

**POLICIES TO FIGHT URBAN POVERTY**  
**A GENERAL FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION**

This document is the outcome of the contribution made by the project “Cities: management of social transformations and the environment” to strategies to fight poverty and to promote democratic culture. It was prepared subsequent to evaluations of the Cities Project which was set up as part of the UNESCO’s Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme for the period 1996-2001. Its objective was to produce a conceptual framework and a methodological guide for action on the basis of action to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of pilot sites in Dakar and Port-au-Prince. This document thus fulfils the Cities Project’s concerns for replicability and transferability.

This document, and also the evaluations of the Yeumbeul/Malika (Dakar) and Jalousie (Port-au-Prince) Projects and the final evaluation of the Cities Project, was compiled and drafted by the sociologist, Denis Merklen. The author had the benefit of an ongoing working relationship with Geneviève Domenach-Chich, Co-ordinator of the project “Cities: management of social transformations and the environment”, a UNESCO focal point for the follow-up to Habitat II. Thanks are also extended to her for her help in compiling the French version of this document.

Documents available on <http://www.unesco.org/most/mostmab2.htm>

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## **I. Introduction.**

All the international bodies agree in designating the growth of poverty as a major problem and its eradication as a challenge. UNESCO describes poverty as a “long-standing scourge on mankind” and states that “today there can be no more important and central challenge for the world community than the fight against poverty” (UNESCO 160EX/13, 2000). This recognition of the growth of poverty and of the need for a response, which emerged in the public arena in the 1990s, is a positive development when set alongside the tenor of debates in the 1980s. There is an urgent need to intervene with effective policies, and the living conditions of whole populations render any other justification for action superfluous. This is the plea put forward by United Nations agencies such as UNDP (UNDP, 2000) and UNESCO (UNESCO, 2000) and by funding bodies including the World Bank (World Bank, 2000) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB, 2000).

### **I.1. Policies in an urban environment.**

One of the main factors influencing poverty-related social transformations is rapid urbanization of the type observed in various regions of Asia and Africa and in certain Latin American countries. Though the most serious situations are generally found in rural areas, poor people migrate from the countryside and are increasingly concentrated in cities. The urban environment thus constitutes a specific field of action.

We shall explore this field of action for policies to fight urban poverty, focusing on its specific features. This will enable us to define the types of actors likely to be involved and who might be mobilized, and also possible courses of action. We shall focus our proposals on a general framework of action designed to identify the main contextual factors, the types of actors mobilized, the main guidelines for policies and their relational framework.

The guidelines put forward in this document constitute a methodological framework. They should not in any circumstances be regarded as “the” strategy to fight poverty. Nor should they be considered as representing a choice between the macro and micro levels. Policies in an urban environment cannot replace general policies at national and international levels. The latter are concerned with, for example, problems of external debt, north-south relations and the role of States in relation to globalization. National-level policies will refer to economic development, inequalities, job insecurity and public education. UNESCO has recalled the important role of international bodies in moving from “poverty eradication actions with and for the poor” towards “a broader level, bearing on the dynamics of society as a whole” (160 EX/13, paragraph 6.c).

The absence of energetic and significant action to help poor and marginalized people living in large cities has two types of adverse outcomes. First, the urban poor are obliged to devise for themselves ways of life and strategies that focus almost exclusively on adapting to their situation and not on transforming it. On the one hand, such people take refuge in their community; on the other, they explore the city, the place where all

resources are concentrated, with the detachment of those who know they are outside the channels of production, circulation and consumption. Second, government inaction, whether it is the result of a lack of capacity or of purpose, further discredits the State, whose legitimacy is already undermined by the effects of economic concentration and increased trade autonomy. And yet the State remains a pivotal structure for the construction of sustainable solutions for social issues.

## **I.2. General framework of action to fight poverty in an urban environment.**

The present document is a contribution to “UNESCO’s strategy on development and poverty eradication” (160 EX/13: paragraph 12.a). It presents a general framework of action for the formulation and implementation of policies to fight poverty in an urban environment. As a methodological guide, its proposals have two main thrusts. The first bears on the roles of the actors. The importance of neighbourhood organizations is highlighted, as is also the role of democratic participatory processes which empower poor people to become protagonists in policies at both local and national level. Also defined are the two pivotal functions of the State: regulation of social life and institutionalization of the public arena. As part of the second thrust, the methodological framework proposes setting up a *neighbourhood organization/State/NGO* relational framework to provide guidance for the planning and implementation of policies to fight poverty.

This document is a contribution to another priority area within UNESCO’s strategy (160 EX/13: paragraph 12.e): the development of “field projects that are to be demonstrably innovative”. It draws on the major lessons learnt from the evaluation of the project “Cities: management of social transformations and the environment”<sup>1</sup>, a research-action project implemented from 1996 to 2001 as part of UNESCO’s Management of Social Transformations (MOST) programme. The Cities Project makes a major contribution by placing neighbourhood organizations at the core of public policies for social and environmental management in an urban environment. It also emphasises the State’s pivotal role. In most developing countries both these types of actors need support. Setting up ongoing processes of communication between State and civil society is seen as the key method of policy implementation, providing a way of enhancing innovatory initiatives and of coping with the conflicts inherent in poverty eradication.

## **II. Neighbourhood organizations within local support networks.**

There is abundant evidence that neighbourhood organizations play an important role in promoting social integration, especially of marginal populations living in large cities in developing countries. When other backup is weak or non-existent (e.g. job opportunities or social welfare provision) people rely for protection on organizations that have emerged from local support networks. The importance of these organizations is not always recognised at State level and by the institutional system. They are often seen by

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<sup>1</sup> The three Cities Project evaluation reports are available on the following site: <http://www.unesco.org/most/mostmab2.htm>.

governments as destabilising factors and by technocrats as an obstacle to planning, whilst political parties consider them merely as electoral instruments.

Neighbourhood organizations should be supported and recognised as actors in development policies and in policies to promote democratic culture. Experience has shown that they possess a large capacity for initiative in the context of development projects and that they constitute an excellent tool for the management of social policies. In a wide range of contexts, neighbourhood organizations have shown an often surprising capacity for improving human settlements and for social management. One instance is that of the *asentamientos*, squatter settlements in Buenos Aires and Montevideo, which have evolved into built neighbourhoods with high levels of collective facilities (Merklen (a), 2000). Similar developments have occurred in most big South American cities, e.g. the “Villa El Salvador” neighbourhood in Peru (Franco, 1993). These movements, which reflect the emergence of an autonomous collective acceptance of responsibility, usually fight for public recognition on the basis of a broad degree of participation and mobilisation. In Argentina, for example, neighbourhood organizations have provided backstop support for people coping with emergencies like the galloping inflation of the early 1990s and more recently the job crisis. They have also given impetus to numerous projects to provide access to drinking water and electricity supplies, build creches and community canteens and set up dispensaries. In its two interventions in Haiti and in Senegal, the Cities Project strengthened local organizations, considerably improving the local quality of life (drinking water supply, drainage, improvements to urban buildings) and encouraging the implementation of a participatory framework.

Despite the often manifest suspicion of governments and technocrats, for more than a decade voices have been raised to stress the potential of neighbourhood organizations. However, such attestations, especially those from NGOs and international organizations, have not so far led to any real recognition of this social capital, nor an acknowledgment of its true value.

***FIRST RECOMMENDATION:*** *Policies to fight poverty must draw on the considerable social capital that neighbourhood organizations represent. These organizations make significant contributions at four levels, which should underpin strategies in an urban environment.*

***a. Initiative.*** *Neighbourhood organizations possess a great capacity for initiative and creativity in implementing courses of action geared to their context and needs. This capacity is the fruit of people’s in-depth experience and knowledge of their own environment. Moreover, such organizations are not subject to institutional constraints and hence enjoy a large degree of flexibility. Lack of resources stimulates the imagination, often resulting in courses of action geared to the community’s needs and capabilities. Such initiatives need to be backed up by technical input and resources for their implementation. The first objective of development policies should be to support inhabitants’ initiatives.*

**b. Participation.** *Participation of stakeholders has been recognised as an essential component of policies to fight poverty (UNESCO, 160 EX/13, paragraph 6.b). Not only is this a sine qua non of democratic policies, it also promotes the efficiency of public policies<sup>2</sup>. The community is a key level for organizing interactivity, creating a favourable environment where people can more readily be mobilised. Participation has an instrumental effect, maximising the impact of policies and the productiveness of the means employed.*

**c. Democracy.** *Neighbourhood associations have succeeded in developing processes and structures involving a high level of participation, thereby promoting democratic culture. Features of life in many neighbourhoods often include the election of their leadership by secret ballot, the choice of delegate groups for each housing block, the holding of periodic assemblies and the setting up of horizontally organised committees. The neighbourhood can be a key environment for developing the practice of direct democracy. At this level, participation is ontological and not instrumental, and is vital for the growth of democratic culture. However, the promotion of democratic practice within neighbourhood organizations should go hand in hand with the latter's incorporation into measures to further decentralisation and local democracy. The promotion of democracy in neighbourhood organizations should receive State recognition<sup>3</sup>.*

**d. Social management.** *As a corollary of the three preceding points, the community is an excellent level for the management of decentralised social policies. Naturally and historically, the local community constitutes the primary level for the organization of welfare and assistance (before this is professionalised and taken in hand by specific institutions). Numerous instances could be cited: the setting up of creches and community schools, promotion of preventive health care practices, assistance via the organization of canteens and consumer co-operatives, social activities like the introduction of women's collectives. To inject greater dynamism into self-managed experiments, there will need to be linkage with the State level.*

## **II.1. Transcending simplistic perceptions and strengthening local support networks.**

Though organizations can be a valuable asset in the fight against poverty, they are often locked into defence mechanisms and the need to respond to the distress of local populations. These processes hinder their incorporation into development projects. Neighbourhood organizations are often caught between two fires. First, they are subject to the constraints of a community system of which they are the public manifestation and

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<sup>2</sup> In his "Seis tesis no convencionales sobre participación" Kliksberg (2000) presents a synthesis of the main advantages of a participatory approach to anti-poverty policy-making. The Inter-American Development Bank has produced a consultative tool for the introduction of participation into project drafting (IDB, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> In Latin America the remarkable experiments carried out in the cities of Porto Allègre and Montevideo clearly demonstrate the advantages of a participatory model.

the mobilised section. Second, they are engaged in ongoing discussions with institutional actors situated outside the neighbourhood, especially the State. We shall analyse the first process below. The relationship between neighbourhood organizations and their socio-political environment will be dealt with when we examine the role of the State (cf. *infra*, III. Public institutions and the State.)

Neighbourhood organizations are the mobilized section of a human group (the neighbourhood) which is underpinned by a local support network. The nature of this network is a factor that determines the potential of local organizations for action and for their inclusion in a democratic process<sup>4</sup>.

This fabric of local support characteristic of the urban poor and socially excluded can be represented metaphorically in terms of “social clusters” (Ndione, 1987). This striking image accurately encapsulates the structure of a local society whose building blocks are groups of various kinds attached by stalks to a common trunk. Family, lineage, ethnic groups, neighbourhood associations and brotherhoods are the constituent clusters of Senegalese neighbourhoods. Within each *cluster* are micro-societies whose ground-rules are traditional or customary, religious, family- or association-focused and which lay down a series of hierarchical procedures. The cluster image is a key to understanding the fragmented yet interconnected nature of local society.

Mobilisation of populations therefore requires that consideration be given to people’s multiple affiliations, i.e. one person will usually belong to several groups. A young person may, for instance, be part of a supportive family, belong to a brotherhood, respect a hierarchy based on custom or lineage and be a member of a local association concerned with children’s education or sport. These multiple local affiliations constitute people’s main rampart against social disintegration. People tend to belong to as many clusters as possible. This survival strategy is comparable to a comprehensive insurance cover enabling people to cope with sickness, unforeseen expenses such as weddings, funerals or births, temporary lack of funds or a house fire.

At the community level, the groups overlap like circles in the intersections in a Wenn diagram. This collective expression of the above-mentioned phenomenon of multiple affiliation provides an insight into the role of the various actors and agents in social life. All forms of group action are superimposed, and while each level retains a certain degree of autonomy, affiliation to local support networks (often family- or religion-based) determines the complexity of the social fabric. This pattern of community relations constitutes the substance of the primary support which Robert Castel has defined as “systems of rules which directly link members of a group on the basis of their family, neighbourhood or work affiliations and weave networks of interdependence without mediation by specific institutions” (Castel, 1995: 34ss). Regulations are made on the

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<sup>4</sup> Local support networks have often been studied by urban sociologists (cf. the work of the Chicago School) and by anthropologists (cf. the work of Oscar Lewis), but have hardly ever aroused the interest of decision-makers, militants or planners of public policies.

basis of people's inclusion in their territory. Locally-based communities organise social welfare for the needy by mobilising the economic and relational resources of their family and/or local environment. The existence of such roots is the key to understanding how people survive in societies where poverty is often dire and widespread.

The traditions and characteristic features of each people take on their fullest importance in local support networks. In this context, policies to fight poverty must show maximum flexibility in project implementation. In Haiti, for example, voodoo is to a large extent a form of social cement, whereas in Senegal this role is played by brotherhoods or ethnic groups and in Latin America it would probably be assumed by the parishes of the Catholic Church and by networks based on cronyism. In some Brazilian cities a considerable incidence of Macumba/Catholicism syncretism would be observed.

In the suburbs of Dakar we observed that the ground-rules of community life prevented women's groups from playing a full part in the development process. These groups, which are part of a process of circulation and co-operation based on a tradition of *tontines* -- self-help funds administered by women notables -- pursue a variety of economic activities which are incompatible with the accumulation process which is indispensable for integration into the market. Sooner or later all the funds injected by development projects disappear into the maze of grassroots support networks.

To turn to another point, we observed that, in Port-au-Prince, neighbourhood associations have begun to keep order in the neighbourhood, overtly taking over from the legal system and the police. This development is to a large extent a response to the non-existence of the State (the current situation of Haitian society) but the fact remains that this use of power could well become totalitarian, as has often occurred. It has been observed on many occasions that neighbourhood organizations can exercise power over inhabitants in a manifestly arbitrary way. This is often imperceptible to an outside observer. In some neighbourhoods of the Argentine capital, for example, we have observed forms of community control that were often incompatible with individual freedom in its most basic form<sup>5</sup>. These observations must be borne in mind in order to avoid pitfalls linked to an excessively simplistic image of neighbourhood associations<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Observation of this type of phenomenon requires a long-term or ethnographic approach. That said, similar observations have often been made elsewhere in poor neighbourhoods. Mafia-type organizations have often taken refuge in such forms of social control, as in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. However, the explanation for the involvement of individuals in such organizations is sociological rather than moral. Studies of the USA in the 1930s have shown that, in the absence of any other support mechanism, joining the Mafia was a way of surviving and acquiring prestige in the neighbourhood.

<sup>6</sup> Any reading in terms of "modernity versus tradition" should be avoided. Local inclusion is sometimes the result of support from a traditional type of sociability (the ethnic group in Africa, for example) but not always (traditionalism has hardly any weight in many countries, e.g. Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and is crumbling in the large cities). The main characteristic of these forms of inclusion is the local basis of networks and support.

Two risks are then apparent. First, aid earmarked for a development project may be used by neighbourhood associations to further their own ends within the community. This is usually an obstacle that has to be overcome when “hunting” type behaviour (which will be described below) is very deep-rooted. Second, the project may serve to strengthen organizations run according to criteria that are incompatible with democratic culture.

The social mobilisation which development projects aim to support is caught between two different poles of attraction. On the one hand, there are the cultural traditions and local support networks which are indispensable in current survival conditions. These are the foundations of local participation structures. On the other, there are the State and political system. The participation in social life that is supported and to some extent initiated by policies to fight poverty is based in neighbourhoods that are already organised. In Haiti, for example, young people’s participation is to some extent the product of grassroots traditions that have grown up during a history of resistance to and co-existence with a totalitarian authority. In one sense, therefore, the mobilisation upon which all development projects depend is bound to be the heir of local support networks, partly resulting from the culture of survival and resistance, partly rooted in community life, partly governed by religious traditions, partly the offshoot of family structures, and partly the product of political traditions at the grassroots level.

These local inclusion<sup>7</sup> structures and these underlying legacies are responsible for the vigour of the neighbourhood’s community life. But at the same time, they may restrict its potential to move towards a culture of citizenship. One way in which this legacy and these structures might evolve could be via political involvement (in the sense of becoming part of the public arena).

## **II.2. Neighbourhood organizations.**

On the basis of these local support networks, neighbourhoods acquire a range of organizations which perform a dual function. First, they represent the neighbourhood in the public arena and in relation to the State. Second, they launch and organize a variety of initiatives within the neighbourhood. Their action has a twofold purpose: they fight to improve living conditions; and they seek recognition, defend an identity and promote various values.

To an outside observer, neighbourhood organizations are the most visible form of collective action. They are in close contact with local support structures and the neighbourhood culture. Neighbourhood organizations thus work simultaneously with local networks and with institutions that possess the resources they need and which represent the society’s universal values. Consequently, they perform an important

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<sup>7</sup> They are “local inclusion” structures in the sense that they provide people with an anchorage in the neighbourhood, often being their main source of social integration.

function as mediators between inhabitants and institutions, whilst at the same time forming part of the neighbourhood.

**SECOND RECOMMENDATION:** *The two main areas in which neighbourhood organizations are active – improving living conditions and building a neighbourhood identity – must be at the core of policies. Neither of these two areas should take priority over the other. Only local actors will be equipped to determine this priority.*

**a. Improving quality of life.** *Action here has two aims. First, improving infrastructures and urban services in general (e.g. drinking water supply, drainage, electricity, public lighting, transport, urban waste treatment) and upgrading buildings ranging from the urban framework (e.g. squares and other public areas, bridges, pavements, roads, staircases) to housing (house repair, extension and building). This field of action includes the urban environment, which is often rundown and insalubrious. Since the poor are usually relegated to marginal areas of the city, there are often major environmental problems (e.g. flooding, rubbish dumps, overcrowding, contamination, pollution).*

*Second, action to promote community life and to provide backup for family life and disadvantaged persons. Neighbourhood organizations often engage in social work, providing a vast range of welfare services. This is classic community work, e.g. creches, canteens, schools, dispensaries, association HQs, health care, leisure activities for children and young people, theatre groups, football teams. Groups engaged in economic activities are often found at this level, e.g. women's groups, micro production projects, consumer co-operatives.*

**b. The struggle for recognition.** *Action is designed to promote integration, the defence or construction of a neighbourhood identity, public recognition and ending outcast status. Activities include giving names to streets and numbering dwellings to provide legal evidence of residence, cleaning up streets and removing rubbish dumps. These aspirations explain why seemingly disproportionate projects may be proposed, e.g. the construction of a football stadium in the middle of a shantytown. In point of fact, such initiatives strengthen people's sense of belonging, and may help them to feel proud of their neighbourhood. Similar feelings motivate the desire for legal title to property. Though squatting is linked to "practical" difficulties, it is often felt to be shameful and is a source of insecurity.*

### **II.3. Support for organizations and follow-up for their initiatives.**

It is clearly by design that neighbourhood organizations centre their action on improving quality of life and fighting for recognition. There are three reasons why they act in this way:

- 1) These aspirations are closely linked to the survival and reproduction of persons and households; these are not strictly private matters. Survival is organised at community level.
- 2) The organizations' local character. Neighbourhood organizations need to be able to garner the fruits of their action for the people they "represent".

3) These two areas concern the neighbourhood rather than individuals. Action focuses on the identity of individual persons and their local inclusion and on the neighbourhood's social cohesion. Achievement of these goals (e.g. a postal address or one's domicile noted on one's identity card) "normalises" the neighbourhood by absorbing it into the city and integrating it into regular procedures. The struggle is about making the transition from inclusion in a community to social integration via recognition from public institutions and participation in social life.

The main guidelines for a policy to fight poverty in an urban environment must cover this ground, despite the complexity and extent of the urban phenomenon, and the many facets of the fight against poverty. From the viewpoint of a strategy to fight poverty, the demands of populations may sometimes seem superfluous<sup>8</sup>. As we shall see below (cf. *infra*) it is necessary to look further than the concept of "poverty". First, because this concept does not cover all the social problems found in poor neighbourhoods. Second, because injecting an "anti-poverty" slant into development policies is incompatible with the complexity of the action that must be taken. Empowering the poor must be the aim of policies to fight poverty.

***THIRD RECOMMENDATION:*** *In order to strengthen neighbourhood organizations, policies to fight poverty in an urban environment should do two things: transfer resources and introduce a relational framework.*

*a. Empower neighbourhood organizations by transferring resources to them (e.g. training, technology transfer, general supply of resources, building of premises).*

*b. Set up participatory bodies linking neighbourhoods and public institutions controlling resources and the power to regulate social life. In particular, set up a relational framework with the State.*

*Policies clearly need to be grounded in an in-depth knowledge of local support networks and cultural traditions if they are to be effective (in terms of goals and methodologies). Development NGOs and local governments can play a leading role in this field, given their field contacts.*

***FOURTH RECOMMENDATION:*** *Policies will aim to promote democratic culture. Support for inhabitants' initiatives and backing for local organizations should remain the core of policies to fight poverty. Actions should, however, bear in mind two points so as to avoid a community-biased approach: an effort to promote democratic practice and support for local culture.*

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<sup>8</sup> *Why invest so much in a football field when the neighbourhood does not even have a dispensary?* The question was raised during the evaluation of Cities Project action in Haiti's Jalousie neighbourhood. The appropriateness and utility of the investment were clearly revealed by the increase in social cohesion and of enrolment in neighbourhood organizations sparked by this activity.

*a. Neighbourhood organizations should be encouraged to promote democratic practice and guidelines for action by following two lines of approach:*

- *Encouraging local organizations to participate in the public arena. A distinctive feature of neighbourhood organizations is that they are non-partisan. They nevertheless have a role to play as a voice of civil society. Participation in public life should help neighbourhood organizations to overcome limitations linked to their local purview and dovetail them into processes of citizenship. There must be a move away from getting “something for my neighbourhood” to projects forming part of the universal context appropriate to the promotion of citizenship. The aim is to enrich the public arena.*
- *Encouraging relations between local organizations and inhabitants of the neighbourhood. It will be necessary to promote legitimate forms of representation when investing neighbourhood organizations with authority and to promote collective mechanisms for constructing these forms of representation and supervising the exercise of authority. The aim is to promote democracy in the neighbourhood without disregarding or denying the identity of inhabitants.*

*b. Support for neighbourhood organizations should be provided via both culture and development (Hermet, 2000). While the enhancement of inhabitants’ traditions and projects calls for constant attention to “culture” and its particularities, promoting democratic culture must encourage the introduction of “universal” values to avoid merely reproducing local traditions and networks. Policies to fight urban poverty must avoid two facile alternatives: the scorn for neighbourhood organizations and simplistic, community-biased approaches.*

*Policies to fight poverty should eschew scornful attitudes and contribute to strengthening neighbourhood organizations, recognizing the distinctive cultural and social characteristics of the populations concerned. The community level should be protected from the negative effects of policies claiming to encourage social promotion and from the effects of indiscriminate integration into the market which, as experience has shown, has often led to the destruction of local ways of life, leaving populations vulnerable rather than integrated.*

*Furthermore, the promotion of democratic practices and values should make it possible to avoid simplistic approaches that often cause policies to fail and, albeit unintentionally, strengthen the undesirable aspects of a community-biased approach.*

### III. Public institutions and the State: regulation and the public arena

The Cities Project experiment sheds a searching light on the State's role in development projects, corroborating observations made elsewhere<sup>9</sup>. The first step in Cities Project action strategy was to provide support for neighbourhood organizations. This initiative was followed up by awareness-raising among government authorities and by bringing together neighbourhood organizations and the State. This second stage was vitally important since it involved institutional recognition of the experiment and marked the start of commitment by the public authorities<sup>10</sup>. The process tested in this way is satisfactory and appears as an innovative alternative. It is a process that starts at grassroots level with support for initiatives originating with local organizations, leads in the first instance to the empowerment of these organizations and then aims to involve the government and the State. The process does not, of course, rule out the development of a relational framework initiated by the government.

The State has a pivotal role to play in the protection of citizens, for ethical and other reasons<sup>11</sup>. A strategy to fight poverty, especially in an urban environment, must take account of State involvement in two areas: the *regulation of social life* and the *institutionalization of the public arena*.

In big cities today, institutions perform an indispensable regulatory function, irrespective of the specific form they possess in different countries. State involvement is vitally important for development projects in an urban environment for two reasons. First, improving the quality of life depends on resources (such as drinking water) that are managed or need to be regulated by public institutions. More generally, the development of a poor neighbourhood cannot be organized by a community acting unilaterally; it must be part of an integrated economic and political urban blueprint.

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, GRET/IRD: *Pour des politiques publiques de lutte contre la pauvreté et les inégalités*, Paris, Mimeograph, May 2000. This document provides an overview of development experiments carried out in Africa by GRET with support from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. See also HERMET, Guy: *Culture et développement*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2000. This book presents an overview of contributions to the "Culture and development Forum" – BID, UNESCO, Sciences Po, Paris, 1999, based on experiments in Latin America.

<sup>10</sup> This process took different forms in Haiti and Senegal. In Haiti, the establishment of stable links between local organizations and the State was disturbed by turbulence in the political process which made the entire institutional system extremely fragile. In Senegal, the county boroughs joined in the Project and initiatives arising from it are integrated into discussions about the urban policies of Pikine municipality (population 1 million).

<sup>11</sup> Many authors point to the need to appeal to supra-national institutions capable of executing a "domestic policy at the planetary level without world government" in order to fill the gap left by nation-States confronted with globalization (Habermas, 2000). Supranational institutions notwithstanding, nation-States continue to have, at their level, a non-transferable role conferred by the norms governing the construction of legitimate authority.

Second, no democratic process is possible without State involvement. The emergence of neighbourhood organizations as actors in the democratic process is contingent upon the political context and its history, which are often marked by autocratic or nepotistic forms of government or by the weakness or even absence of the State. Furthermore, participation cannot develop without the formation of a broadly-based public arena in which the State's function is irreplaceable.

Examination of the State/neighbourhood relationship (taking both above points into account) highlights what must be a core feature of any development policy: "Encouraging the State to fulfil its due functions" (Hermet, 2000). At this point, strategies to fight poverty necessarily become political, in the sense that they involve setting up mechanisms to produce legitimate authority.

### **III.1. Regulation.**

Solving problems in the urban environment necessarily calls for institutional regulation. Desirable though it is for people to play a part in improving their quality of life, it is clear that big cities cannot function without societal regulation that goes much further than the community-based framework of individual neighbourhoods.

The State's role is highlighted "by default" when it fails to find a remedy for malfunctioning urban services<sup>12</sup>. It has often been noted that the sustainability of development projects in poor neighbourhoods depends on the water company (for standpipes) and the town hall (for refuse collection, emptying cesspools and latrines, etc). These examples illustrate a constraint that affects all development projects involving services and infrastructures in an urban environment. It is impossible for individual communities to solve problems in such fields as transport, drinking water, drainage, electricity, education and public health by taking unilateral action. In large cities with millions of inhabitants and a complex economic activity, social life requires a type of regulation that can only be provided by public institutions.

Technical problems such as a spasmodic water supply are an indication that standards and mechanisms for regulating social life are lacking. Urban services are dependent on institutions. This being so, policies to fight poverty must aim to strengthen relations between local actors and the institutions representing society as a whole, namely the State. The State is involved in its capacity as "a system of public institutions" (thus clearly distinguishing it from the government).

The situation regarding institutions leads us from the example of services on to another problem, namely the identity of the neediest people. In developing countries, institutions

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<sup>12</sup> We observed a remarkable situation in Jalousie, Haiti. Even though people were living in dire poverty, a cohesive community was managing to instil a certain degree of social "order" into the neighbourhood. On the other hand, chaos continued to prevail elsewhere in the city as a result of the State's inadequacies.

often do not regulate important areas of social life, or do so inadequately: laws and rules are not respected, there is a parallel economy, urban chaos, inadequate policing, etc. Everyday experience can be summed up as follows: *you work, but half your pay is not declared*. Social security may be provided for by the Constitution but it is never actually delivered. Children go to school but they learn no skills that can be regarded as useful. In many cases the problem is not so much that modern institutions do not exist but that in practice they leave gaps that are filled by other kinds of social welfare providers like those found in run-down neighbourhoods. In other cases, it is clear that institutions have broken down or simply do not exist. To compensate for the fragility of institutions, local support networks step in to do the State's job and community-based regulation replaces social regulation.

This institutional fragility is closely linked to the attitudes and behaviour of neighbourhood organizations and of members of local support networks. Economic and institutional fragility helps to sustain a "hunting culture" which is typically found in run-down neighbourhoods and exemplifies a type of relationship between individuals and society which functions in cities.

People living in insecure circumstances leave each day the refuge of their neighbourhoods to make a foray into the city, which they regard as a forest harbouring all kinds of opportunities. In this situation, individual lives and collective action can be described in terms of "a search for a niche, for space left free by institutions which are unable to guarantee social integration. In a world dominated by instability and risk, there is no place for the culture of the farmer who has to organize his life around natural cycles. So groups and individuals behave like hunters, combing the city and its institutions on the lookout for opportunities" (Merklen [b], 2000)<sup>13</sup>. Perhaps today they will make a good catch: a menial job, assistance for the association from the town hall, a loan from an NGO, a handout from the Church or from a marabout, something to sell on the market, a windfall from a tourist. They perceive the city as a world where every opportunity must be snapped up. Since planning is non-existent and social regulation is inadequate, people living in poor neighbourhoods learn to try their luck whenever they see an opportunity offered by gaps in institutions whose fields of activity are ill-defined.

*Policies to fight poverty must contribute to the establishment of social regulation mechanisms capable of combatting insecurity.* First, because insecurity and a fatalistic approach to the vicissitudes of existence often lead to terrible suffering, akin to that caused by poverty and need. Second, because situations in which the poor are at the mercy of events and take refuge in hunting-type strategies are inimical to participation and the creation of political bonds. The hunter has a pejorative image of the politician, whom he regards as a corrupt administrator of the State, which is itself perceived as a machine concentrating and arbitrarily distributing resources. Both in neighbourhood organizations and in individuals we can see the development of a culture of contingency,

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<sup>13</sup> The hunter is on the lookout for opportunities, he lives in a Bergsonian perpetual present. His behaviour can be defined as being opposite to that of the farmer who organizes his life in tune with the seasons.

instant gratification and living off one's wits. There is no attempt made to fit in with standards and institutions that work badly. Their aim of the groups and individuals is immediate, material, tangible profit. The hunters sometimes behave like crafty poachers or like Jorge Amado's *Capitães da Areia*, who roamed through the city of Salvador from its periphery in search of bargains and one-off opportunities.

When the State is a weak regulator of social life and fails to play its role as a safety net for the neediest members of society, it coexists with the appearance of marginal forms of social behaviour<sup>14</sup>. This institutional situation and the behavioural trends that result from it influence the long-term evolution of development as well as the sustainability of development projects. Local support networks structured like "cluster societies" act as a counterpoise to the informal sector and institutional instability. This diagnosis radically modifies the field of action of development projects in an urban environment. It means that action must focus on the linkage between State inadequacies and marginal culture. This is why a strategy based either on the State or on civil society, as if the two were interchangeable, is not appropriate. A policy to fight poverty which backs up neighbourhood organizations and aims to strengthen civil society inevitably requires a strong State and a solid institutional system.

When a development project relies exclusively on the dynamism of civil society, it is very likely to encounter a defensive, mistrustful attitude on the part of the population. If they are not dovetailed into institutions, neighbourhood organizations will often tend to make their participation conditional on the more or less tangible profits they can derive from it. When this happens, organizations incapable of becoming self-reliant make constant requests for assistance. They will only act when there is a prospect of obtaining funding or practical support. In these conditions a project cannot make any lasting impact.

***FIFTH RECOMMENDATION:*** *Policies to fight poverty will aim to strengthen the regulatory role of public institutions and the State. This recommendation has two objectives: enabling institutions to work and helping to reduce insecurity.*

- a *Promoting the smooth running of services and institutions directly concerned with physical living conditions in poor neighbourhoods. For example, it is not enough to install a small number of standpipes or even a drinking water supply network. Access to drinking water will need to be institutionalized by legislation, by setting up a water company when one does not exist or by providing back-up when it is underperforming or malfunctioning, by setting up a public regulatory and supervisory mechanism<sup>15</sup>.*

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<sup>14</sup> In this context, although the concept of poverty is extremely important in approaching the question, it is insufficient to conceptualize what we have tried to describe here. We shall return to this point, cf. *infra*, V.1. Some problems often encountered in "well-intentioned" strategies to fight poverty.

<sup>15</sup> Whether the property is private or public is clearly of secondary importance.

- b *Helping to reduce insecurity. The eradication of insecurity is not only a means of relieving distress caused by uncertainty, it also involves the inclusion of individuals within tightly knit social bonds. These bonds provide the support (Castel, 2001) required for training responsible individuals. The aim of this aspect of policies to fight poverty is to prevent the individual from being left with no other support than that which a poor community can provide.*

### **III.2. Democracy and the public arena: a place for conflict.**

One major problem facing development projects is the all too often observed phenomenon that the poor are suspicious of politics and politicians. Whilst at the end of the 20th century democracy is a generally accepted perspective, it is clear that needy people feel “distant from the public arena and the affairs of society”. This distancing, which is often created by political cronyism and the State’s loss of legitimacy or simply by the absence of democracy, has been amplified by structural adjustment and its corollaries. “Since the State’s resources [are] now limited, access to the State, which was hitherto the speciality of politicians, is a less important issue than it was before. It makes more sense to focus one’s demands on other areas or to formulate them in different ways” (Coulon, 2000: 85). In this context, policies that seek to buttress the organizations of civil society may aggravate this weakness which induces people to turn to NGOs and international bodies on the grounds that they are more credible and efficient. This approach further undermines people’s confidence in a State which is already discredited. During implementation of the Cities Project in Senegal we saw that the amount of money invested in it represented more than ten years’ budget of one of the three county boroughs. How could the different parties fail to feel that an NGO and an international organization had come to do something that was an unfulfilled duty of the State? In short, how can a development project in an urban environment be prevented from adding to the State’s loss of legitimacy?

Past experience has shown the dangers inherent in projects geared to supporting civil society (to the detriment of the State, though that is not their avowed intention). Non-governmental development actors have all too often confused government with State. They have set out to promote “governance against the State”, reasoning in terms of micro-governance (Hermet, 2000: pp. 159-175). Seeking to counteract the adverse effects of a vertical exercise of political power, they have ultimately further weakened the State’s authority, leading to an even greater fragmentation of society.

There is no point in trying to fight poverty without being ready to cope with the conflicts that solutions will inevitably spark off (Øyen, 1999). In an urban environment, people systematically make the State the target of their complaints, even when they are in conflict with another social agent (e.g. the owner of land where an unauthorized settlement has taken root).

The State is the only democratic conflict-solving body. As a result, it is the institutional promoter and watchdog of the public arena, not because it holds a monopoly on the public interest but because only a strong State (in terms of legitimate authority) can co-

ordinate actors within an enlarged public arena. In this context, democracy signifies communication between the State and civil society, the State marshalling the scattered voices of society and then restoring them to society in institutional form (Durkheim).

Furthermore, poverty-related problems or problems concerning a population's quality of life are often connected with the activities or interests of very powerful economic organizations (e.g. an economic activity that pollutes water or absorbs an urban area's workforce in unacceptable conditions). A legitimately constituted government, emanating from a functioning public arena, will provide the needy with their only chance of being heard. It is, of course, also a check on the arbitrariness of corrupt authority. In other words, the problems of poverty cannot be solved without a body equipped to handle conflict, which must exist prior to the introduction of social regulation mechanisms.

The preceding remarks require elucidation. As part of its function as a social regulator, integrating and protecting needy and marginalised populations, the State is a normative and executive institutional system. At this level, a policy to fight poverty must focus on strengthening linkage between neighbourhood associations and local government (e.g., municipalities), certain ministries and public utilities and other public institutions (public health and education). In relation to the public arena and democratic process, the State is represented by government, parliament and the other political authorities. Neighbourhood organizations and development NGOs must achieve recognised status as actors within the wider public arena. As a consequence, linkage with the State must be strengthened in a strictly "political" way.

### **III.3 The State and the municipalities.**

By virtue of its proximity and its contact with populations, local government plays a major role in policies to fight poverty. It is the natural host institution for participation by neighbourhood organizations, especially since municipalities are defined in most cases as the city's government. However, "policies to fight urban poverty" are not exactly the same thing as "urban policies". There are many areas in which the local state has to give way to the State and vice versa. A strategy to fight poverty will find the right mix between these two terms for each situation. All the same, we must beware of oversimplistic approaches that restrict policies to local action.

Improvement of quality of life cannot be perceived solely in terms of distribution of goods and services. Such improvements must form part of a collective right and of comprehensive legal regulations accompanied by institutional mechanisms (engaging the responsibility of the political authorities, i.e. the State) to back them up. Failing this, there is a risk that populations will continue to experience different forms of paternalism or cronyism.

### III.4. The civil society-State relationship is at the core of policies

While it is important to distinguish civil society from the State, it is pointless to treat them as two separate entities. . . . Civil society only flourishes where civil liberties are dovetailed into political liberties and where there is interdependence between the actions of individuals and communities and government decisions.

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Fragile institutions are often the result of a low level of economic development combined with a varying number of political factors. Consequently, policies to fight poverty must incorporate measures to strengthen institutions (in countries where the State is weak) and to set up machinery for civil society-State participation and communication (where there is a gap between public institutions and the population).

**SIXTH RECOMMENDATION:** *The State has a major role to play in protecting the needy and providing a public arena for handling conflicts. Policies to fight poverty must encourage the creation or enrichment of the public arena. Action will focus on two areas:*

- *Promoting the recognition of neighbourhood organizations as legitimate actors in the formation of the public arena.*
- *Setting up facilities for discussion and participation as features of public policies.*

*Four guidelines ensue:*

- a. When policies are focused on civil society (support for grassroots initiatives) they will be designed to bring in local government and involve the State. This is indispensable if policies are not to widen the already-existing gap between people and the public arena. As a first step towards abolishing the tension that often exists between population and authorities, an action system could be set up involving neighbourhood associations, the development NGO and municipalities. Subsequent action at a higher level should be dovetailed into a regulatory legal framework and should provide a template for public policy. Failing this, the best outcome to be expected is a micro-project that is successful but has no major impact.*
- b. NGOs and international bodies (UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF, etc.) have a crucial role to play in legitimizing local and State organizations, with a specific place being earmarked for each actor.*
- c. Support must be solicited from the State (where necessary) in its dual capacity as regulator of social life and watchdog of the public arena. State support will be channelled particularly but not exclusively into local government capacity-building. The involvement of government bodies at the national level is recommended to prevent policies from being limited in scope and so that “social” aspects are not dissociated from the sphere of citizens’ “rights”.*

*d. Mechanisms for communication between the State (especially but not exclusively at municipal level), the NGO and neighbourhood organizations will be set up. These mechanisms will be central to structures for managing policies to fight poverty.*

#### **IV. Local development NGOs. Mediation and support.**

Development NGOs have been described as “a relatively small group” of intellectuals belonging to a certain “middle class” and often trained abroad. Progressive by inclination, these people have set up NGOs which endeavour to serve as structures providing mediation between the excluded majority of the population, on the one hand, and international bodies and State machinery on the other. These groups “have always had great difficulty in working out their relationship with the political authorities and with the majority of the population, which is organized on bases that are largely outside their grasp” (Pouligny, 2000: 566). This leads us to define their role and analyse their limitations.

##### **IV.1. The contribution of NGOs.**

The role of NGOs can be a key factor in policies to fight poverty because the management of a development programme needs on-going follow-up among local populations and actors. The NGO’s role is to facilitate communication between the needs and interests of populations (represented by neighbourhood associations) and public institutions. It also involves providing support for neighbourhood organizations. NGOs are often responsible for embodying in a development project the needs expressed by associations.

***SEVENTH RECOMMENDATION:*** *Development NGOs’ contribution centres on three main activities: supporting neighbourhood organizations, establishing a momentum of communication, taking part in a research-action process.*

*a. To support neighbourhood organizations. NGOs will perform an essential function, establishing methods of action and operational policies and strengthening neighbourhood organizations. This will be done in four ways:*

- *Drawing up development projects based on the needs expressed by neighbourhood organizations, transferring the requisite capacities to empower populations.*
- *Developing training facilities in several fields (technical, management, IT, crafts, policies).*
- *Training local organizations in project conception and social and environmental management.*
- *Providing resources (e.g., premises, communication and transport facilities, computer equipment) by developing relations with funding and co-operation agencies.*

*b. To promote an on-going communication process. In the context of a strategy to fight poverty, this means setting up policy management systems in which co-operation and participation are the keynote of decision-making. This component is designed to meet two*

*objectives: democratising neighbourhood organizations and expanding the public arena. Remaining outside the local power system, the NGO will seek to set up mechanisms enabling the actors concerned to introduce arrangements for solving conflicts that arise from the transformation of social hierarchies.*

*c. Take part in the research-action process. Because of its intermediary position, the development NGO has special insight into the correlation between different orders of knowledge. It acts as a mediator between the skills of the politician, the scientist and the people at large.*

*NGOs will aim to produce knowledge as a spinoff of experiments that occur. Facilities must exist for disseminating and possibly reproducing this knowledge. To this end, the NGO must promote co-operation between academic researchers and grassroots actors.*

*The main value of intervention by NGOs is communications-focused; it results from the introduction of discussion opportunities open to all the actors. This method permits development along mutually agreed lines, e.g. extending local experiments to other groups and neighbourhoods or setting up collective management bodies grouping the different actors. This does not in any way imply neutrality or the concept of anti-poverty strategies as non-conflictual (i.e simplistic or unfeasible).*

*In societies where the chasm between elites and the rest of the population is too deep, intermediary structures are few and far between. In these conditions, NGOs sometimes provide one of the few points of contact and avenues of communication between the centre and the periphery. NGOs thus assume a mediation function.*

#### **IV.2. Some limitations of NGOs.**

Nevertheless, NGOs are subject to certain constraints

1. Material resources. A policy to fight poverty must be designed to promote the autonomy and empowerment of the needy. This being the case, the “mediation” role to be played by development NGOs cannot be restricted to distributing resources or providing services in situations where people cannot cope and where the State is powerless or indifferent. In the field of humanitarian action and poverty alleviation NGOs can, for example, be found providing medical care, distributing food and medical supplies, etc. Development NGOs, by definition, rely on the resources they can obtain from funding agencies. As organizations, they are to some extent bureaucracies which need financial backing in order to exist. In other words, they have no alternative but to seek funding. As a result, they tend to think of themselves as managers positioned halfway between the possessors of resources (funding agencies) and needy populations. This is a fatal error. Experience shows that NGOs must be extricated from this “Celestina”-type role in which they attempt to bring together two social sectors which are separated in practice by a social divide and by the concentration of resources. To pursue this line of approach is to perpetuate the bonds of dependence and assistance.

2. Legitimacy. The question of NGOs' legitimacy has often been raised. *Who do they speak for? Who do they represent?* (Morvan, 2000). To avoid this type of question, they must position themselves as a third party which is helping to construct the main relationship between populations and the State. If they do this, they will not be taking the place of neighbourhood organizations, political parties or State structures. NGOs must see themselves as "facilitators", opening up access to rare resources and instituting relational processes. They must abandon the claim they sometimes make that they are the sole representatives of civil society.

## **V. General framework of action: Policies to fight urban poverty as the product of a relational framework.**

### **V.1. Problems often encountered in "well intentioned" strategies**

A number of limitations and dangers are contained in strategies to fight poverty, and in the very concept of poverty, engendered by the way in which most of these policies are implemented (Merklen, 2001). Four main problems can be distinguished in the current tenor of policies to fight poverty:

The concept of poverty often restricts possible strategies in the field of social action. How is the "war on poverty" waged? Food, "welfare" or clothes are handed out, dispensaries, primary schools and community canteens are built, benefits are given out in exchange for community work, living conditions are improved by providing drainage or access to drinking water, etc. Three guiding principles often govern action strategies. At State level *decentralization* is advocated, *focusing* is the key word for defining objectives and, at the implementation stage, *participation* is advised as a stepping stone to good governance. It can already be said, however, that after more than ten years' systematic implementation of these policies, the balance sheet in terms of poverty alleviation is clearly negative at all levels.

Why is this approach followed? Because the image of a "poor" person is that of a person (or a community) who lacks something: "To be poor is to be hungry, to lack shelter and clothing, to be sick and not to be treated, to be illiterate and receive no education" (World Bank, 2000a). The argument is that since poor people lack something, it should either be given to them or they should be helped to acquire it. One of the most widespread consequences of this approach is the fragmentation of social policies. "Target" populations are "focused on": women, children, the disabled, old people and alcoholism, young people and drugs, slums and delinquency, peasants and the land. . . . As if there were no common denominator between them.

The poor, then, are tagged as members of problem categories and it is on these grounds that they are called on to "participate". And to improve the accuracy of targeting and to be more responsive to the demands of participation, it is necessary to be close to the grassroots. Hence "decentralization".

The concept of poverty is an inadequate tool for making an accurate diagnosis of the situation of the neediest people. It encompasses and thereby obscures other social problems of paramount importance for policy-making. One of them is the deficit of social integration which turns people into dropouts. As we have pointed out (cf. *supra*), it is often this type of deficit rather than poverty that gives rise to “hunting” strategies. The fight against poverty would be more effective if it included the concepts of *vulnerability*, *instability* and *insecurity*. It would then be responsive to the situation of people who lack the security of a stable job or ownership. Vulnerability is manifested in constant instability and the need to live from hand to mouth. Some poor people may be thoroughly integrate -- this is the case of low-paid wage-earners, for example. Their difficulties can be solved by a wage increase. The idea of vulnerability expresses problems of social integration and reflects the weakness of the social bonds that are thought to encourage personal development.

The more we concentrate on the fight against poverty, the more we relegate to obscurity and oblivion the forces and processes that lead people towards poverty or keep them there. Why does each day see a rise in the numbers of the needy on every continent? Why is this happening in relatively rich countries like Argentina as well as in very poor countries like Bolivia? These questions are outside the frame of anti-poverty projects because it is generally accepted that neither economics nor politics are mentioned in discussions about poverty.

There is no mention of hierarchies or conflicts. Two major issues are usually absent from expositions and policies contained in documents advocating a “fight against poverty”. When diagnoses are made, it is never said that the poor are poor because they are part of social hierarchies and the ways in which these hierarchies are reproduced (and resources are concentrated). Strategies never take into account the conflicts inherent in the modification of hierarchies and processes (Øyen, 2000). Where will society find the resources to increase the share of product earmarked for education? How can pauperisation be halted without undermining the labour market and security of employment? How can peasants be given access to land? How can the environment and natural resources be protected without regulating the activities of the big companies that exploit these resources? These are issues that are generally mentioned in recommendations for a struggle against poverty, provided no questions are asked about the conflicts inherent in tackling them.

We thus propose a general framework of action for policies in an urban environment which will take these difficulties into account. The proposed framework is one of the most valuable results of the Cities Project experiment.

1. Poverty will not be treated as a problem concerning needy persons but as a problem concerning the society in which these persons live.
2. This starting point leads to recognition of the existence of poverty-generating processes that must be checked. These processes are connected with a hierarchical social structure.
3. It will be impossible to eradicate or alleviate poverty without transforming hierarchical relationships. These transformations inevitably involve conflicts.

The proposals put forward here thus provide a methodology for action in an urban environment, without overestimating the scope of this type of action in projects aimed at eradicating poverty, i.e. at the complex transformation of societies and of their reproduction mechanisms.

## **V.2. The general framework of action**

On the basis of evaluation of the Cities Project and the accumulated experience of development projects in an urban environment it is possible to identify the types of actors present in most contexts. They include 1) local organizations (neighbourhood associations, women's groups, community schools, dispensaries, voluntary-sector restaurants, etc.); 2) the State (understood as the various levels of government and the system of public institutions); 3) development NGOs; 4) international bodies (bilateral co-operation agencies, United Nations agencies and credit organizations, co-operation agencies and funding agencies). Any development project must draw up intervention strategies in the context of the power relationships within this system of actors.

Each national framework has its own pattern of actors and inter-actor relationships. We recommend that this distinctive pattern of actors and relationships be taken as the general framework of policies to fight poverty in an urban environment.

### **General action framework for policies to fight poverty in an urban environment**

#### **Local support network**

#### **Neighbourhood organizations**

#### **Development NGO (locally based)**

#### **Local government – Municipality**

#### **Public institutions – STATE**

#### **International Organizations**

#### **Context extending to the international level**

#### **Economics – politics – information**

The diagram shows the various types of actors (in the white bubbles), their positions and their relationships. Inside the main State bubble is a Local Government bubble (special link with local organizations). The State bubble also includes (in view of the general significance of the word State) ministries and public institutions, as well as the standards resulting from democratic action.

The grey boxes contain the contexts of urban anti-poverty policies. Neighbourhood organizations appear as emanating from the local support network, while the State and international organizations form part of the wider context of economic and political relations or information control.

The lines denote relations between the actors. Two types of link are emphasized. First, the neighbourhood organizations-State relationship, the aim being to promote democratic process and autonomous activities. Second, the mediation role which must form the matrix of the development NGO's action. Near to the latter, the international organizations are represented. Their interventions fit into an "action-reaction" rationale, insofar as their action is mediated by governments and NGOs.

The approach to policies to fight poverty presented in this diagram is that of an exercise in mediation between a wider context and a local population structured by its local support networks and represented by its neighbourhood organizations. The micro/macro dichotomy thus loses its relevance.

This *General Action Framework* should be used to prepare specific diagnoses and strategies for each situation. In other words it is a useful template. In each situation, a number of precise questions must be answered and upon these strategies will depend. We insist on the importance of constructing a relational framework, the core of which will be the Neighbourhood Organizations-State relationship. In such a situation, how much weight should be given to the State and how much to local government? Should international bodies give priority to helping NGOs, the State or neighbourhood organizations? Such questions cannot be answered via a one-size-fits-all framework and rightly so.

The answers to these questions will be influenced first by the diversity of local or national situations, and second by people's history. Developed societies contain many examples of weak community organizations that find it hard to get established. This is not surprising since their role has been obscured by economic progress and, after two centuries of continuous action, public institutions have taken the place of community spirit. The situation is quite different in poor countries where the institutional deficit and State inadequacies are glaring and as a result community organizations are very strong.

It is also observable that there are variations in the democratic content of neighbourhood organizations. In countries (e.g., Uruguay) with strong democratic traditions and structures, neighbourhood organizations may contain an element of democracy, helping to broaden the public arena and renew the democratic system. The situation is totally different in countries with a paucity of democratic experience<sup>16</sup>. It is therefore wrong to

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<sup>16</sup> Following the theories of "new social movements" inspired by Alain Touraine, many Latin American theorists extolled the virtues of "civil society" organizations in the democratic revival that took place in the 1980s. These hopes did not last long when these social movements gave way to cronyism and forceful political systems. For a critical analysis, cf. CARDOSO, 1983.

attempt to transpose a model deriving from a specific experience (as often happens from the West to the South or the East).

One general observation can be made, however. The progress of capitalism and of State organization in Europe have led to the gradual disappearance of most community organizations and, more recently, of those rooted in working class culture. Mass unemployment and a “new poverty” have reappeared, affecting the poorer strata of the population, who now find themselves deprived of any means of integration and are in situations close to “disaffiliation”, to use Robert Castel’s celebrated term. The family and community support structures typical of working class neighbourhoods have weakened and the jobless are dependent on the State and deprived of organizational backup. In these circumstances a demand for less State and more “civil society” seems legitimate and understandable<sup>17</sup>. This type of situation is less pronounced in Third World cities where, generally speaking, community structures are relatively strong. Neighbourhood organizations therefore need to be recognized as valid actors in the political system and as a demand for responsibility on the part of the governed. In this context, State and civil society seem to be involved in a process of simultaneous development rather than of contradiction. The issue is not to strengthen “State *or* civil society” but “State *and* civil society”.

In such a context, each group of actors must find its own answers to questions about the relative weight of the State or the NGO, for example. In other words, it is important to regard the *Framework of Action* as a relational framework motivated by a *spirit of communication*. Actors motivated by such a spirit should be able to find their own answers to questions of this type which are not in any way “technical” or “scientific”. The answers will be political and will emerge from the resolution of the conflicts inherent in poverty alleviation.

For this reason, policies must dovetail into a strategy to fight poverty *and* a strategy to build democratic culture. The two are indissociable. If policies to fight poverty are not to reproduce a framework of dependence they must have a dual objective: improvement of the quality of life and promotion of the exercise of citizenship. Poverty will not be eradicated without the construction of legitimate, democratic government. In the last resort, the existence of poverty, whatever form it takes, is symptomatic of corruption of the democratic order of societies, when it is not the direct effect of an absence of democracy itself.

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<sup>17</sup> I should like to thank Frédérique Le Goff (CEMS/EHESS) for her contribution to the debate about community organizations in Europe and North America.

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MERKLEN, Denis: Three Cities Project evaluation reports:

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**Policies to fight urban poverty:**

**A general framework for action**

April 2001