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## *Part I*

# PRESENTATION OF IRED

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## **IRED IS:**

- \* An international association of individuals who believe in a global development project, who live by the same values and who are committed, both individually and collectively, towards bringing about change.
- \* An international network of over 1000 partners, local networks, peasant and urban groups, associations of handicraftsmen, women, cooperatives, NGOs and other fellow organisations, who are eager to collaborate in order to break out of their state of isolation and, by joining forces, constitute an organised force to bring about change.
- \* An international service, organised at the national, regional and world levels, to provide its members and partners, and indeed all of the organisations with which it collaborates, with information, exchanges of experiences and support for local and global development.

### **To achieve the defined objectives, IRED:**

- \* facilitates exchanges of experiences between South-South, South-North, North-South and also with the East.
- \* assists in the creation and development of local and national networks, unions and group federations.
- \* provides, together with its partners, technical support in the areas of training, management and organisation, appropriate technologies, negotiating, etc., in order to strengthen the institutions in question, at every level.

IRED is therefore a facilitator, a convivial platform from which each and every one can express himself freely and work positively, a service which strives to guide and strengthen all those with whom it collaborates, and never competing with those involved in similar activities.

# IRED, ONE VISION

## AND SOME ALTERNATIVES

IRED does not believe that it is simply being utopian in thinking that the transition "to another society" is possible through the combined action of motivated and competent individuals who share this vision and understanding of the global problems at the root of injustice. All of these individuals have joined forces in organisations, networks and movements, to work towards making this change a reality.

IRED believes in these men and women of civil society, who have become organised and who today constitute an alternative to a democratic society. What is needed above all is for young persons, who are all too often marginalised and excluded from accessing information, resources and power, to be able to represent tomorrow's alternative.

IRED believes that the State, who has its role to play in this future development, must be at the service of this civil society. It believes in inter-dependence between the North, East, South and the various classes.

IRED is still working with conviction, not only severely criticising the shortcomings of the current development system, but also providing its support for alternative and operational proposals which have the makings of providing solutions and generating development.

In order to fulfill this commitment, IRED, which is organised in a flexible and informal manner, is resolutely intent on action.

# GLOBAL OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, AND METHODS OF ACTION

The first role is to **strengthen local associations** - people's federations, unions, networks and movements, both rural and urban. This strengthening process must result in their being able on the one hand to attain the means to support their own development, and on the other hand to be able to have a say in decisions pertaining to their future.

This also involves **strengthening the leaders** of these organisations, in other words the men and women on whom these changes in attitude, mentality and structure depend. This **institutional strengthening** and training process encompasses four dimensions:

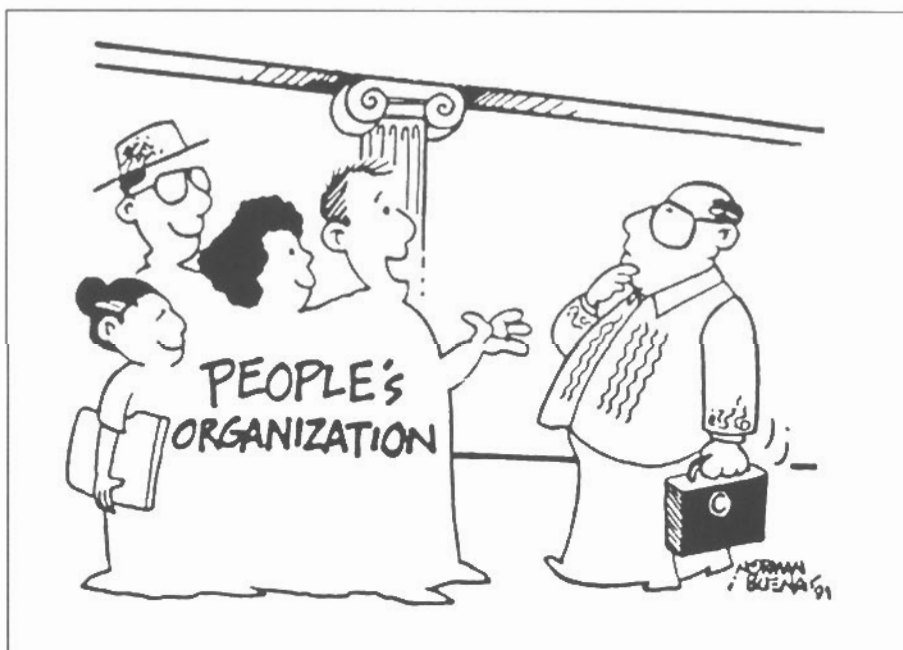
1. A look at **culture**. It is in fact at the very root of their culture that the characters of these men and women are formed, and with this the basis for the development of these organisations.
2. Social recognition. These men and women must be listened to, in their capacity of representatives of rural and urban populations.
3. Financial autonomy and promotion of economic activities. One of the essential ingredients for these organisations' financial autonomy lies in management, and therefore much emphasis is placed on training in this domain.
4. The political dimension. Any change necessitates political decisions and action.

## Specific objectives and areas of action

IRED's operational strategy is based on the following areas of action:

1. **Access to information.** Today, information represents a new form of power. Without access to information, development organisations will remain marginalised. IRED must therefore provide them with any information relevant to decision-making and organisation of their activities.
2. **Progression towards autonomy.** This involves a several-stage strategy:
  - The competence and credibility of the organisations, which is vital to their economic and political autonomy.
  - Strengthening of self-management skills for villages and groups of villages, to enable them to make a profit on activities undertaken, consequently an increase in income which will enable development organisations to become self-financing.  
  
Strengthening of management, planning and evaluation methods, and management training.
  - Seeking **alternatives to the current financing system**, based on external aid by project, for example by developing savings and credit systems or new mechanisms for capitalisation.
  - Training the managers of these organisations in negotiating skills, and also to improve their knowledge of the problems and mechanisms in macroeconomics, needed for their action at the local level, to ensure that these organisations' autonomy is not only financial and economic, but also social, political and economic.
3. **Building new solidarities.** Isolation is the people's organisations' worst enemy. Thanks to improved communication, networks are now able to form and create mutual solidarity at every level: local, regional, national, continental and eventually worldwide. This new solidarity will give rise to proposals for credible solutions which can thus be supported by strong, united organisations.

4. Formulating alternative proposals. IRED must keep up its relentless criticism of the prevailing system, its workings and its consequences. However, as criticism alone is not enough, alternatives, forthcoming from dialogue with local organisations, must be proposed.
5. **Acting together towards change.** In order to change laws, mentalities, structures and systems, one must act together, in an organised and concerted manner. IRED must be involved not only with alternative proposals but also, alongside its local partners, with lobbying and advocacy activities to enable these partners to defend their rights and influence decisions on which their future depends. Nevertheless, lobbying and advocacy are not enough. The people's movements have a great strength (which the NGOs do not): that of the sheer number of their members. Although in some cases there are a few hundred men and women, more often than not there are thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands and even millions of individuals. The number of persons, and the unity within these organised movements gives them the strength to constitute a pressure group whose strategic action would be a determining factor in getting the authorities in power to take decisions favouring the promotion of development for local groups.



## Strategies and methods of action

IREC's global strategy is based on two essential levers, which are on the one hand **institutional strengthening** (already covered) which involves not only the development organisations, but also the individuals and leaders of these organisations, and on the other hand **networking**, or the creation and development of networks, which enable organisations to break out of their state of isolation.

This networking strategy is a progressive one. Initially, it originates with the individual, the leader, man or woman, involved in an activity geared towards change, who gradually builds up a group or creates an association or movement. The success of network action depends on the strength of the partners, their capacity to "play the game", to get directly in touch with other partners within the network, without passing via the centre. The following three diagrams explain the process by which a network's action must be organised:

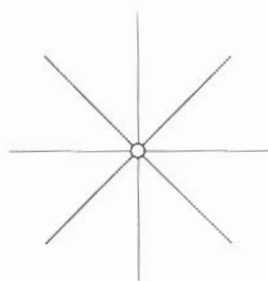


Diagram A

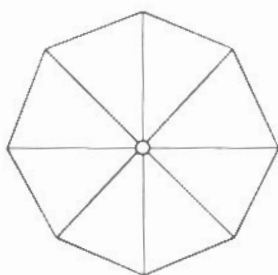


Diagram B

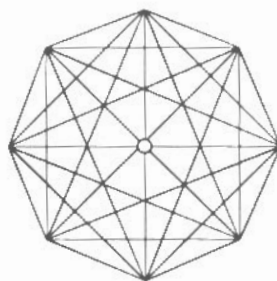


Diagram C

*Diagram A* shows all information, all forms of support and exchange, passing through the centre, be it a secretariat or a committee. When the partners communicate, it is via the centre. The action of such a network is restricted.

*Diagram B* shows a better balance. The nucleus is the centre of the network: it plays a capital role, but the partners are starting to collaborate directly, without referring to the centre.

*Diagram C* shows direct and systematic communication between the various members of the network. The centre acts as a support service for action carried out by the partners.

This diagrammatical representation of the network clearly demonstrates the role that a network's central coordinating nucleus should gradually assume.

## IRED's global strategy is based on three processes:

### *1. Think globally, act locally*

One often reads the saying "Think globally, act locally". Although this strategy is indeed necessary, it is important to realise that it entails a process which starts from the top and goes downwards, and which therefore has the tendency of imposing ideas on the local organisations which are not their own (top-down approach). Think locally and act globally is, on the contrary, a strategy based on local participation by populations, which aims at reaching the global level and its decision-makers (bottom-up approach).

Practice has shown us that neither of these approaches can be self-supporting. The top down approach (from global towards local) is often that of administration, which aims at getting populations to participate in its projects, without succeeding. The bottom-up approach (from local towards global) employed by NGOs and people's organisations systematically comes up against barriers at the level of administrative, political or military bodies, which prevent it from accomplishing its objectives.

IRED's strategy is therefore, whenever possible, i.e. within democratic States, a meeting of these two approaches, at the regional level, which has a much more significant effect on local development and on populations, as well as on national and global development.

### *2. The transition from micro to macro*

Most development organisations are involved in micro activities at the local level, involving the "poorest" populations. Their action is voluntary. Even though they sometimes lack technical competence and financial resources, most of the initiatives taken at the local level are successful because the action carried out by these development organisations is adapted to needs, supported by local, motivated men who are accepted by their own kind. Initiative relies on the



active participation of the populations. The idea is conceived together. It is carried out in a spirit of joint goodwill. This is the key to its success. If, in addition, these initiatives are able to benefit from technical support, financial support, open markets, and can surround themselves with technical competence and high-quality management, they can be sure of success.

How does one progress from being successful at the macro level, to a larger dimension? Some say that one should add up micro successes, whilst others believe rather that one should plan micro-macro development and, in this context, look at the various stages of this transition and act accordingly.

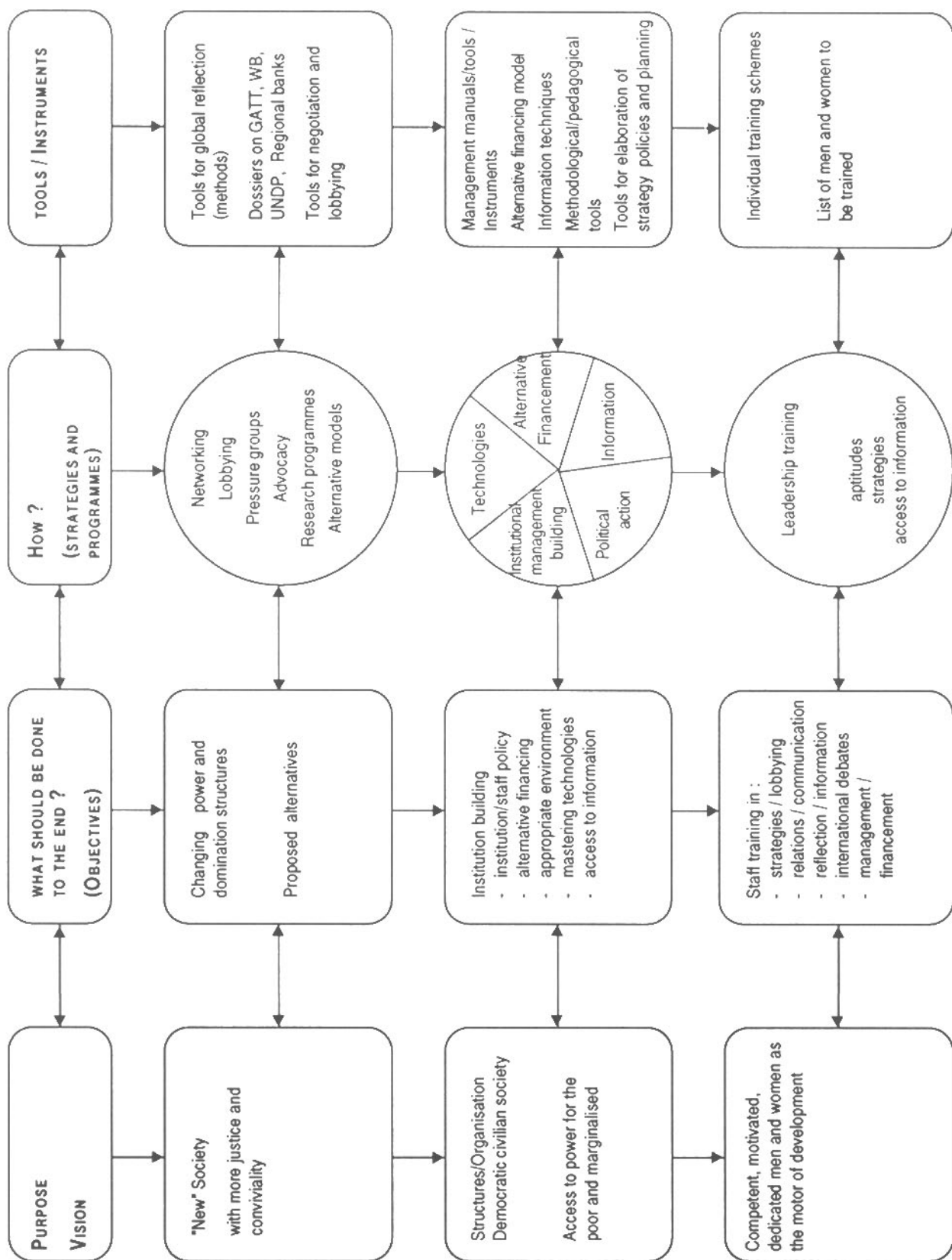
IRED believes that development must initially be based at the micro level and entail the participation of the local populations. It also believes that a micro success is not enough if it does not present possibilities for expansion and effort to multiply the results on a larger scale.

Lastly, with our ambition being to provide new solutions to development problems, our thoughts and strategies must also be based at the macro level. This is why IRED works hard in capitalising case studies, and studying those transitions from micro to macro which have been successful. Research-action programmes currently underway should provide some useful lessons which will ensure that our successes at the local level can have a more significant impact within other regions or countries.

### *3. The progression towards autonomy*

This strategy has already been covered, but one should be aware that the NGOs and development organisations can no longer continue to live under this contradiction of promoting a philosophy which is based on self-development or self-reliance, when in fact most (80 to 98%) are financed by external aid.

Progressing towards autonomy means therefore mastering a certain number of techniques, methods and strategies which will enable the development organisations to collaborate better with their surroundings (governments, banks, external aid) and to deal to the best of their ability with any clashes of interest which could encourage economic activities within an organisation the main objective of which is social.



## WHO ARE IRED'S PARTNERS ?

IRED currently works in the following twelve East and Southern African countries: Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, Zambia, Namibia, Mauritius, Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique, Lesotho and Zimbabwe.

The active partners currently stand at 89 organisations. The regional office intends, under its 1994-1997 triennial plan, to increase the number of partners to 150.

Partner organisations consist of grassroots movements/groups which are locally-founded training institutions, savings and credit cooperatives, agricultural groups and rural development support organisations.

Partners have joined the network either through applying after receiving IRED-Forum, or after being identified by the DSS or referred by existing partners. The major criteria used in selecting organisations is that they must have a strong grassroots base. The DSS has also endeavored to reach out to isolated groups and has focussed its efforts on trying to bring out these small groups. There are now both small and large organisations within the network. The DSS is now refocussing its activities and developing programmes to cater to the needs of different partners.

# Main options and strategies of IRED

## FUNDAMENTAL OPTIONS

As soon as IRED was created it was important that the founding members reach a CONSENSUS enabling them, as well as any new partner of the association, to refer to the basic options and strategies defined both at the ideological and operational levels.

Such main options may be formulated as follows:

1. The person is the instrument and the finality of development. A person has needs which are not only economic and social, but also cultural and spiritual. Development is caused by motivation and example, even more than by technology or finance.
2. IRED, through its members and the organisations to which they belong, intends to promote the values underlying the development policy intended for the least favoured.

The respect of persons and of fundamental freedoms, the setting-up of economic systems demanding a fair distribution of riches and incomes, peace between men and nations, justice in their relations and within the established economic systems, etc.

Authentic development must be completely integrated within the culture of the society concerned. IRED must therefore promote research of the cultural identity upon which society projects may rest, as well as new ways of life and forms of collective action.

3. Development is therefore the business of persons and groups who live within the confines of their local community. It must bring liberation, overcome domination, promote individual and collective imagination. It is thus communication and an opening to the world.

Populations in towns and villages must determine for themselves what development at local level should be, and be in a position to participate at regional and national levels in order to:

- establish the basic needs, whether physical, economic, social or spiritual of each individual, group and community concerned as a whole;

- make use of their own means through their participation;
  - let development activities stem from their culture and customs.
4. Development is also an organised, overall and cumulative process through which a local, regional or national community puts to the best use the potentialities of its environment, with the best possible means and technologies, to satisfy in an equitable and lasting way the needs of all towards transformation and opening to the world.
  5. Taking into account the multiplicity of cultures, geographic and climatic frameworks, languages, attitudes, customs and economic potentialities, IRED believes in the plurality of ways of development. It must therefore adapt to local and national situations provided that they are not in contradiction with its own principles and options.
  6. IRED is opposed to any form of domination, whether external or internal. It condemns the economic systems blocking or destroying the efforts of the less developed countries. It also condemns any act of internal domination and repression tending to crush persons and groups who wish to organise and promote their own development.
  7. A fair sharing of power, resources, and means of production between the various population groups will enable each one to be responsible and to develop. The State and its administrative and technical services should be at the disposal of all its people.
  8. The division usually made between North and South, industrialised and developing countries has become more and more relative. Rather, what is necessary is to distinguish everywhere in the world between those who have and those who have no access to power, to resources and to means of production. Poverty exists everywhere but it should be seen at home first. It is necessary to gather together people who are doing something at home. *The approach is the same. It stems from people's initiatives in their own environment.*

## STRATEGIES

Strategy plays a most important part in development or when formulating policies. One should know how, when and with whom to act. Strategy should bring about *change* starting from the actual situation in the field. It enables

utopia to become reality by promoting communication between various groups. The strategies which IRED tends to promote can be described as follows:

1. In any of its operations IRED is concerned with the basic environmental unit in the field where people live day after day, whether it be in the district, town, village or place of work.
2. Development must respond to the basic needs of these people. It should "enable violence, misery, alienation and repression to be avoided". Poverty also means being powerless.
3. Any action assumes the participation of the majority of those concerned. This participative policy implies a responsible attitude from the greatest possible number of individuals and the creation of small operational units strengthening this responsibility.
4. The population to which IRED's operation is directed is composed of all those who in villages, towns and cities constitute the mass of the less privileged. IRED must, however, tend to associate with its own objectives, not only the leaders of such groups but also the representatives of technical services, of Parties and Governments. It will endeavour to work in close liaison with technicians, entrepreneurs and local and regional elites in so far as their objectives and functions try to support people's efforts to overcome poverty.
5. Development must be integrated since it is not necessarily brought about by the addition of sectorial action, whether on a small or large scale, which sometimes tends to increase division and domination.

One should distinguish between development at local, regional, national and international levels. Programming and planning are necessary, provided that the representatives of the local populations are associated with these two processes.

6. Development implies the search for an optimum balance between the private and public sector, the part to be played by the administration and the participation of the population, the development of towns and country, of industry and agriculture and between regions.
7. Decentralisation of power is one of the technical means to be promoted. The control of external aid and of development financing must be carefully organised as well as the training of persons on whom operational choices and action will rest at all levels.

# THE STORY OF AN ADVENTURE

BY FERNAND VINCENT  
FOUNDER-COUNSELLOR

*It is the dawn of the 1980s. Three groups of men, in three different continents - Africa, Asia and Europe - decide to create the IRED world network.*

*Some fifteen years on, as I hand over the reins to a new Secretary General, IRED's Executive Committee asks me to devote some of my time to writing the story of our shared adventure. Here, therefore, are some of the landmarks, events, and key dates which have had an impact on IRED's progression, which at a later stage will be presented in the form of a special publication.*

## The birth of IRED

It was amongst a handful of former students and teachers at the *Institut Panafricain pour le Développement (IPD - Panafrikan Institute for Development)*, in the context this institution's activities, that the idea to create IRED first started to grow.

It was 1980, and I had just left the Institute's General Secretariat. Together with a few friends from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe, I speculated: what could we, together, do in order to provide, through our personal and collective commitment, a better way of promoting a form of development which was both more united and better suited to the needs of local populations?

With some 20 years' experience behind us, we all had a somewhat negative view of the situation in the development field throughout the world - the ineffectiveness of international aid, and the extremely restricted limits in the areas of governmental and multinational action. Indeed, we had witnessed first-hand, through our own involvement in the Third World, the failure of macroeconomic planning, technical assistance, and grandiose ideas. We were also well aware, of course, of the limitations of our own ideas with regard to integrated development and a strategy intended to change North-South relations. All of us - Africans, Asians, Europeans and Latin-Americans - were involved in training, research and support activities, as well as the concrete realisation of programmes. Together, we had a common determination, one and the same ideal: to do better.

This project "to do better" was realised by creating an international association the name of which is indicative of three important aspects:

**Innovations:** this is the "raison d'être" of development. Development entails change. If we want to "develop", we must innovate and observe what is happening here and there around us, watching those who have already innovated, in order to transfer their experience to our own circumstances.

**Networks:** joint action is one of the ingredients of success. One must de-isolate, communicate, exchange, and mutually strengthen one another.

**Development:** our utopia is that of an alternate development which obviously entails economic growth but which also, and above all, is social, human, and united.

This is the IRED Project which brought the founders together.



IRED was born simultaneously in Africa, Asia and Europe. I was in fact simply the facilitator of a commitment shared by our three groups:

- in Africa, around the IPD, Boukary Younoussi, Jean-Bernard Payet, Bernard Lédéa Ouedraogo, Jacques Bugnicourt, and many other friends, who had together been through some great adventures.
- in Asia, M.V. Rajasekharan, Chandra Soysa, S. Loganathan, Om Shrivastava, Joe Madiath, who had shared their ideas about a project for a world IRED network at a seminar in Bangalore, India, which was also attended by Ronald Léger and Roméo Maïone of the ACDI, Canada.
- in Europe, Bernard Lecomte, Michel Garcin, René Didier and many others, who got together on a regular basis to examine and research ways and means for the future IRED.

The first draft project for the international *Development Innovations and Networks association*, was prepared on 15 May 1980. It served as a basis for joint reflection and gave rise to a considerable number of fundamental ideas.

It was in Geneva on 8 and 9 September 1980 that IRED was officially established - its statutes approved, the lists of its first members and partners drawn up. I sent the final project for the creation of the international Development Innovations and Networks association to each member, together with a letter which concluded with the following words :

*"I have taken the initiative of having headed paper printed and opening a bank account. For me, and I believe for you too, this marks the beginning of a thrilling adventure"....*



Elizabeth Kddy

## The activities

As mentioned above, IRED is first and foremost both a forum and a support centre. What was IRED's strategic and political development through the activities, which are extremely numerous, carried out by the network? **Six stages mark out this progression:**

1. The network started up with two main activities, which it still pursues today, and which give it its reputation: the organisation of exchanges and the publication of the network's information and communication review: IRED-Forum.

The first exchange organised by IRED was carried out in 1980. At that time, organising a study trip for Sahelian peasants to India and Sri Lanka was indeed a challenge, and we did not receive a great deal of encouragement for this undertaking. In fact, we even had to take criticism from certain cooperation agencies, who did not take it at all seriously: "We've heard that you're doing international tourism for peasants". And yet today, the ten Sahelian leaders who visited Southern India and Sri Lanka in 1980 are men and women who have secured leadership positions in prominent peasant movements and are now the negotiators for these large cooperation agencies. They speak of autonomy, of alternative financing, of enterprise promotion, of marketing their products, and of peasant trade unionism, and they also hold dialogue with governments. Since then, IRED has organised several hundred exchanges, at every level: be it women visiting the neighbouring village to learn how to manufacture soap, or a group of Sri Lankans travelling to India to study how to start up a local people's bank. IRED has become one of the top specialists in person-to-person exchange. Guides have been published describing exchange as an alternative means of training for those who will never be able to attend school.

2. The IRED-Forum review is a tool for one and all. Peasants make use of an article, translating it into their local language; they discuss it whilst sitting together under a tree. It will be the starting point of a discussion on marketing their produce or on local savings. A coordinator from an NGO in the North is preparing a field trip to the Third World and wants to get in touch with people's movements: he notes down from our review the various IRED partnerships throughout the world. Technology centres collate the information provided in IRED-Forum on technical indexes, to diffuse them to their partners. IRED-Forum has become the vehicle for a relations strategy, from the village to the whole world.

Around 1985-86, answering to the needs of partners in West Africa, IRED carries out training programmes for village self-management. As part of these programmes, it publishes volumes I and II of the Management Manual for Third World development associations, which was translated into French, English, Spanish, and the various national languages of Asia. It also proved useful within the countries of the former USSR.

Management training, to render groups autonomous and responsible, had become one of IRED's new programmes.

3. IRED's self-examining questions as to its identity and the manner in which it fulfilled its partners' needs had gradually lead it to become involved in research. Peasant studies were carried out in the Puttalam area of Sri Lanka, and with the FONGS in Senegal, from which lessons were learned from experiences out in the field. During this same period, IRED, realising the importance of the network strategies, developed a strategy to create and run local and regional networks. It applied this practically in various regions throughout the world and joined forces with its large sister networks to organise various joint activities and programmes.
4. The experiences and development of the various programmes called for a pause, time to reflect. This came in the form of the IRED-Forum evaluation, followed by the evaluation of the entire network. These evaluations affirmed the majority of the initial decisions and increased our conviction to venture still further.
5. In order to progress towards autonomy and to become valuable negotiators in international dialogue, the people's organisations had to strengthen themselves institutionally. IRED's programmes gradually became geared towards empowerment, in other words increasing the power of people's organisations not only economically and financially, but also socially, culturally and politically.

New publications accompanied this policy: strengthening financial autonomy, promoting alternative forms of financing to speed up partners' financial autonomy, became action programmes.

6. Lastly, the document produced following the self-evaluation process, IRED's action plan and triennial programme towards the year 2000, was approved by the GAD in Peking, 1991. The last section of this document lists these fundamental decisions.