

Chapter 11

Global to Local: What You Can Do

As the twenty authors of this book have met with hundreds of thousands of others over the past decade in protests, social experiments, local house meetings, national hearings, global teach-ins, and the World Social Forum, we have experienced the transformation of anger about economic globalization into a politics of hope for the future. Hope lies in many factors, from the declining legitimacy of the key institutions of corporate globalization to the flowering of citizen groups and people's movements to the emergence of new governments that reject the old models. Most fundamentally, the hope lies in the remarkable spectrum of alternatives work that spans piecemeal reform to visionary proposals, and that spans local economic experiments to new national transformations in countries like Brazil.

After decades of Margaret Thatcher and other globalization cheerleaders telling us there were no alternatives, that fiction has been exposed. There are alternatives. Tens of thousands of them. The failing legitimacy of the institutions of global corporate rule combined with the political force of an enlivened civil society have created an unprecedented moment of opportunity to rethink and transform the institutions of economic life, advance the democratic project, and realize the ageless human dream of liberty, justice, and prosperity for all.

Thus far, the authors of this book have attempted to empower readers by offering new ways of thinking about alternatives to economic globalization, by laying out the principles that citizen groups have offered as a basis for alternatives, and by describing what others are doing to create a better world. While most positive change takes place through collective action, there is also a great deal that you, the readers, can do as individuals.

Transforming the global economic system is an enormous task that will require many hands and considerable time. But you, as an individual, can start tomorrow to take actions that will help create a more equitable and sustainable world.

Of course, the corporate globalists would like you to think otherwise. It is in their interest to have you believe that your identity in the economy is limited to that of a passive consumer. They bombard you with slick images and slogans, hoping to persuade you that bigger vehicles mean more freedom, the latest deodorant will lead to dates with supermodels, and everyday low prices are the ultimate human conquest.

For these profiteers of a consumer culture, it is good news that the most popular gathering spaces in many communities are now shopping malls, while funding is shrinking for public parks, libraries and other spaces where individuals come together to meet, read, play, and act collectively.

We all need to buy things. But as human beings, in all our complexity, we need much more than material goods to lead fulfilling lives. And it is important to remind ourselves that we can take action on many levels to shape a better world. We can be active rather than passive consumers, and many of us can make better use of the powers we have

as workers, investors, students, and members of faith-based and other organizations. Moreover, as communities and nations have become more interconnected, we often have opportunities to act not only as local and national citizens, but also as citizens of a globe. And as citizens, we need to exercise rights that go far beyond the right to buy more stuff.

Below we offer just a few ideas on how you can act in each of your multi-faceted capacities. In addition, we encourage you to use the information at the end of this book to contact organizations working on globalization for more information on how to get involved.

As a Consumer

Global firms can only make their billions of dollars selling deadly cigarettes, gas-guzzling Hummers, hormone-filled beef, butter from the other side of the planet, underwear made in sweatshops, and genetically engineered corn if people buy them. There are several ways that individual consumers can strive to ensure that their spending better reflects their values.

Be an informed consumer. A central tenet of the market economy is that consumers have full information. A market can only operate efficiently if consumers know every detail about how a good is produced, who produced it, how it is disposed of, and under what conditions and at what environmental or human cost do these actions take place. As production is more globalized and under corporate control, this information is increasingly harder to come by. However, the more that we become informed consumers – either by forcing corporations to reveal this information, or finding it out ourselves, the more successful we will be in choosing products that benefit, rather than harm, our world. There are dozens of organizations (examples are provided in the Resources section) around the world that provide lists of “green” or environmentally sound products, “blue” or products produced with sound workers rights, and other social indicators to help consumers make informed decisions. There are also hundreds of examples of “corporate campaigns” in which consumers and community activists have joined together to force businesses to either meet their demands on the environment, worker rights and safety, consumer health and the rights of communities, or close up shop.

Buy local. In many parts of the world, farm systems are being transformed as consumers increasingly head for local farmers markets and demand organically produced fruit and vegetables. Organic food sales in the U.S. have been growing at the spectacular rate of 10 percent a year. A simple act such as buying a locally grown organic tomato has ripple effects throughout the global food assembly line by reducing “food miles” and the environmental havoc wreaked by too many refrigerated containers on too many ocean vessels. In general, steering money towards local businesses and services has a positive multiplier effect on local communities, whereas money spent at large chains is typically funneled back to headquarters -- and often into the pockets of overpaid CEOs.

Join a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program and/or support local farmers’ markets and urban gardens. Most cities offer CSAs that allow urban consumers to make direct relationships with organic farmers, thus by-passing the conventional retail and marketing system. By joining for a reasonable fixed amount per month, city dwellers receive boxes of fresh produce delivered personally from the farms. This supports local organic farms, as well as providing extremely fresh produce. Similarly, local farmers’

markets offer direct contact with farmers bringing fresh produce. And a growing urban garden movement is enabling urban dwellers to use vacant land to grow their own produce.

Support fair trade. Some things we consume can't be produced just down the road, such as coffee and cocoa for the billions who live in colder climes. For these and other products, a vibrant "fair trade" or "alternative trading" market has emerged around the world. Whereas most corporations treat the producer as a faceless factor of production whose costs are to be minimized, fair trade organizations strive for the opposite – living wages and safe and dignified working conditions for developing country artisans and farmers.

One reason fair trade organizations can afford to pay well is that they reduce the number of middlemen and minimize overhead costs. They often work with producer co-operatives that ensure safe and dignified working conditions and allow producers a say in how their products are created and sold. Co-operatives are also encouraged to provide benefits such as health care, child care and access to loans and to reinvest profits into their communities, for example to build clinics or other community projects. Some fair trade organizations work to shift processing and packaging activities to the developing world, so that as much value-added work as possible remains in the producer country.

Fair trade commodities, including coffee, chocolate, handicrafts, tea, bananas, honey and other products, are certified by non-profit organizations in 17 different countries, all of which are affiliated with Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International. The fair trade coffee system alone benefits over 350,000 farmers organized into over 300 cooperatives in 22 countries. More than 40,000 cocoa farmers are organized into eight cooperatives in eight different countries. The business generated by fair trade organizations in Europe and the United States accounts for about \$400 million per year. While this is still only about one-tenth of one percent of all global trade, the market is growing rapidly. The fair trade industry in North America and the Pacific Rim grew an impressive 37 percent in 2003, according to the Fair Trade Federation and the International Federation for Alternative Trade. Total fair trade sales in the United States, Canada, and Pacific Rim now surpass \$250 million a year.

Some argue that fair trade encourages Southern farmers and entrepreneurs to become dependent on fickle global markets over which they have no control. In so doing, it could undermine the local economies that stand at the center of the alternatives posed in this book. However, supporting fair trade is one way to combat the dire problem of poverty, at least in the medium-term, while we work to promote policies that will help strengthen domestic demand in poor nations in the long term.

In addition to fair trade, consumers can favor eco-friendly products and services. More and more products now carry eco-labels, which certify some degree of ecological consciousness in the production of the goods. Some services, like "eco-tourism, likewise contain such eco-labels. Consumers can purchase fruits, vegetables, meat, and fish that are produced in eco-friendly ways, and can avoid companies with unfair labor standards and environmentally damaging policies.

As a Worker

Most people have influence in the economy through their roles as workers, and could do more to utilize this power to reinforce the alternatives spelled out in this book. Over the past hundred-plus years, trade unions have represented the most powerful way for workers to gain a voice and win basic rights in the workplace. Joining a union, organizing a union, supporting those who do, and helping other kinds of workers organizations all can help you as a worker and others in the work place.

Pension Power. Hundreds of millions of workers now belong to unions and similar institutions that fight for basic rights and better working conditions. Many of these unions have won pension benefits for their members, and as pensions have grown, so too has the collective economic clout of workers. In the United States, for example, workers' savings account for \$6 trillion and are the largest pool of investment capital in the country. Union federations like the AFL-CIO in the United States are working on strategies to harness the power of these pensions to support firms that respect basic worker rights. Because the pension system is so varied and complex (the type of pension, the structure of the pension system, the decision structure within unions), there is currently less room for individual workers to influence overall decisions about their pensions. Still, in many workplaces, individuals do have choices over what sort of funds their retirement accounts should invest in, opening the door to socially and environmentally responsible choices.

Form and support Worker-Owned Co-ops. As an alternative to hierarchical business structures, people around the world have formed worker-owned cooperatives in which the workers own and operate the enterprise themselves. Thus, workers are not working for other people who take their earnings and give them a small portion back, but rather for themselves. Decisions are generally made democratically, on a one-person one-vote basis. The labor involved in running the enterprise, and the wages and other benefits that result, are shared. For example, earnings are generally divided equally, or according to hours worked, skill level, or some other method determined by the group. Decisions on how work is to be done, by whom, on what schedule, and under what conditions are also decided democratically by the group rather than by managers selected by distant owners.

Workers can also push their employers to adopt policies that reflect social and environmental values. For example, you can encourage your work place to:

- Support public transportation or car-pooling through financial incentives and take advantage of any tax breaks offered by the local government for firms that offer them.
- Stock the employee kitchen with fair trade coffee, favor unionized vendors, and buy recycled, reusable and other eco-friendly office supplies.
- Cut down on waste by upgrading computers instead of junking them and recycling cell phones, pagers, printer cartridges, office paper, newspapers, cans and bottles.
- Apply the same standards for its operations abroad as it applies domestically.
- Take full responsibility for its products from the point of production to the point of disposal, acting in full transparency to ensure that consumers, workers and community members have free and easy access to all information about the product as it impacts their lives.

- Invest a certain proportion of its profits in the communities within which it operates as well as sharing new safety and greener technologies with those communities.

As a Depositor and Investor

Whether you have \$50 in a savings account or \$500,000 in the stock market, your financial decisions can make a difference.

Decades ago, most financial institutions were local, and deposited savings were re-lent to the local community. Today, most local banks are part of giant national banks that re-lend the money on international markets where it contributes to the highly volatile global casino economy. It doesn't have to be that way. You can:

- Open an account with a socially responsible bank or a credit union. In the United States, you can determine a bank's community involvement by asking any branch for a copy of their bank's Community Reinvestment Act Performance Evaluation. This evaluation rates how well the bank meets the needs of low and middle income people locally.
- Investigate how your bank invests in local community development. For example, some banks invest their deposits in development projects such as lending programs for affordable housing, conservation, education, and development in inner cities. Other financial institutions work towards strengthening Native American communities, for example.
- Check into whether you qualify for a credit union. These not-for-profit institutions often offer better customer service than the mega-banks, as well as low interest rates on loans and lower fees.
- Donate to important causes as you use your credit card. Many organizations now offer credit cards that allow a percentage of your purchase dollars to be invested into the organization itself. This allows you to contribute to organizations while promoting your values.

In another vein, you can support the "local currency" movement in your community. These "alternative money" schemes, located in many cities, represent a partial alternative to engaging in the dominant economy. Communities of people agree to use a local "scrip" currency, rather than dollars for some of their needs, and to exchange services at agreed rates. The effect is to recycle funds and services within a community, keeping resources local.

Increasing numbers of people have extra income which they chose to invest. In the United States, there is a growing variety of mutual funds, whereby an individual can pool small amounts of savings with others in a fund that then collectively invests those funds. For over a decade, there have been increasing numbers of funds that specialize in "socially or environmentally responsible" corporations. These funds use a variety of screens, some focusing on environmental and labor rights criteria, others steering clear of alcohol, tobacco, or weapons-related companies.

As a Local Citizen

Most people identify themselves as the citizen of a country; some are citizens of two. Yet, in an increasingly interdependent world, we are all part of several worlds simultaneously. We are local citizens, and there is a great deal we can do to strengthen our communities. As national citizens, we too can be part of an alternative discourse. And, we are all now global citizens, and there is much we can do to reshape economic globalization and inhibit its negative effects. Here are a few ideas as starting points. As a local citizen, you can:

- Seize control of your local operating systems: transport, energy, waste, where global policies most directly play out. Insist that your local government support initiatives in each of these areas that reduce impacts on environment and encourage local solutions that avoid global corporate involvement.
- Create your own mini-alternatives summit in your community. Bring together civil society organizations, religious groups, activists, community members, students, scholars, elected officials, etc. to present, discuss and implement alternatives to economic globalization in your own community.
- Learn about the myriad of community organizing taking place where you live. Participate in these or join with others in your community to create your own movement to see real alternatives implemented at home. If you already participate in several community groups, such as your place of worship, your school or your food co-op – try to bring these communities together to work on issues of shared concern. You can also participate in on-line organizing communities. The internet provides many avenues for activists to learn new ways of organizing and bringing attention to alternatives on globalization.
- Attend your city council meetings and learn about and participate in issues affecting the community. Get involved in political campaigns in support of progressive candidates and consider running for office yourself. Participate actively in local public hearings
- Organize eco-initiatives in your neighborhood promoting urban agriculture and community development, such as cooperatives.
- Work against urban sprawl by voicing your concerns at county and state meetings and organizing community leaders.
- Organize cleanups in your neighborhood and city through community activism.
- Find out if your local community offers tax credits on revitalizing or preserving your property. Some offer tax credits for home and business owners. These incentives not only help create sustainable, revitalized local communities, but also create new jobs and can promote historic tourism.
- Support voter education and registration efforts in your community. Low levels of political participation and voter turnout, especially among low-income and

younger people, only increases the excessive influence of global corporations over our political system.

- Become a media activist. Support alternative media that reflects non-commercial values, but also make yourself heard by major media: call talk shows and raise alternative viewpoints; write to editors, producers and especially to advertisers when their content is objectionable. Such letters and emails are read and change can result. Get your colleagues and neighbors to join you in protests in such matters.

As a National Citizen

As citizens of countries whose governments make daily choices about how to interact with the global economy, there is a great deal we all can do to influence the paths our nations take. Countries vary widely on the democratic space that exists in which to operate. In some countries, citizens have taken the bold step of electing governments that reject the path of corporate globalization in favor of alternatives; in the past half decade, majorities have brought in new governments espousing critical views in Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. In the United States and other G-8 countries it is crucial that movements grow and pressure the most powerful countries to change policy. Deep political change requires more than simply voting more progressive politicians into office. It requires an active and mobilized citizenry engaged in every aspect of public life. Become active in a political party. Organize local issues forums. Get to know your political representatives and let them know your opinions. Run for office.

In developing countries where governments remain closely aligned with corporate globalization, such as the Philippines, strong national campaigns have nonetheless put effective pressure on governments to reject market-opening policies of the World Bank, IMF, and World Trade Organization. Get active in campaigns on these and related issues in your own country.

The energy of citizen engagement is growing nearly everywhere around a vast array of issues that in the end come down to issues of justice, environmental sustainability, and democracy. All are in the end integrally related to one another and to the institutions and culture of corporate globalization. The growing power of global civil society rests in part on its progress in alliance building across conventional divisions of nationality, issue, religion, race, and gender to build a movement of the whole. Be part of the alliance building process. Reach out in solidarity.

An enormously helpful resource outlining ideas on what you can do is the new book, *MoveOn's 50 Ways to Love Your Country: How to Find Your Political Voice and Become a Catalyst for Change*, which is a "how to" book detailing specific actions people can take to "turn inspiration into action." The titles of the chapters read like a catalogue of political actions, including:

- Create an Effective On-line Petition
- Mobilize Underrepresented Voters
- Register Voters in Unlikely Places
- Organize an Issue-Specific Voter Registration Drive
- Get Your Office to Vote

- Participate in a Phone Bank
- Respond to Biased Reporting
- Write Letters to Congress That Work
- Talk to the Officials You Didn't Elect
- Respond Locally to National Issues
- Host a Political Salon
- Express Your Political Views through Art

As a Global Citizen

Perhaps the most striking shift in the consciousness of many people over the past two decades has been the rise in global awareness and in the avenues open for people to act globally. People can participate in many ways on the global stage:

- Participate in international exchanges. Travel globally with organizations as opposed to commercial ventures to learn about how economic and social issues are affecting a region. Global Exchange and Witness for Peace are two of a growing number of international organizations working to increase public awareness of international problems by organizing international travel programs that bring people into direct contact with the issues and people they rarely hear about in the news. Participants learn first hand of the consequences of U.S. policies in places like Venezuela, Mexico, El Salvador, Argentina, Venezuela, Palestine, and Iraq. If you are thinking about taking an international tour on your next vacation, consider signing up for such a tour.
- Learn about how the World Bank, IMF, WTO and other global institutions function and how their policies affect your country and other areas of the world. Organize public forums in your community to educate people about the consequences of their policies. Make clear to the people who management your pension fund that you don't want your money invested in World Bank bonds.
- Follow the outcomes of regional alternative summits to see how they connect with the people and groups working to implement alternative ideas. Get involved with an international gathering like the World Social Forum or one of the growing number of regional and national social forums.
- Join the growing movement of people around the world who meet every gathering of the leaders of corporate globalization with public protests that demonstrate opposition to the current model and demand alternatives, while simultaneously embodying those alternatives through community empowerment, democratic decision-making and equality in organizing. Then, when you return home, continue the connections made with other people, movements, and organizations locally and around the world to continue to work together to implement alternatives.

Join organizations working for social justice, environmental sustainability, human rights, and local control. You will find an extensive list in the appendix. If you don't see an organization doing what you think needs to be done? Start your own organization or organizing community and start creating the change you want to see right now.