

# THE TRENTO CHARTER



FOR BETTER  
INTERNATIONAL  
COOPERATION





## THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The UN Millennium Declaration invites governments to pursue goals aimed at ensuring global human development. Civil society is called to exert constant pressure on their governments so that they keep their promises and, at the same time, to make their own the priorities and efforts proposed by the United Nations.

To this end, the Trento Charter adopts the items of the agenda moved by the Millennium Campaign: the year 2008 was dedicated to the Millennium's 8<sup>th</sup> Goal (creation of a global partnership for development) while 2009 is focused on the 7<sup>th</sup> Goal (ensuring environmental sustainability). We are working backwards, one goal per year, towards 2015, the year in which we hope to drastically reduce poverty.

## THE TRENTO CHARTER

The world has changed. The Trento Charter is an attempt to re-interpret contemporary times in order to rethink together the meaning of 'development cooperation' in its essential and unique characteristics, beyond the current legislative scenario and the need for new laws governing the matter. The fact that this movement has been detected in diverse locations stresses the urgency of this problem. We therefore have attempted to set down a few traits that we deem fundamental in shaping what we call 'cooperation as we see it': a new vision and a new practice of cooperation. Other traits may be added to these and we hope all of them in the future will be transformed into explicit indications for new regulations. Methodologically speaking, the following paper is the product of the work performed together by players in the field of international cooperation, each one variously committed in international solidarity action.

*The promoters of the Trento Charter*





# JOINING INTO A SYSTEM FOR BETTER INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION



## 1. READING THE PRESENT: COOPERATION THAT THINKS AND ACTS

In an ever faster-moving world, featuring continuously changing dynamics, the approaches to and the procedures for intervention (cultures and tools) of non-governmental and governmental organizations in development cooperation often prove outdated. There is often no time to think one's action out or to update/synchronize the thought (and consequently the action) with the world. This calls for the strengthening of the research and training approaches in order to produce theory and enhance experiences, by creating places within and between the organizations involved in cooperation in which to prepare the intervention philosophy and the orientation of the action, starting from critical interpretation and from the communication of practices applied. These are places in which to merge thought and action as the hinges of a single, identical process. For this to come about, laws and regulations as well as financing circuits supporting them are required: a law on cooperation in association with regulations and programmes in tune with the times.



## 2. REGAINING THE WORLD: DIALOGIC AND NOT SELF-REFERENTIAL COOPERATION

The action of part of the world of international cooperation is featured by the inversion between means and ends. Indeed, although quite comprehensibly, organizations tend to focus on the safeguarding of their own survival rather than on social promotion within the communities. The question is: is it possible to regain a non self-referential approach aimed outwards, towards the Other, towards the world? An initial shift towards escaping from self-referencing implies the re-viewing of not only one's coherence with the principles underlying one's vision of the world and inspiring one's actions, but also with the results and actual impact of one's action on reality. Thereby, evaluation, intended as verification and assignment of meaning/value, takes centre stage. The need to address the world requires a viewpoint that outlines a form of cooperation that is dialogic (in which subjects, places and languages dialogue one with the other) and dialectic (that sees difference and conflict as potential constitutive elements of interaction), where relations are constitutive.



## 3. INVESTMENTS: IN HUMAN AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Putting relations centre stage also means recognizing and enhancing the strong human and social resources in international cooperation organizations and in the



territories, in which to invest with a view to exercising conscious citizenship. It is necessary to overcome the dichotomy between 'community of donors' and 'target community', within a partnership approach: cooperation means living the present, aware that contemporary challenges are effectively fought only by activating internal processes of social animation. To this end, one must engage in a 'mutual mirroring' work, so as to stamp out the borders between 'inside' and 'outside', in order to achieve social transformation both within our own communities and in those of the countries with which one is cooperating. The central position of the relationship reflects the central position of the individual, seen as the core of the concept of human development, as an individual capable of relating and that, within the mutual autonomy of the parties involved, generates change.



#### 4. **FOCUS ON THE COMMUNITY:**

##### **QUALITY COOPERATION RELEASED FROM ECONOMISM**

International cooperation mainly depends on public financing of development. It is without question that action without financial resources is impossible. Another obvious fact is that its dependence from public financing, to be augmented and at the same time reviewed in terms of institutional management based on a more effective, topical and balanced attitude, is proof of the political character of international cooperation. The financial bond, however, although there, runs the risk of becoming a misleading simplification that prevents us from seeing a more radical aspect of the problem. It seems sometimes that cooperation, before being bonded, 'binds' to the need for financial resources. Convinced that good cooperation does not depend exclusively on a larger allocation of the GDP, it is necessary to gauge the importance of activating local resources and of involving partner communities. Without this stage, the boat inevitably drifts in a one-way direction and towards ineffectiveness of the intervention. The ensuing risk is the social impoverishment of the communities involved. It is necessary to work in the direction of a kind of cooperation capable of abandoning the economic growth paradigm and of acquiring the idea and practice of development co-promoted by the partner communities that include quality of life parameters chosen by the individuals and communities concerned, based on their peculiar values and priorities.



#### 5. **RIGHTS IN RESPONSIBILITY: BEYOND THE LOGIC OF NEED**

The world of international cooperation describes itself through the media and in the official language as a set of 'donors' of material assets (structures) and of immaterial assets (democracy and development). It runs especially the risk of perceiving itself as such in the cooperative and solidarity action, thus generating an unbalanced relationship with the Other, reduced to and in some cases offended by its identification as essentially 'needy', non self-sufficient and not autonomous, which causes the onset of a syndrome that prevents the Other from imagining the future and of socially self-promoting itself. It is necessary to work to adjust this unbalance, to work on the implica-



tions of a relationship of mutual dependence, on the ambivalence and on the shadows of the 'humanitarian' concept. In order to work successfully, a kind of cultural innovation must be applied: the logic of need implies the logic of aid (in its more or less refined variations), to the detriment of the logic of rights. The basing of the foundations of cooperation on the logic of rights, instead, means to place the cooperative action within a political dimension, a place dedicated to addressing the challenges posed by global disequilibria and injustices. It also means to consider each territory, no matter how impoverished, as a supplier of richness in terms of knowledge, tradition and culture before being a supplier of material goods, thus reproposing the issue of the democratic re-appropriation of resources and therefore of self-government.



## 6. ESTABLISHING LONG-LASTING RELATIONS: COOPERATION BEYOND EMERGENCIES AND NEXT TO CONFLICTS

International cooperation has a hard time in expressing relationships between places and faces. It seems to be in tune with our present times that in turn have a hard time in assigning appropriate value, in activating and in boosting process, continuity, construction and duration logics and prefers occasional interventions of apparently very high effectiveness. The result is a kind of 'fixed term' cooperation, marked by project deadlines, by the quantitative dimension of the many occasional relations, activated each time in the wake of an emergency. In order to redirect the cooperative action towards its final objectives, it is absolutely necessary to reacquire process (relationship) time over the project (action) time. The assumption and at the same time the fundamental outcome of this reacquisition process is the kindling of trust between the parties involved. The interpretation of international cooperation as a process of mediation and of social transformation, prior to being an intervention in aid of development, also implies the placing of the issue of the non-violent management of conflicts at the heart of the cooperative activity. There is no development without peace. And there is no peace without justice, i.e. without the delicate contact with the direct, structural and conflictual violence that marks life, truth and the memory of individuals and places.



Photo: Mandarino Beatrice De Biasi





## 7. COOPERATION IN THE PLURAL:

### RECOGNIZING THE PLURIVERSE OF THE PLAYERS AND OF THE FORMS

Italian development cooperation is no longer the exclusive sector of the government, at institutional level, nor of the formally recognized NGO's, at non-governmental level. Perhaps it is no longer the exclusive sector of the non-profit scenario either. Other institutional subjects (local and regional bodies, universities), other non-governmental subjects (associations, non-profit-making organizations for community work, foundations, fair trade, micro credit, responsible tourism and even the world of labour, enterprises, fair economy, associations of migrants) in the last twenty years have entered the cooperation scenario and taken their legitimate places. It is now necessary to formally and substantially recognize the pluriverse of the players in the international cooperation and solidarity sectors that act in different ways and specific forms (international development cooperation, decentralized cooperation, community cooperation, solidarity actions), thus accepting the challenge of interconnection and of the search for common meanings.



## 8. BEYOND THE NETWORK:

### BUILDING OVERALL SCHEMES IN CREATING COOPERATION

A glance at the international cooperation scenario, in its diverse forms, gives the impression of a world consisting of networks of vertical and horizontal organizations that are fragmented and non-communicating, both intra- and inter-organizationally. In these networks it is unlikely to trace the specifics of the players (such as: the task of an institution engaged in cooperation, the percentage contributed by the non-governmental portion, the role played by the governments), all mixed into a blurred 'intervention' politically and operationally featuring redundancy, ineffectiveness and unproductiveness as well as structural distortions: cooperation, as aid, acts as an ointment on injuries induced, in places and in people, by that very same world that also produces injustice. It is difficult to build and reinforce coherence among national public policies as regards development, international cooperation and foreign politics. The fragile networks drawn up on paper appear as a set of dots that cannot operate together because of the lack of lines connecting them in an overall blueprint, given the plurality of languages. In order to reverse this trend, one must step back from direct action so as to open up work space and integration tables on which to trace connections, construct overall views and harmonize intervention both in terms of approach and of operations, thus moving on from the local and national dimension towards progressive Europeanization.



## 9. LOOKING AHEAD: SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE COOPERATION

Human life depends on the goods and services supplied by natural eco-systems. An overall view and an effective and synergic approach are key to the safeguarding of



the functions and processes exerted by the environment, with a view to providing future generations with the right to achieve longevity, health and creativity within the context of sustainable human development. It is important to pay greater attention to environmental issues when practicing development cooperation, so as to restore, where possible, compromised environmental functions and to conserve integral ones. To this end, it is necessary to base cooperation programmes on a wider awareness of the impacts on the environment (such as deforestation, reduction of natural habitats, pollution, erosion and soil salinization, overexploitation of resources, for example) and of the options available for addressing them at the various space-time scales (renewable sources, efficient use of resources, territorial use planning, for example). This calls for careful integration of local cultures and traditional practices with recent knowledge and technologies the application of which should promote equal access to basic services while guaranteeing production and the chance for social participation. At the same time, it is essential to obtain positive integration and communication between the local level, where the effects of the interventions on the environment are felt, and the various institutional levels where the decisions are made and the intervention and environmental management policies are prepared.



## 10. KNOWING ONE'S LIMITS:

### EXPERIMENTAL, FALLIBLE, PARTICIPATED COOPERATION

A number of scenarios featuring greater social and cultural fragility should be approached and treated via experimental and reversible processes strongly oriented towards participation of local societies. When one is dealing with the effects of international migratory policies, with the impact of the rules of international trade, with the outcome of the action of international agencies, the capacity to mobilize civil society and public opinion in order to have a say in the final decisions of the state in which one is operating and the capacity to stop on the threshold of interference in the name of aid may prove more effective in obtaining change and sustainable human development than receiving larger funds for interventions.



# ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY FOR BETTER INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION



## GREEN IDEAS

**FOREWORD** The international cooperation we wish to achieve promotes a strong idea of environmental sustainability, aimed at preserving natural stocks, guaranteeing equality between and among generations, beyond the anthropocentric paradigm. The paths of international cooperation require a wide-angled view capable of identifying, quantifying and qualifying the surrounding environment in order to stop affecting the equilibrium of a given territory.

**RISK** Nature, in its various components, is man's condition of life on earth. In the near future, if we do not implement a real and urgent form of political activation as regards environmental issues, our natural heritage may be irreparably damaged. This is why it is necessary to culturally transform the "predation paradigm" into that of conservation and of regeneration of natural resources, starting from the awareness of man's fragility on earth, living in a limited space where resources are unfairly distributed. The human presence in nature features the ability to make collective choices capable of redirecting destructive tendencies.

**THOUGHT** Cooperation requires "planetary thought" that needs to replace "single thought", therefore capable of re-imagining the man-environment relationship in this era of inter-dependence. A sort of "mental ecology" is required, capable of freeing itself of the categories of the past and evolving the conceptual maps. To work on the cooperation/environment relationship not only means to promote better and greater cultural awareness of environmental issues, but especially to feed the underlying social imaginary, so as to generate varied representations and visions of the relationship between human beings, the natural environment and inhabited spaces (so that, for example, the world's natural habitats are recognized as being also the cultural habitats of others). In addition to thought, ethics and practice, it is necessary to re-activate the collective imaginary to see future non-predator horizons for the natural environment.

**CARE** The re-thinking of international cooperation in terms of environmental sustainability implies a theoretical transition from the ethics of aid to the ethics of



care. By taking on the “care” approach one recognises the mutual relationship between living beings in space (attention to and responsibility for the world) and time (attention to and responsibility for future generations), shifting from a logic of exploitation to one of conservation and regeneration of resources. The aim of the latter is to create a capital for the benefit of the community via the maintenance-renewal of ecosystem-related services and the utmost promotion of self-development of the territories. To “take care of the world” requires a presupposition: the environmental issue, when practicing international cooperation, is not an issue for specialists but rather a transversal topic that regards everyone and all “international relationships”.

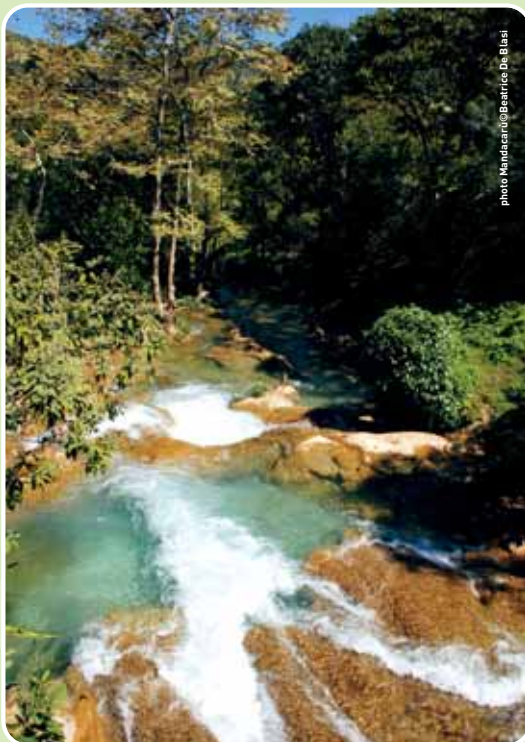


photo: Mandacario/Beatrice De Biasi

**INTER-DEPENDENCE** Environmental protection touches upon economic and power interests between the North and the South of the world. The solution here is not to extend or transfer an environmental conservation model but rather to revise and practice everywhere the complex relations between environment, production and development, with a view to safeguarding the local systems focused on specificity and on local natural resources. The world of international cooperation, engaging in a dialogue and not in antagonism with the world of production, can play an important role as mediator between economic businesses and the territories.

**CONFLICT** Environmental conflicts are topical subjects on the political agenda. They are both controversial points of discussion and occasions for creating relationships between different worlds. The cooperation we strive towards inhabits conflicts and opens doors to dialogue with the international community, the states and the territories, not in collusion with the projects for unlimited exploitation of the environment. Such cooperation instead rejects the attempts to criminalize indigenous populations or any individuals or groups that oppose the predatory logics against natural and cultural diversities. Indeed, it lives the conflict and works towards guaranteeing for the various subjects inhabiting the territory the power to govern it.





## GREEN THEMES

In order to guarantee environmental sustainability, one must consider and address, in the international cooperation programmes, several ambits of action that are as controversial as they are unavoidable:

- ✓ the use of natural resources: soil, subsoil, hydrosphere, forests, biodiversity;
- ✓ the protection of ecosystem-related services (products and functions of nature that are to the advantage of humanity, such as for example a natural filtering system capable of purifying water or a forest reserve capable of quickly recycling large quantities of carbon dioxide), at global and at local levels;
- ✓ energy and environmental impact: renewable resources, emissions and consumptions, the impact of production;
- ✓ the communities' vulnerability and exposure to environmental risks (e.g.: natural disasters);
- ✓ adaptation and climate changes: desertification and agricultural soils, the dissemination of conditions that are pathological for humans;
- ✓ environmental factors and urban and rural poverty: slums, access to water and to essential sanitary services, food safety, the spreading of diseases;
- ✓ the deterioration of natural systems: the production of waste, air, land and water pollution;
- ✓ eco-refugees: the existence of flows of people forced to migrate due to the changes in climate and the progress of desertification.





## GREEN TRENDS

The practice of international cooperation by contributing to guarantee environmental sustainability requires the following stages.

### To adopt as guidelines for action:

- ✓ the dissemination of knowledge and of awareness, throughout the non-governmental world, of environmental issues as reported in the international Charters;
- ✓ the strengthening at cultural level of a systemic and multi-disciplinary approach in the international cooperation programmes capable of highlighting the connections between the natural environment and the socio-economic sphere, and of protecting cultures and local civilizations as the heritage of humanity;
- ✓ the territories' re-appropriation of the theme of development and of environmental management via participatory processes in compliance with international policies, so as to prevent the risk of exploitation and the risk of resurrection of an environmental type of colonialism.

### To adopt as action strategies:

- ✓ the integration between local, national and international environmental policy plans (contents of the conferences and of the international charters: Rio de Janeiro 1992, Johannesburg 2002, Kyoto Protocol 2007, Decade of education for sustainable development 2005-2014, etc);
- ✓ the opening of arenas for discourse and social participation in the territories regarding management of the environment and territorial planning (e.g.: Agenda 21 and the principles of the Aalborg Charter);
- ✓ the development of public communication concerning the environment as a topic, offering linguistically accessible and comprehensible explanations of the actions implemented;
- ✓ the introduction of environmental sustainability criteria among the requirements for the selection of international cooperation projects, also through the integrated use of tools such as EIA (environmental impact assessment) and SEA (strategic environmental assessment) on a territorial scale;
- ✓ assessment of environmental governance vis-à-vis management transparency processes (corruption, eco-mafia, etc.) and the support towards the balancing of power in the participation in the decision-making on environment and territory management;
- ✓ the creation of experimental projects in support of renewable energy sources (sun, wind, hydroelectric, etc.) and the efficient use of natural resources (water, wood, etc.);
- ✓ reinforcement of the network and of the partnership, so as to exchange good practices in environmental management, both between multiple local contexts (North



and South of the world) and between the various types of organization (local and central government institutions, universities, enterprises, or organized civil society);

- ✓ focus on integrating traditional knowledge with technological development towards a productive junction between science, local cultures and technology;
- ✓ quantification of the natural capital, so as to economically enhance the conservation interventions and to integrate the management of protected areas with local development;
- ✓ the promotion of environmental education and of good practices that enhance the chances of a positive relationship between human beings and the natural environment, even as regards its aesthetic aspects (such as responsible tourism, for example).



photo Fondazione Fontana

**THE WORLD SOCIAL AGENDA (WSA)** Promoted by Fondazione Fontana Onlus (a non-profit making organization for community work), WSA is a programme of events, appointments, workshops and initiatives for the civil society, schools and local authorities of the Veneto and Trentino-South Tyrol regions in Italy. From 2008 to 2015, its intention is to promote thought and indicate actions capable of contributing to the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals, in a special trip backwards from the Eighth Goal to the First. The year 2009 is dedicated to environmental sustainability (Goal No. 7 of the UN Millennium Project). The debate launched by the Charter of Trento thus tackles how better international cooperation is also achieved via greater focus on the environment.



**The initiatives for 2009 in Trentino-South Tyrol are supported and sponsored by:**



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**THE PROMOTERS OF THE TRENTO CHARTER** The Trento Charter for Better International Cooperation stems from a route travelled by institutional and non-governmental players in international cooperation in the first months of 2008 in Trento in parallel with the initiatives for the World Social Agenda.

**Promoters of the Charter are:**



**TAVOLO TRENTO  
CON KRALJEVO**



Osservatorio  
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