance, telecommunications, airlines, railways and the like. Who benefits and who loses?

Many of us don't know or have forgotten how European industrialised. Europe of the 16th Century was backward and poorly resourced but with their guns they were capable of spreading death and destruction across huge distances. "Europeans interpreted military superiority as intellectual and even biological superiority". Until the 19th Century, small arms in the so called third world were able to measure up to those of Europe and was also manufactured by village smiths in Afrika.

“Winston Churchill, winner of the Nobel prize for Literature was war correspondence of the Morning Post. In his biography My early Life [1930] describes the Battle at Omdurman in 1898 “... nobody expected to die.... The battle was only a sporting element in a splendid game” Unfortunately the British missed the splendid game because opponents learned it was useless to fight against modern weapons.” Why is this culture of violence sustainable, and who maintains it?

Imagine a world where where over 5000 land mines are planted each year, and a world where for every dollar spent on education for every school-age child whose job is to learn, 25 dollars is spent on one soldier whose job is to kill.

Imagine a society that devotes most of its time, energy and currency to devices and ideas that are specifically designed to hurt or kill others of its own kind and any other living thing, or for that matter non living things. Where more children are killed by firearms than all the natural diseases combined! These institutions are preparing tomorrow’s leadership; is this what the West mean by sustainable culture, a culture of sustainability?

Every society known to man contains elements of violence. People have always killed, lied to, cheated and stole from other people even if by accident. What distinguishes one society from the other is the magnitude, pervasiveness and rate of increase. Before every major war of Western involvement, there was massive impoverishment or a major economic depression was in full swing.

There has never been a time when the West has not been preparing or engaging in war against others or with each other or supporting others in their fight by selling arms. Leonard Jeffries says of their behaviour or sustainable culture as “death, destruction, and domination”. The only people who have built an entire culture based on dominance of others are the Europeans.

In such a culture it is not hard to imagine that a handgun is being produced every 20 seconds! Those are the official statistics. There are many legal handguns in circulation or untold numbers of illegal ones brought through underground markets. It does not speak of assault weapons, grenade launchers, bazookas, surface to surface missiles readily available in stores and homes! Violence and war are the most lucrative businesses today and an ecological disaster!

In this dialogue we need to address this culture of violence and destruction in the name of democracy, free market, globalization and sustainable development. Justice and Peace are the two sides of the coin and around the sides of the coin runs coexistence, our one hope to the culture of sustainability as renaissance people. I submit!

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[http://www.ymparistojakehitys.fi/sustainable\\_societies.html](http://www.ymparistojakehitys.fi/sustainable_societies.html)