

Book Review



Title: *The solidarity economy alternative: emerging theory and practice*

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The book raises a profound and key element of human and environmental sustainable development, namely the solidarity economy. Above all, it argues that a solidarity economy is in fact the solution to the plight of neoliberal capitalism. The focal point of this book is mainly motivated by seven aspects of global neoliberal capitalism: (a) global financial crisis, (b) retrenchments, (c) unemployment, (d) poverty, (e) hunger, (f) food insecurity and (g) climate change. Based on the practical and theoretical components, this volume makes its standpoint within the Italian, United States', Brazilian and South African perspective. Moreover, the contemporary global and South African economic statuses make this volume relevant to the current socio-economic, political and environmental discourse.

It is common knowledge that among all challenges across the world today, unemployment – especially youth unemployment/underemployment – and climate change have become the major global risks, thus threatening local, regional and global peace and security. In fact, for the past four years many countries, including South Africa, have been characterised by protests, eg the Arab Spring, Boko Haram insurgency and labour and service delivery disputes. This has exacerbated the challenges of food crises.

According to *The solidarity economy alternative – emerging theory and practice*, a solidarity economy is the alternative to this impasse. Satgar explains the solidarity economy within the South African context of *ubuntu*; it strives for humanity before profit. It is about transforming society through directly addressing and catering for immediate human needs and natural balance. Its core principles and values are rooted within the spirit of collectiveness, unity, integration, coherence, sharing, equality, social justice, democracy, transparency, participation and inclusivity (Satgar, Williams, Esteves, Mance, Jara, Bennie and Satgoor in this volume). On the contrary, capitalism values individualism and profit-making over humanity and nature.

In addition, although both social and solidarity economies are driven by the cause for humanity, Williams identifies a critical and clear distinction between the two; ie a social economy seeks to find better ways of satisfying human needs within the capitalist system whereas a solidarity economy strives for an anticapitalist, transformative and sustainable approach to address human and environmental needs.

The book indicates that the main objective of a solidarity economy is to provide socio-economic opportunities for transformation, development, and sustainability at the grassroots level. Through its bottom-up approach, community-based programmes are formulated as worker cooperatives, with the aim of creating jobs, eradicating poverty, alleviating hunger, and disseminating knowledge and information through education and training services.

It is interesting that the authors went to the extent of using practical experiences with regard to defining the concept of a solidarity economy. A clear example of a solidarity economy is used in part 3 of this volume: the case of food sovereignty initiative projects through worker-control cooperatives in two South African townships. These cooperatives were mainly formed by unemployed and retrenched people, who decided to take on a more democratic model whereby everyone equally participates in decision-making and have equal control in overseeing production, distribution, consumption and surplus.

Not only does this practical life situation make it easier for the reader to follow through and relate to the situation, but it also develops and stimulates the reader's understanding of the concept. Therefore, the practicality and simplified methods used in this book can actually help many young unemployed and employed South Africans, including those in colleges of further education and training and universities, to curb the rate of unemployment, poverty and hunger in their immediate family household, communities and country.

The book clearly indicates that everyone can play a part in and take responsibility for addressing the socio-economic, political and environmental challenges of the country through social and political willingness. This volume can especially be of assistance to government and private institutions, civil society and local community members to give guidelines on how they can work together to build an economically and ecologically sustainable development from below. This could be done through encouraging and promoting cooperative initiatives on the lower community levels and capacitating local communities with equal access to productive capital assets.

After reading this book, the conclusion is reached that the success of a solidarity economy depends not only on the willingness of a political party or government, but also and most importantly on local communities, civil societies, academics, activists, media and youth; men and women. To quote Christine Lagarde, International Monetary Fund managing director: '[Y]ou need all players to work together to win. You need teamwork. The same is true for the global economy. Each policy instrument must play its part in order to achieve proper balance'¹.

This book is recommended for schools, universities, community members, community-based organisations/enterprises, cooperatives, practitioners, civil society, all government sectors and departments, and policy makers. It is easy to read, relate to and understand and is therefore highly recommended for community libraries.

NOTE

- 1 Lagarde, C. 2014. The challenge facing the global economy: new momentum to overcome a new mediocre. Speech delivered at Georgetown University, School of Foreign Service, 2 October. <http://www.imf.org/external/np/speeches/2014/100214.htm> (Accessed 11 November 2014).