

# The Global Solidarity Economy Movement

by Emily Kawano

In a surreal twist, right-wing conservatives—whose neoliberal policies of deregulation and laissez-faire brought us this latest economic crisis—seem to be riding a groundswell of support in the world of domestic electoral politics. However, a different truth is gaining traction in the global economic grassroots. Long-term economic distress, concerns about climate change and rising oil prices, and dissatisfaction with business-as-usual have led many people and communities to engage in economic practices that put people and planet ahead of profit maximization. The US Solidarity Economy Network has formed to strengthen and connect the myriad unconnected alternative economic enterprises that have grown out of this historic moment.

One example is in Port Clyde, Maine, where fishermen broke with hundreds of years of staunch individualism to form a co-op. Instead of going for the biggest haul—overfishing—which had led to the decline of the fishing industry, they now make do with smaller catches and get better prices by cutting out the middleman, selling directly to local residents, and starting their own fish processing plant.

In each continent there has been a steady growth of Solidarity Economy movements. These networks and economic enterprises are connected through RIPESS (*Réseau Intercontinental de Promotion de L'Économie Sociale Solidaire*), the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social Solidarity Economy.

RIPESS North America has brought together Solidarity Economy organizations from the US, Canada and Mexico at various meetings including the US Social Forum in June 2010. This past summer, RIPESS LAC (Latin America and Caribbean) held a meeting in Medellín, Colombia that brought together 350 people from 18 different countries. In October, the African Solidarity Economy network, which is still in the formative stage, will be coming together in Morocco. In Europe as well, many Solidarity Economy organizations are working towards forming a RIPESS-Europe network. The recently formed Asian Alliance for the Solidarity Economy has taken on the considerable task of hosting the next RIPESS Globalization of Solidarity Forum in 2013.

The labor movement is beginning to engage with the Solidarity Economy,



which it sees as a way to create jobs and address poverty. The International Labor Organization (ILO) is running a training this fall on the social Solidarity Economy in Turin, Italy. It is also working with *Chantier* (see page 2) in Quebec to organize an international conference in October, 2011 on policy and the role of the state in the social Solidarity Economy.

The crisis of climate change is driving economic and political shifts that the Solidarity Economy supports. For example, in April, 2009 the Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth that emerged from the People's Summit on Climate Change in Cochabamba, Bolivia, was heavily influenced by indigenous world views and calls for a whole new, non-exploitative relationship to land, water, resources, other creatures and among each other. We welcome the strong emergence of this perspective.

With so much good work going on, it is critical to foster economic integration so that these pieces work together in order to grow and strengthen the Solidarity Economy. The global mapping process is a key piece to accomplishing this goal. There are some great mapping platforms that serve a number of functions including, 1) enabling consumers to find Solidarity Economy goods and services; 2) enabling Solidarity Economy producers and suppliers to connect to build solidarity supply chains; 3) collection of data for research that can identify best practices and be used for the construction of supportive policies; and 4) the promotion of linkages between individuals, organizations, networks and movements involved in the Solidarity Economy through social networking. This kind of multi-functional mapping and economic integration is crucial in the next and necessary stage of building an economy for people and nature.

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