**Sílvio Humberto dos Passos Cunha**

**Some Considerations Regarding Resilience Strategies Taken from the Political Experience of the Steve Biko Cultural Institute**

Assistant Professor at the Feira de Santana State University
Executive Director of the Steve Biko Cultural Institute
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This text seeks to establish a dialogue on the questions raised by Professors Jill Simone Gross[1] and John Lederach[2], particularly the issue presented by Gross which posits whether sustainable development can incorporate resilience strategies and, if so, which are the courses of action to be followed. Lederach's text includes points that help us define these courses of action.

Leaving aside the conceptual discussions surrounding economic development and its sustainability, I agree with the view that economic development cannot be limited to its material aspects, which are traditionally measured in terms of GDP. Economic growth, though a necessary condition, is not enough to interrupt the vicious cycle of poverty that ravages, above all, the nations that suffer from high levels of inequality. Furthermore, we must question the nature of this global economic growth, which is based upon patterns of living and consumption that raise concern about the future of human life on earth. Such concern was highlighted by the esteemed Brazilian economist Celso Furtado in his book *The Myth of Economic Development* (1974), where he points to the limits of economic development. At issue, then, is not only whether economic growth is *sustained* on the basis of high GDP growth rates, but whether it is indeed *sustainable*: that is, whether the growth is sound development in terms of preservation of the environment and the quality of life on earth. This challenge becomes even greater for countries, notably those in the South, that have not yet resolved their serious social problems. The challenge has been taken up, so what is to be done? The sword of Damocles is raised above our heads. So what can be done, one of the paths to be followed, is to find the answers or, better yet, consider and validate the answers provided by those (individuals and communities) that suffered and continue to suffer the direct consequences of

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[1] Sustainability versus Resilience: What is the global urban future and can we plan for change? , September 2008

[2] Resiliency and Healthy Communities an Exploration of Image and Metaphor

the economic and social development models adopted by their governments either with little or no dialogue with civil society or nothing but rhetorical good intentions.

I consider it not only possible, therefore, to incorporate resilience strategies into sustainable development models, but also essential to effective public policies that target inequality, particularly in countries where such inequality exists to a high degree. Brazil, for example, where approximately 5,000 families control around 45% of the national wealth[3], and where the face of poverty is marked by race, age and gender – black, young and female - is ranked 11th by the Human Development Report (2007/2008) among countries having the most inequitable distribution of income. The city  where I live is Salvador, capital of the State of Bahia, considered the black Mecca, the black Rome on account of its majority (70-80%) black population. But, despite this black majority, the latest survey conducted by the IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) on the basis of the PNAD-2007 (national home census survey) showed that whites with 10.5 years of education receive an average of five times the minimum wage, whereas blacks (including those of mixed race) having 8.5 years of schooling receive an average of only 2.1 times the minimum wage. The study further concluded that, were they white, these blacks could expect four times the minimum wage. Taking Salvador as an example, can a de facto sustainable development model ever be implemented in the city without establishing a dialogue that is effective, active and real on the survival strategies adopted by its black population? These strategies were developed to counter the adversity and inequality generated by systemic racism which, for at least 120 years, has maintained this population in a state of poverty.   It is important to add that poverty is not limited to a lack of material resources; indeed, poverty has a non-material dimension characterized by poor social relations, insecurity, vulnerability, low self-esteem, impotence – in a word, situations from which examples of resilience strategies emerge.

The challenge is how to put this active dialogue into practice. We understand that for this dialogue to take place, it is important that the formulators and others who influence public policy admit that, indeed, they have no monopoly on the wisdom of development models that diagnose, design and implement measures to spur economic growth and reduce inequality and poverty.

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[3] See Marcio Pochman in Le Monde Diplomatique Brasil, year I, n.3, October 2007.  It is important to point out that recent IPEA studies indicate  the level of social inequality in Brazil is at its lowest point in  the past 25 years, thanks to social assistance programs such as *bolsa familia*, which serves 11.2 million (64% black or mixed-race) citizens, together with minimum wage supports.

Our intention is not to deny the value of formal-technical knowledge but to recognize the intellectual contribution and the systemic and non-systemic practices of various social actors, shaped by their experience with and triumph over the daily, structural obstacles generated by a long history of social exclusion.   One must be open to a direct dialogue, free of formal hierarchies that greatly disrupt such dialogue, especially with social movements and other civil society representatives. Policies must be formulated together with -- not on behalf of -- these representatives.

As such, it is essential to recognize civil society's role in promoting policies to combat inequality and poverty, especially as articulated by those who criticize the neoliberal view that economic growth is primary and sufficient in and of itself. By incorporating the concept of the active exercise of individual rights and freedoms in the broadest sense (the concept of *cidadania*), of civic participation, with that of democracy in the strictest sense: that is, a notion of *cidadania* that is open to all, decentralized, and not merely at the service of civil society's traditional members [Tr: note: the sentence is incomplete]. If we persist in operating in this inadequate and arbitrary manner, we shall at best achieve a partial victory over poverty and inequality, and shall certainly continue with merely "formal representatives" of an organized civil society.

Brazilian society, with its historically high and persistent levels of inequality and poverty, cannot rely upon traditional models of popular participation that are typical of more advanced democracies. What is needed is innovation, a search for new methods of individual and collective participation. [Examples of] such innovation -- though entrenched in the capital – labor dichotomy -- are currently being attempted, such as experiments with participatory budgets and community councils.

The need for a society to follow its own course is one reason resilience strategies are compatible with sustainable development models, [but this compatibility loses its effectiveness] when policy-makers ignore these strategies. It is worth noting that recognition of the  wisdom and know how,  knowledge and social technology conceived by citizens on the "lower rung" in their daily struggle against social exclusion is more than just participatory rhetoric.  Put another way, the incorporation of resilience strategies allows for a dialogue with those on the lower rung who may not even be classified as members of civil society, and yet, who apply on a daily

basis their social technology of confrontation, ever adapting to new forms of exclusion. Consider the example or, better, the phenomenon of the LAN houses scattered along the peripheries of Brazilian cities. These houses have provided internet access to the poorer classes, who, were they to depend exclusively upon the efforts of government, would remain deprived of digital resources. Likewise, countless social technologies created by Brazil's black movement in the realms of education, health, youth services, human rights and campaigns against racism exist and they are, in fact, technologies that have also emerged from individual and collective strategies of resilience conceived over the course of decades of confronting racism and its manifestations.

As a conclusion to this dialogue I present you with a summary of the political experience of the Steve Biko Cultural Institute (SBCI), which exemplifies the principles of the collective resilience strategy and whose institutional mission is to promote the upward mobility of the black community through education and the restoration of ancestral values.

The Institute was founded in 1992 by young black activists to promote the entry of black students into universities through a preparatory course for the entrance exam. In the course of these 16 years, more than 1,000 students have entered institutions of higher learning in the State of Bahia. The goal of the SBCI is to develop activities that foster the political empowerment of black youth, whether in the area of jobs creation, income promotion, human rights, prevention of racism, leadership development or the promotion of the sciences.

The Institute emphasizes educational technology, or CCN (Black Citizenship and Awareness), which it developed and which strives to raise the self-esteem of black youth exposed to high risk social conditions stemming from Brazil's systemic racism and its manifestations. These black youths have reported that CCN indeed promotes real possibilities for change in their lives. CCN saves lives! (See attached reports). And consider the remarks of Tarry Pereira, educational coordinator:

> CCN currently takes an interdisciplinary approach in which all disciplines making up its specific course of study "navigate" along a certain theme, one in keeping with our reality. We have, then, the "discipline" in which all of the content is systematized. As such, the CCN educators understand the content of the disciplines as they communicate the important themes. The

current working theme is that of Identity, with Life's Origin as its sub-theme. Resources employed include lectures, expository classes, interdisciplinary classes, films, seminars, research projects and field lessons in places that provide practical experience with the relevant theme.

The CCN program opens doors, presents the "whys," questions what is given and points out new directions and counteracts the effects of psychological servitude. The program may be an answer to the school dropout problem and serve as an important tool in the effort to improve the quality of public education, especially inasmuch as it strives to foster a sense of belonging. Obviously, CCN is no *deux ex machina* or national savior, but the program serves the educational needs of a broad and active portion of the citizenry, which, unfortunately is viewed as but a dream by the majority of Brazil's black population, still bound to the primary legacy of slavery – the state of quasi-citizenship.

This brief report outlining CCN's experience serves to reaffirm, on the one hand, the importance of incorporating resilience strategies in public policy decisions to lessen the vulnerability of marginalized social groups and, on the other, encourage a new discussion around the issue of the dissemination of resilience, namely, to what degree can its principles be taught and learned. CCN's experience indicates that this is indeed possible. Now for the debate!

## ATTACHMENT
**Some remarks by students taking classes at CCN**

" My biggest change came through my classes at CCN, where I learned to treat the people around me better and to allow them security, freedom and a sense of importance when with me. "

"The first change to happen was when I realized the magnitude of the project. But, the main thing is that little by little I free myself from mental slavery, especially when I'm aware of who are the great heroes and what are their objectives, achievements and qualities. I should point out that in this brief period I learned things I never imagined, and experienced emotions I had never felt before; and each day I feel like going to the very end ".

*"I got to the point of asking whether before the CCN classes I was really an individual".*

*"CCN changed my behavior when confronting racism. We are the disseminators of what we learn at CCN."*

"It was, specifically, in a CCN class that I became more interested in myself."