

# Transitioning from Less Solution-Oriented Employment to More Solution-Oriented Employment

[Posted at The IPCR Community Journal at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ipcri/> on December 21, 2008  
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[Published in the section “Highlights from The IPCR Community Journal” at the website of The IPCR  
Initiative (at [www.ipcri.net](http://www.ipcri.net)) on December 21, 2008]

“The transition from an unsustainable fossil fuel-based economy back to a solar-based (agriculture and forestry) economy will involve the application of the embodied energy that we inherit from industrial culture. This embodied energy is contained within a vast array of things, infrastructure, cultural processes and ideas, mostly inappropriately configured for the “solar” economy. It is the task of our age to take this great wealth, reconfigure it, and apply it to the development of sustainable systems.”

(David Holmgren, from “Energy and Permaculture” article)

## Introduction

We now live in very complex and challenging times. More and more people, in more and more parts of the world, are coming to the conclusion that all of us have important responsibilities associated with resolving a significant number of very serious challenges, which include (but are not limited to):

- 1) global warming and reducing carbon emissions
- 2) peak oil and reducing dependence on petroleum based products
- 3) global inequities and the tragic cycles of malnutrition, disease, and death
- 4) an increasing world population requiring more resources when many resources are becoming more scarce (*with a special emphasis* on the increasing number of people who are consuming resources and ecological services *indiscriminately*)
- 5) cultures of greed, corruption, and overindulgence have caused a crises of confidence in financial markets, and are in many ways slowing the restructuring of investment priorities needed to respond to the challenges listed here (and other challenges)
- 6) there still seems to be a majority of people on the planet who do not have a clear understanding, well-grounded in personal experience, of which basic elements of community life and cultural traditions lead to mutually beneficial understandings, which lead to cycles of violence—and why it is so important for people to achieve clarity on this subject.

## The “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” Proposal

One suggestion which could assist in bringing many solutions to light at the local community level is a 161 page proposal by this writer titled “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>”.

The “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” proposal advocates organizing and implementing Community Visioning Initiatives in 1000 communities (communities—or segments of rural areas, towns, or cities—with populations of 50,000 or less) around the world

1. which are time-intensive, lasting even as much as 1½ years (18 months), so as to give as much importance to developing a close-knit community as it does to

- a) accumulating and integrating the knowledge and skill sets necessary for the highest percentage of people to act wisely in response to challenges identified as priority challenges
- b) helping people to deliberately channel their time, energy, and money into the creation of “ways of earning a living” which are directly related to resolving high priority challenges
- c) assisting with outreach, partnership formation, and development of service capacity for a significant number of already existing (or forming) organizations, businesses, institutions, and government agencies
- d) helping to build a high level of consensus for specific action plans, which will help inspire additional support from people, businesses, organizations, institutions, and government agencies with significant resources

2. which expand on the concept of “Community Teaching and Learning Centers” (created by the “Teachers Without Borders” organization) so that such local community points of entry function as information clearinghouses, meeting locations, educational centers for ongoing workshops (on a broad range of topics related to the Community Visioning Process, and building the local knowledge base), practice sites for developing “teacher-leaders”, a location for an ongoing “informal” “Community Journal”, a location for listing employment opportunities—and provide a means of responding quickly (by changing the emphasis of workshop content) to new urgencies as they arise

3. and which suggest—as a way of emphasizing the need for an exponential increase in compassion for our fellow human beings—that communities (with the resources to do so) enter into “sister community” relationships with communities in other countries where there has been well documented calls for assistance with basic human needs.

The following three sections of this article will provide some further information about the concepts Community Visioning Initiative, “Community Teaching and Learning Centers”, and “sister community” relationships.

### What are Community Visioning Initiatives?

Well organized efforts to identify problems and brainstorm solutions are a universally recognized approach to problem solving which is commonly used in family, community, business, and government settings in every part of the world. In its most basic format, a Community Visioning Initiative (CVI) is simply a more comprehensive variation of the above mentioned approach to problem solving.

Community Visioning Initiatives (CVIs) are especially useful as a means of increasing or maximizing citizen participation in the planning phase of community revitalization efforts. In 1984, the non-profit organization Chattanooga Venture [Chattanooga, Tennessee (USA)] organized a Community Visioning Initiative that attracted more than 1,700 participants, and produced 40 community goals—which resulted in the implementation of 223 projects and programs, the creation of 1,300 permanent jobs, and a total financial investment of 793 million dollars.

[Note: Since the source references for all quoted material in this document can be found by searching the pdf file of the “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” document, they are not reproduced here. The “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” document is accessible at the website of The IPCR Initiative, at [www.ipcri.net](http://www.ipcri.net), or through the following link <http://ipcri.net/images/1000Communities2.pdf>]

Community Visioning Initiatives (CVIs) can be described as a series of community meetings designed to facilitate the process of brainstorming ideas, organizing the ideas into goals, prioritizing the goals, and identifying doable steps. Many CVIs require steering committees, preliminary surveys or assessments, workshops, task forces, and collaboration between many organizations, government agencies, businesses, and educational institutions—and seek to build up consensus in the community for specific goals and action plans by encouraging a high level of participation by all residents.

The “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” document referred to in this article incorporates input from many different fields of activity, and emphasizes a time-intensive approach to Community Visioning, which may take up to 1½ years (18 months) to complete. (For more details, see Section 6 “A 15 Step Outline for a ‘1000Communities<sup>2</sup>’ Version of a Community Visioning Initiative” of the “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” document.)

[Note: The “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” version of a Community Visioning Initiative includes a step (Step 12) which is described as follows: “Summary Presentations and Job Fairs”. Here is an excerpt relating to job fairs, from p. 39 of the “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” document: “The job fairs which come at the end of the CVI process provide opportunities for all key stakeholders in the community (businesses, organizations, institutions, government, etc.) to demonstrate their upgraded awareness—and their interest in the welfare of the community—by offering and facilitating new employment opportunities...”]

### What are Community Teaching and Learning Centers?

The concept of “Community Teaching and Learning Centers” (CTLCs) was created by the organization “Teachers Without Borders” (see [www.teacherswithoutborders.org](http://www.teacherswithoutborders.org)). The website of “Teachers Without Borders” includes the following description of CTLCs: “Community Teaching and Learning Centers (CTLCs) are local, practical education centers designed to be embraced by and emerge from the community itself.... CTLCs use existing facilities and are often outfitted with libraries [(which include) dictionaries, references, educational material of general interest] ... computers, face-to-face classrooms, and break-out spaces, used primarily to serve several essential functions for community sustainability.”

In this “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” proposal, the concept of CTLCs is expanded so that such local community points of entry function as

- 1) information centers, resource centers, clearinghouses (on how residents can deliberately channel their time, energy, and money into the creation of “ways of earning a living” which are directly related to resolving high priority challenges
- 2) locations for workshops on topics suggested by the “Preliminary Survey” [see Step 3 of the 15 Step Outline (Section 6)], and as determined by the CTLC Coordinator
- 3) practice sites for the development of “teacher-leaders”
- 4) community centers for meetings, both planned and informal

- 5) locations for “Community Journals” (which are collections of formal and informal input which may be contributed to or accessed at all times)
- 6) locations for “Final Version” Document submission (“voting”) as part of Steps 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10 of the 15 Step Outline (see Section 6 of the “1000Communities2” document)
- 7) locations for “Summary of CVI Process to Date” Notebooks, for latecomers, and as an information resource for media
- 8) central locations for listings of employment opportunities
- 9) as a special form of community education, which can respond quickly (by changing the emphasis of workshop content) to new urgencies as they arise

### How would the “sister community” concept work?

Programs for developing the sister community concept already exist as a result of the work of Sister Cities International.

“Sister Cities International is a nonprofit citizen diplomacy network that creates and strengthens partnerships between U.S. and international communities. As an international membership organization, we officially certify, represent and support partnerships between U.S. cities, counties, states and similar jurisdictions in other countries.” The mission of Sister Cities International is “to promote peace through mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation—one individual, one community at a time.” “Sister Cities International represents more than 2,500 communities in 134 countries around the world.” Key program areas include: Sustainable Development, Youth and Education, Humanitarian Assistance, and Arts and Culture.

Unfortunately, there are often so many different activities which require our attention during the course of any given day, and many of us simply do not know how much good can be done in the world with even minor contributions of time, energy, and money. Here this writer will provide the names of ten organizations—and a brief description of their work—which should be sufficient to bring to mind how many different kinds of positive outcomes could result from such “sister community” relationships. [see Appendix 5 of the “1000Communities2” document (“Examples of Humanitarian Aid Which Can be Explored Through ‘Sister Community’ Relationships”) for more detailed information about these organizations.]

The Ten Organizations (or concepts) are:

Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies  
World Food Programme  
Doctors Without Borders  
Teachers Without Borders  
S3IDF (Small-Scale Sustainable Infrastructure Development Fund)  
IDE (International Development Enterprises)  
Alternative Gifts  
Peace Corps  
Foreign Student Exchange  
Adopt a Child (“Sponsoring” a child)

### **1. The Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**

“There are many circumstances in communities around the world where the activity of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is essential for communities of people to survive natural—or human-created—disasters, and progress to a recovery and rebuilding phase.”

### **2. World Food Programme**

“WFP is the United Nations frontline agency in the fight against global hunger.”

### **3. Doctors Without Borders**

“Every year, Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) provides emergency medical care to millions of people caught in crises in nearly 60 countries around the world. MSF provides assistance when catastrophic events — such as armed conflict, epidemics, malnutrition, or natural disasters — overwhelm local health systems.”

### **4. Teachers Without Borders**

“Teachers Without Borders is a non-profit (501c3), non-denominational, international NGO founded in 2000, devoted to closing the education divide through teacher professional development and community education. Our organization focuses on the building of teacher leaders.”

### **5. Small Scale Sustainable Infrastructure Development Fund (S3IDF)**

“Our Mission: To foster pro-poor, pro-environment small scale infrastructure services with financing and technical assistance for the electricity, water, sanitation and other infrastructure (eg. transport and telecommunications) necessary for poverty alleviation.”

“Based on more than 25 years of experience, IDE has developed a unique market-oriented development model that benefits the rural poor. We call it **PRISM** (Poverty Reduction through Irrigation and Smallholder Markets). Using PRISM, IDE integrates small farm households into markets and develops sustainable businesses that reduce rural poverty worldwide.”

### **7. Alternative Gifts International (AGI)**

“AGI is a nonprofit, interfaith agency. AGI provides education for people of all ages about global needs and raises funds each year in its Alternative Gift Markets and from individual donors to respond to those needs. Designated grants then are sent to the established international projects of several reputable nonprofit agencies for relief and development.”

### **8. Peace Corps**

“... 190,000 Peace Corps Volunteers have been invited by 139 host countries to work... (in the following areas): Education (36%), Health & HIV/AIDS (21%), Business (15%), Environment (14%), Youth (6%), Agriculture (5%), Other (4%).”

### **9. Foreign Student Exchange Programs**

“A student exchange program is a program in which a student, typically in secondary or higher education, chooses to live in a foreign country to learn, among other things, language and culture.

“American Foreign Exchange (AFS) is an international, voluntary, non-governmental, non-profit organization that provides intercultural learning opportunities to help people develop the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to create a more just and peaceful world.”

## 10. Sponsor A Child

What does Children International do?

“Our child sponsorship solution provides health, educational, material and emotional aid to impoverished children around the world. One-to-one sponsorship gives these children the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty and realize their full potential.”

### Transitioning from less solution-oriented employment to more solution-oriented employment

Section 6 of the “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” document is titled “A 15 Step Outline for a ‘1000Communities<sup>2</sup>’ Version of a Community Visioning Initiative”. Step 12 of this 15 Step Outline begins as follows:

#### **Step 12** Summary Presentations and Job Fairs

(Approximate Time Required: 4 weeks)

##### A. Goals

- 1) Steering Committee members (with help from volunteer Advisory Board members, etc.) will summarize the Community Visioning Initiative (CVI) process
- 2) Steering Committee members-- and key community leaders who were very much involved in the CVI process—will make presentations based on the summaries
- 3) Specifically, information will be provided on how residents can deliberately focus their time, energy, and money so that their actions
  - a) can have positive repercussions on many fields of activity relating to solutions
  - b) can result in an increase in the “ways of earning a living” which are related to solutions and action plans
- 4) Job Fairs will provide a forum for organizations and businesses working in solution oriented fields of activity to describe employment opportunities and future prospects, to discover local talent, to hire qualified prospects, and to build knowledge bases and skill sets for the future

The following passage is also included as “Special Commentary” for Step 12:

**“Special Commentary:** By now, there will have been sufficient public discourse for those people with understanding about high level shifts in investment portfolios to have learned something about what directions future shifts will be leaning towards. The job fairs which come at the end of the Community Visioning Initiative process provide opportunities for all key stakeholders in the community (businesses, organizations, institutions, government, etc.) to demonstrate their upgraded awareness—and their interest in the welfare of the community—by offering and facilitating new employment opportunities... and thus helping with a just transition from patterns of investment which in only limited ways represent solutions to prioritized challenges to patterns of investment which *in many ways* represent solutions to prioritized challenges.”

As mentioned on p. 125 of the “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” document, one aspect of this just transition can be that people who do deliberately focus their investments of time, energy, and money towards solutions identified by the Community Visioning Initiative being carried out in their community may receive, as encouragement, local currency. *And then such local currency can, in its turn, be redeemed in ways which will be particularly helpful to people transitioning from less solution-oriented employment to more solution-oriented employment.*”

Especially important to this kind of transition will be a community’s capacity to identify local specific “engines of economic stability”. The 15 Step Outline for a “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” version of a Community Visioning Initiative (mentioned above) includes Step 3 “Preliminary Surveys”. One question which is recommended for such “Preliminary Surveys” is as follows: (for all of the questions, see Section 9 of the “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” document)

#### Question #5: Identifying Engines of Economic Stability

Many people seem to be worried that “the economy” will collapse if some form of “voluntary simplicity” philosophy becomes more and more accepted... and yet many of the challenges of our times have chronic elements (see Appendix 1), suggesting that it may require decades, generations, or even centuries to overcome such challenges. (There *will* be work to do....)

a) Please name as many engines of economic stability and methods of economic conversion as you can which you believe would result in communities that

minimize resource requirements  
maintain ecological sustainability  
maintain a high level of compassion for fellow human beings

and which represent what a significant majority of community residents surveyed would describe as a high quality of life.

**Important Note:** Having responses to the above question (and many others, through “Preliminary Surveys”) from 150 key leaders from a significant variety of fields of activity in the community will, by itself, be a significant contribution to the “(reconfiguring) the embodied energy from the industrial age, and applying it to the development of sustainable systems” (see quote at the beginning of this article).

#### Problems that may arise

Even though there may be a sense of shared urgency among a majority of the residents in a given community, there are problems, issues, and challenges which can turn the whole Community Visioning Initiative process into an unfortunate experience with few positive outcomes. And yet—given circumstances which require problem solving unlike anything most of us have experienced before—experiments must be tried, and risks must be taken. However, every precaution should also be taken to avoid costly efforts which result in unfortunate experiences with few positive results. Such experiences might be demoralizing, and impair the effectiveness of other constructive efforts in the future.

As a way of minimizing destructive and demoralizing thinking and maximizing constructive thinking and constructive action, the “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” document includes a section on “Problems That May Arise” (Section 13). As one example from that section, consider the following:

### *3. The need to proactively encourage constructive thinking*

“There will be people who are inclined to focus their attention, regardless of the difficulties and urgencies of trying to resolve multiple crises, on trying to make money by preying on people’s fears and misunderstandings, or on trying to encourage people to set aside their higher aspirations, and indulge in destructive behavior. Such behavior is clearly counterproductive to the building of caring communities; it can be very dangerous for community morale, and it can become a crippling obstacle in times of crises. Responsible people will take sufficient preventative measures to encourage a high percentage of constructive thinking and constructive action in their community.” [Note: This particular “problem that may arise” is formulated into a question (see question 7) which is included in Section 9 “15 Suggestions for Preliminary Survey Questions” in the “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” document.]

### Concluding Comments

This writer understands that creating the knowledge base, skill sets, and the compassion for our fellow human beings necessary to resolve the challenges of our times will require

- 1) recognizing deficiencies in the knowledge base and skill sets of our communities as they are now (an awareness which can be brought to the forefront by Community Visioning Initiatives)
- 2) recognizing deficiencies in compassion for our fellow human beings (an awareness which can also be brought to the forefront by Community Visioning Initiatives)
- 3) linking together the concepts of Community Visioning Initiatives, “Community Teaching and Learning Centers”, “teacher-leaders”, ongoing workshops, and “sister community” relationships
- 4) curriculum development “on the fly”
- 5) teacher training “on the fly”
- 6) community centers which are neighborhood-friendly, and which provide ongoing workshops that are deliberately affordable
- 7) encouraging as much formal and informal meetings with other people in the local neighborhoods for discussion, information sharing, mutual support and encouragement, fellowship and friendship—so that the result will include the building of a close-knit community of people with a healthy appreciation for each others strengths, and a well developed capacity to resolve even the most difficult challenges.

This writer—and the “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” document—also advocate three propositions which are especially relevant when considering the value of local community points of entry information clearinghouses, and ongoing workshops....

- a) There are countless numbers of “things people can do in the everyday circumstances of their lives” which will contribute to peacebuilding, community revitalization, and ecological sustainability efforts, in their own communities and regions—and in other parts of the world. [As one example of the countless numbers of things people can do, consider the list of “105 Related Fields of Activity”, located at the website of The IPCR Initiative at <http://ipcri.net/related-fields.html>]

- b) People can, one by one, decide to deliberately focus the way they spend their time, energy, and money so that their actions have positive repercussions on many or all of the action plans which emerge from Community Visioning Initiatives.
- c) The result can be that there are countless 'ways to earn a living' which contribute to the peacebuilding, community revitalization, and ecological sustainability efforts necessary to overcome the challenges of our times.

Everyone is involved when it comes to determining the markets which supply the "ways of earning a living". All of us have important responsibilities associated with resolving a significant number of very serious challenges in the months and years ahead. Communities of people can deliberately create countless "ways of earning a living" which contribute to the peacebuilding, community revitalization, and ecological sustainability efforts necessary to overcome the challenges of our times.

Even now, as you are reading this, truly inspiring contributions of genuine goodwill are being generated in a variety of ways—and in a variety of circumstances—by countless numbers of people in communities around the world. A combination of Community Visioning Initiatives, "Community Teaching and Learning Centers" and "sister community" relationships can bring to light the many truly inspiring contributions of genuine goodwill in your community and region, and contribute much to the building of "close-knit" communities of people... communities with a healthy appreciation for each others strengths, communities with a well-developed capacity to resolve even the most difficult challenges—and communities which demonstrate a high level of compassion for their fellow human beings.

With Kind Regards and Best Wishes,

Stefan Pasti, Founder and Outreach Coordinator  
The IPCR Initiative

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