

“THE TIMES ARE URGENT; LET’S SLOW DOWN”

An Open Letter to CONCORD-DEEEP, CIVICUS, GCAP, Civic Society Organizations and Activists Working for a ‘Better’ World

With deep gratitude for the stories of transformation now emerging across the planet, and for the renewed hope we share for a different kind of world, we greet you from our hearts.

Recently, we were privileged to be part of a Global Summit organized by DEEEP (Developing Europeans’ Engagement for the Eradication of Poverty) and a coalition of activist organizations that includes CIVICUS, CONCORD and GCAP (Global Call to Action Against Poverty). We gathered in the city of Johannesburg to consider what a different world might look like and, much more importantly, how we could collectively work together to bring about this world. We celebrate the amazing efforts of the organizers that made this possible.

Bayo Akomolafe (one of us) delivered the keynote address, in which he espoused a new politics of engagement, a new sort of activism for the times. On the heels of his passionate plea, we now write. We, members of the so-called Global South, now offer to you the gifts of our spaces - gifts we think are crucial to this beautiful conversation about a world our hearts believe is possible today.

We come from lands that know the world differently – we come from cultures that had once lived harmoniously and in intimacy with a cosmos that is just as alive as we are. Unfortunately, these cultures are being sterilized, demonized, and homogenized under the auspices of an increasingly synthesized world. Slowly, the thrilling plurality of our many worlds is fading away under a monoculture of being that cannot serve our deepest aspirations and highest potentials.

We need not restate here the issues civic society has contended with for so long; we know all too well how the system exploits us, how global finance and neoliberal economics has spawned a poverty industry, how education has evolved as an enterprise of conformity, how industrial growth and the treatment of Earth as a mere instrument for ‘development’ is poisoning our

food and killing our children, and how health and wellbeing are empty words that hint at drug dependence and higher profit for insurance agencies.

These conditions have been with us for a long time; our times are probably more urgent than when people first began to protest these 'injustices' – but today gifts us with the appreciation of a different kind of urgency, one which comes from the realization that the system is not the cause of our problems, it is a consequence of our separation from each other. It is a consequence of our complicity with our own destruction. In other words, *we are* the system we fight against.

This is why we think that the current paradigm of protests, branding and volunteerism will not address the deep substructures of experience that need to shift. We must go deeper...a lot deeper than merely protesting the status quo.

The mainstream approach of civic society is not contesting the deep layers of experience, or challenging the normative ways of experiencing the world. While our work as activists has surely made our voices heard, and amplified the need to rethink our systems, it is worrisome that not-for-profits, funding organizations, civic society organizations and NGOs have themselves become an industry of service-providers, PowerPoint presentations, proposals, prestige, slogans, and busy schedules. People very often take on the shape of that which they strenuously resist.

Though civic efforts have been worthwhile, they have done nothing to change our relationships with the planet, with people and with ourselves; we are still tethered to the deadening values of consumerism, and have not reclaimed our roles as living co-creators of a society we prefer to live in.

Civic society has not provided irresistible alternatives for both the activist and the non-activist – or at least provided the conditions for the emergence of these possibilities. We have become highly corporatized – only seeing the changes that could come from behind the lenses of our roles and bureaucratic processes.

The monolithic triumph of corporatization and approach to society has reduced the complexity of human expression to a few, easily recognized series of processes and answers. This is why we think we need more than institutions to address the challenges of today. We think the powerful need of today is to reclaim lost territory, and heal the rift created by a commodified world.

We discern that the urge of the times is not to fix a broken system, but to acknowledge our inherent power to summon other worlds.

We know **a way**. Our cultures teach us that in turning to each other, we become disruptive to old realities and hospitable to new ones. Because we will not co-create the world by proxy, we need to turn to ourselves again, and rekindle the realness we have lost. The closer we get to the ways we can grow food, the less we have to depend on or fight against genetically modified products in brazen shopping malls.

In these human-scaled circles of rejuvenation, we will weave a new social fabric; a new world will be a tantalizingly present and dynamic reality, not a distant ideal. In these places of 'vulnerability', we will reclaim a terrain that is free from the paralyzing influences of NGO-speak and politics.

This is not about conventional movements.

We envision a meta-network, a new politics of engagement that draws in the non-activist and activist and helps them recognize the power they already are.

In those circles, our hands will be occupied with the serious business of reclaiming territory, creating value, and reconnecting with others in ways that we might actually be able to try ourselves. As we do this, there will be less need to depend on the fading structures and frameworks that now populate our inner and outer landscapes.

This is not a call for funding, new institutional regulations, or greater emphasis on the established parameters we are used to; we are not naïve enough to think institutions are the problem, but we are conscientious enough to recognize that the 'solutions' will not come from within them. We can however have both...institutions that address the issues, and a meta-project, a shared alliance or network that strives to connect these unbranded 'circles of reclamation' emerging across the planet now.

In his recent keynote speech, Bayo Akomolafe suggests ways we can build 'an invisible revolution'. His position is not final or doctrinaire, but given in the spirit of exploration – and held by the disruptive archetype of the trickster mythology in our indigenous settings.

We are also truly happy about the new 'Johannesburg Compass' – comprising of questions and soft orientations that capture the concerns of the activists that gathered at the Global Summit. We think of it as a truly commendable way to inspire widespread conversations about new possibilities.

This is why we write then. We write because there are conversations that we are yet to have about our true power; we write because we are not as limited and constrained as we suppose. We write because we suspect that this is the finest hour for civic action today. We recognize that for many of you reading this, what we hint at – a new form of deinstitutionalized activism, if you will – represents a leap into the dark...embracing the unknown. Our people think of the dark not as a place of horror and grief, but the place where surprises are stitched, where miracles are sown, where colours are alchemically combined, and where the new tapestries of a preferred existence is buried in wait.

We call on activists around the world to think of what they do, to recognize that this is a time to address the syndrome, not the symptoms. This is an opportunity for us all to join the chorus of voices now summoning a new world.

We would be honoured if you could acknowledge this letter as a means of deepening the conversation.

If we beat the system at its own game, we've lost. It is no longer time to rush through the contested world blinded by fury and anger – however worthwhile these are. Now, we think, is the time to 'retreat' into the real work of reclamation, to re-member again our humanity through the intimacy of our relationships. The time is very urgent – we must slow down.

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DEEEP 2013 Keynote Speech: *The World Alethea Dreamed of: The Deep Shift We Need for a New Planetary Future*

<http://movement.deeep.org/community/blog/view/8943/the-global-conference-started> (accessible via this link)

The Johannesburg Compass: Questions and Orientations

<http://movement.deeep.org/community/blog/view/9022/the-johannesburg-compass-questions-and-orientations>