

major supporter and only trading partner, the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc of countries. The crisis was of a scale comparable to the great depression of the 1930s for a small island country, now without friends (but with a very powerful enemy next door) or trading partners: no foreign exchange to purchase badly needed food or fuel and a free fall of the country's GDP by 15 percent.³⁹ The Cuban state (intensely engaged with Cuban society and social actors — see below) responded to the economic crisis of the 1990s with a structural adjustment program (SAP) that was the antithesis of the SAPs imposed on southern countries by the Bretton Woods institutions. Cuba declared a “Special Period in Time of Peace” and introduced a series of austerity measures and economic reforms. But it was a SAP with a *difference*: Cuba's program relied almost entirely on the country's own resources and did not reduce, but increased, its social spending from the already high 20.08 percent of its GDP in 1990 to 32 percent by 1998.⁴⁰

Moving the State: Social Mobilization and Public Participation

If the state is such a critical institution in human development and poverty alleviation, it still needs to be explained how and under what conditions the underprivileged classes in a society, including vast numbers of the rural poor, are able to influence state policy and make it respond to their needs. High HD indicators, which are statistical averages, underscore the fact that development in these societies has been more inclusive with a wider spread than elsewhere (Kerala vs. India or Cuba vs. Latin America). This raises the critical political question of how these classes become mobilized, incorporated into relatively stable organizations with universalistic ideologies and programs, and integrated into the political process. Both Kerala and Cuba throw considerable light on this question and show how and why the mobilization of these classes — the nature of their organizations and the mode of integration — are critical for HD.

The literature on Kerala is replete with accounts of the state's long history of social mobilization and struggle. The trajectory began in the southern part of Kerala, the princely state of Travancore and later that of Kochi (formerly Cochin) with the well-known social reform movements and caste associations in the latter part of the nineteenth century — combining a unique Kerala model of renaissance, enlightenment, and reformation, all in one. In British Malabar, where rack-renting and predatory landlordism were more prominent, nineteenth and early twentieth century social movements focused more on agrarian issues.⁴¹ To be sure, these movements were born in specific historical contexts — economic, social, cultural, and political — about which we will not concern

39. Uriarte 2002, 3 and 36; Uriarte 2004.

40. Uriarte (2002, 3) notes that in 1990 Cuba's social expenditure of 20.08 percent of GDP was higher than that of Japan, Australia, and the United States and twice the Latin American average of 10.4. By 1998, after a decade of crisis, Cuba was spending 32 percent of its GDP on social programs, still the highest in Latin America (*ibid.*, 36). Despite the high social spending, services actually declined in the face of higher demands and decreased buying power of the Cuban peso, among other factors. This decline led to many problems such as delayed maintenance of hospitals, shortage of medicines, and reduced ration entitlements. See also Barraclough 2000.

41. Herring 1983 and 2003; Radhakrishnan 1989; Panikkar 1989.

ourselves here, referring only to the rich literature available.⁴² One of the fascinating facets of this narrative is how even the maharajah of Travancore, the kingdom's Hindu ruler, was himself transformed from protector of Varnashrama Dharma, the caste-based social and moral order (perhaps the most oppressive in the whole of India) to supporter of lower-caste struggles and changer of caste oppression.⁴³ Eventually the maharajah threw open to all castes educational institutions and Hindu temples, formerly the exclusive preserves of the higher castes. Some of these movements were later joined by, and even absorbed into, trade union and political movements that led to the establishment of strong political parties, in particular, of a well-organized Communist Party with a universalistic and class ideology that remained purposive and programmatic and retained its mass base across caste and religion over a period of time in one of the most pluralist societies in the world. Since the 1970s Kerala's numerous political parties have functioned largely within two coalitions, the left-of-center Left Democratic Front (LDF), led by the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM), and the right-of-center United Democratic Front (UDF), led by the Congress Party. The two fronts have alternated in gaining an electoral majority and holding power with some regularity. The choice Kerala's (and India's) communists made to engage in multiparty democracy and adversarial politics in India seems to have been based on an astute and realistic assessment of the actual possibilities; their organizational strength, mass base, and ability to mobilize their supporters made their strategy successful.⁴⁴ Although this strategy involved considerable class compromise and the need to moderate, if not abandon, some radical programs, it also succeeded in forcing the right-of-center parties and traditional conservative forces to accept much of the left's social programs. It is worth noting that even limited land reforms, moderated in the face of strong opposition, required organized struggles and intense participation of mass organizations, especially of landless workers.⁴⁵

Cuba's trajectory shows some important similarities with Kerala's despite its obviously different political and cultural history.⁴⁶ Cuba's most significant mass movement, also starting in the latter half of the nineteenth century, was centered on the demand for independence from Spain. The independence movement mobilized Cubans across lines of social class and gender. Historians regard this as the defining moment in the emergence of a Cuban melting pot and a distinct Cuban national identity. Under such leaders as Felix Varela and José Martí, the struggle for independence was also linked to the broader struggle for

42. See note 13 above.

43. Devika 2010; Woodstock 1967.

44. Nossiter 1982; oral presentation made by veteran left intellectual and former editor of the CPM newspaper *Desabhimani* at the first workshop on the Kerala-Cuba Project, Trivandrum, Kerala, 12–14 December 2006.

45. Such struggles were observed and documented in Tharamangalam 1981, which also documented some of the many evasions and illegal transfers. That even modest land reforms cannot be implemented without effective popular struggles and without a strong state that has the power and the will to implement reforms is amply demonstrated by years of broken promises and unimplemented programs all over the world, especially in India and Latin America.

46. Díaz 2007; Saney 2004.



Student Federation of India activists clash with police during a demonstration in Cochin, Kerala, Tuesday, 1 July 2003. The activists were protesting against the banning of politics on college campuses. "The literature on Kerala is replete with accounts of the state's long history of social mobilization and struggle." (Credit: AP Photo)

the end of slavery, for social justice and universal human rights, and for a transformation of society that would guarantee basic entitlements to every citizen. These struggles continued into the twentieth century as the United States (and U.S.-controlled "strong men") replaced the Spanish as the new oppressors (1920s to 1950s), and as social justice and equality still eluded the Cuban people. For example, the formal abolition of slavery in 1886 did not end entrenched racism and racial prejudices that denied black and mulatto Cubans access to many critical economic and social benefits including jobs and education.⁴⁷ These social movements, however, eventually led to armed revolution, at least in part because by the 1950s there was little space in Cuba for the kind of adversarial and accommodative politics that characterized Kerala.

For reasons rooted in Cuba's political history and its unique geopolitical situation, postrevolutionary Cuba has rejected the model of party-based democracy; the Cuban Communist Party does not function as an electoral party.⁴⁸ Instead, the Revolution established and institutionalized a classical socialist form

47. Díaz 2007.

48. It may be noted that Cuba's historical suspicion of multiparty electoral democracy predates the revolution and goes back to the historically specific situation of vulnerability arising from its proximity to an imperialist and interventionist great power. Cuba's misgivings about a multiparty electoral system go back to the time of José Martí himself. Martí's exposure to electoral politics in the United States convinced him that such a system was not in Cuba's interest. He saw it as a divisive process that squandered national energy and as an instrument that invited manipulation by foreign players (Saney 2004). This last point plays in the collective psyche of Cubans with great force especially in the light of well-documented evidence of U.S. efforts to fund and to use opposition movements to subvert Cuba's political system. The issue is so sen-

of “direct democracy” and instruments of popular participation through “organs of people’s power” and mass organizations. As in Kerala, Cuba’s many mass organizations influence debates and policies at all levels. These organizations include, besides the Communist Party, strong trade unions, farmers’ unions, and women’s and student organizations. The formal representative bodies are municipalities and provincial and national assemblies. People’s representatives are nominated directly by the voters and elected to these bodies in competitive elections by secret ballot in a nonparty context. From the standpoint of human development, the most vigorous form of participation has been at the grassroots, municipal level, and this form of participation has been made even more vigorous, intensive, and extensive through the reforms for greater decentralization in the 1990s.⁴⁹

While these bodies do not have legislative powers, their control and management of local economic and social affairs are far more significant than in liberal democratic societies, including Kerala, and the stakes are high. In the absence of any significant private sector, these bodies have been very active in “forming, determining, developing and monitoring local and national economic plans and budgets and in checking all economic activity located in the municipality.”⁵⁰ They not only manage and control local agricultural cooperatives and other economic enterprises and distribution systems, but also the delivery of all vital services including education and health. Despite the recent introduction of some private enterprises, the activities and powers of these democratic bodies have actually been considerably enhanced as a result of the decentralization process. With the stakes so high, popular participation is vigorous and there is an institutionalized system of vigilance and monitoring especially through the “accountability sessions” at which delegates must periodically give account of their activities and answer the electorate’s questions. It is important to note that these local bodies are also linked to provincial and national bodies and influence ideas, debates, and policies at all levels. The reforms of the “Special Period” of the 1990s, for example, were intensely discussed and debated at all levels of government and mass organizations.

As will be seen below in part 3, since the early 1990s both Kerala and Cuba have had to confront major new challenges and to navigate the turbulent waters of neoliberal globalization and reforms. And these are putting pressure on their patterns of politics and development.

sitive that independent organizations in Cuba take special care not to accept financial help from U.S. sources to keep themselves above suspicion.

49. On Cuba’s model of representative government, see Roman 2003; August 1999; and Saney 2004. Popular participation in the context of decentralization and local development is one of the issues our research project is investigating. Since 2005 this author has made six research visits to Cuba, spending on the average about ten days each, conducting interviews with a variety of people and making field visits, especially to farmers’ cooperatives and to the agricultural university in Havana. During one of these visits Canadian and Cuban members of our research team visited the municipality of Sancti Spiritus where we spent two days engaged in intensive discussions with members of the local municipality. In general, we have been favorably impressed by the effectiveness of the programs and by the level of people’s participation.

50. Roman 2003, 1.

State–Society Relations

We have argued above that the two key elements in HD in Kerala and Cuba are (1) an interventionist state committed to pro-poor policies, and (2) a mobilized society that engages the state through well-organized mass organizations and parties. In this section we discuss the way in which these two elements have interacted to create and maintain a certain synergy, a “virtuous” relationship. We suggest that this may be critical in understanding why these two cases have succeeded where many others such as Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Sri Lanka have not been so successful. Before turning to this discussion a caveat must be introduced. Imperialism and imperialist inventions have been critical factors in the trajectories of many countries, and especially so in the case of Cuba, but this is a subject outside the scope of our discussion. That tiny Cuba succeeded in repelling numerous well-documented attempts to destroy the revolution by the world’s greatest power is an amazing story,⁵¹ and we cannot altogether discount the role of historical accidents, the brilliance of Cuba’s leaders, and even sheer luck as factors in some of its successes. Even on this issue, however, we emphasize the need to focus on empirically identifiable factors such as Cuba’s formidable defense and intelligence capabilities, its astute diplomacy in garnering support from most of the world’s countries and the United Nations, and, most important, the overwhelming support for the revolutionary regime from Cuban citizens, especially in the face of imperialist interventions, and from well-organized and vigilant mass organizations such as the CDRs (Committee to Defend the Revolution).

Scholars examining state–society relations use different analytical lenses such as “equilibrium,” “balance,” “synergy,” and “state-in-society.”⁵² Joel Migdal’s concept of state-in-society is particularly useful for it shows the state as embedded in society and constructed by social forces, on the one hand, yet enjoying relative autonomy and the capacity to mold and even manipulate social forces and social groups, on the other.⁵³ While the state can enjoy relative stability over a period of time, being a system of institutionalized practices, beliefs, and rules, every state is ultimately precarious and vulnerable as an arena in which contesting and changing social forces are continuously at play.

The point to be emphasized is that Kerala and Cuba have both been successful in maintaining a balance between state and society and among a variety of social groups and organizations. This balance does not mean an equilibrium imposed by some invisible hand, but a synergy created and maintained by institutionalized mechanisms capable of accommodating differences and resolving conflicts. As noted above, in Kerala the process involved accommodation and compromise among various interest groups, mediated by rational-le-

51. Morley 1987.

52. Much of this literature overlaps with the literature cited in the two sections above. Of particular interest here are Migdal, Kohli, and Shue 1994; Migdal 2001; Houtzager and Moore 2003; Evans 1995, 97; and Evans, ed. 1997.

53. Migdal, Kohli, and Shue 1994; Migdal 2001.



"In Cuba education was linked intrinsically to the revolution's goal of transforming Cubans into an enlightened, mobilized, and empowered people. Following Castro's famous promise to turn the nation into a gigantic school, education was 'declared to be every one's right.' It is not accidental, therefore, that Cuba successfully organized one of the best free public school systems anywhere,..." (Credit: ILO Photo/Deloche P. 2000)

gal, modern institutions of the state as well as political parties and other organizations.

In Cuba, which eschews multiparty, adversarial politics, these negotiations take place not only within and across the Communist Party and the many mass organizations under its auspices, but as mentioned above, also among the many levels and organs of the state. Almost all major changes in policy, the rectification programs of the 1980s, and especially the austerity measures and reforms during the Special Period were implemented after intense public debates. It is noteworthy that the government's first austerity package formulated by the National Assembly in 1993, which included a "tax on wages," was vigorously opposed by representatives of the unions because the workers had not been given a chance to discuss these measures. Subsequently the proposed plan was set aside and mass consultations initiated in what have been called "Workers' Parliaments," and revised austerity plans were eventually adopted.⁵⁴ As will be seen below, a more recent plan to reduce ration entitlements also seems to have been abandoned in the face of popular opposition.

This is not to suggest that in either case this "virtuous" relationship has been unproblematic, or without dilemmas, strains, or contradictions or that it will be sustained indefinitely through the turbulent waters of still ongoing neoliberal globalization and reforms. In fact, such a relationship is always precarious and a

54. Saney 2004, 50–52.

delicately negotiated one since democratic participation involves and requires critics of a given regime and even political opposition, and states and societies must negotiate inevitable conflicts of interests among social classes and groups. Our argument has only been that the role played by both have been important and essential in producing the human development outcomes, and further that they have played such roles within an institutionalized framework capable of accommodating differences and resolving conflicts.

Cultural Revolution and Paradigm Change

Visiting Cuba during the first year of the revolution and interviewing a wide variety of people, C. Wright Mills wrote:

What impresses me most of all about the cultural possibilities in Cuba are the eagerness to learn and the open-mindedness of many of the young men who make up the revolutionary Government of Cuba. In 20 years of teaching and writing, and of considerable travel, I have never before encountered such a sustained passion for learning, and such an intelligent awareness of the kinds of things that must be studied. And yet one of my major worries for Cuba is my worry for her cultural establishment. I do not mean only art and literature; I mean culture more broadly to include all those institutions of the mass media of communication and of higher and lower education by which the character and the mentality of men and women are formed.⁵⁵

What emerges from our discussion about public action is a picture of a mobilized society putting pressure on the state that must respond to it by making provisions for people's basic security and other public goods because the society has *captured* the state and/or upholds it with its support. But a more basic question must be asked: what social or cultural factors or forces *moved* these societies in the first place and how did they, in turn, *move* their states and bureaucracies (or even create these institutions ab initio as in Cuba) to formulate and implement policies that led to these outcomes? To begin to answer this question we must examine what we have called a "cultural revolution," namely, a transformation in human consciousness and a paradigm change in social values and ideals, in people's conception of and commitment to social and distributive justice and human rights, and in people's aspirations for themselves and their children.⁵⁶

To be sure, prominently figuring in this revolution were such radical philosophers and cultural leaders as José Martí, Fidel Castro, and Che Guevara in Cuba and Narayana Guru and Namboothirippad in Kerala, and there were "battles of ideas" and "revolutions in ideas." What is more important in the transforma-

55. Mills 1960, 186.

56. Tharamangalam 2007. Our usage of the concept here differs from the way it has been used to refer to the "cultural revolution" in China in the 1960s and 1970s where it was, at least initially, designed and guided by the top leadership of the state and involved conflicts among the leadership of the Communist Party. As our definition implies, we refer to a process of broad cultural change akin to the European Enlightenment emanating in society and affecting large sections of its intellectuals as well as of its general population.

tions of these societies, however, is the process by which such ideas became part of the popular cultural movements and were internalized in the collective consciousness of the people. Such a cultural revolution is also a revolution in hope — giving new hope to people who formerly lived without hope, accepting their fate as inevitable and/or unchangeable. Kerala historian Robin Jeffrey has noted, for instance, that by the 1930s large numbers of people in Kerala had enthusiastically embraced the belief that they had “entitlements,”⁵⁷ a concept that figures prominently in the writings of Amartya Sen.

Sen’s characterization of famines as caused by “entitlement failures” is very useful in understanding Cuba’s success in averting a famine in the face of a sudden and unprecedented crisis including a 30 percent fall in food availability.⁵⁸ As the Cuban state tightened its belt during this crisis, it went to extraordinary lengths to safeguard people’s deeply cherished entitlements even if at a reduced rate. Not only were there no famine or famine-related deaths in Cuba, but not one school or hospital was closed. The pioneering campaigns for mass literacy in both Kerala and Cuba were momentous cultural movements that had little to do with any policy or plan for economic development. Only two years into the revolution, Cuba captured the world’s attention by launching its innovative and revolutionary nine-month-long literacy campaign, which mobilized 100,000 secondary students and other volunteers to impart the skills of reading and writing to 707,000 adults in all parts of the country. Kerala launched a similar campaign in 1989–90 that led to the claim that the state had achieved 100 percent literacy by the early 1990s.⁵⁹ In Kerala the social reform movements campaigned vigorously for the rights of the lower castes to education. An early associate of Sree Narayana Guru, Dr. Padmanabhan Palpu, said on the subject: “We are the largest Hindu community in Kerala.... Without education no community has attained permanent civilized prosperity. In our community there must be no man or woman without primary education.”⁶⁰ It is not accidental that universal access to education (first primary and then secondary and even postsecondary) became an issue of high priority in Kerala both in terms of public demand and public policy.⁶¹ In Cuba education was linked intrinsically to the revolution’s goal of transforming Cubans into an enlightened, mobilized, and empowered people. Following Castro’s famous promise to turn the nation into a gigantic school, education was “declared to be every one’s right.”⁶² It is not ac-

57. Jeffrey 1992.

58. We have characterized it as a notable case of entitlement success, for example in Tharamangalam 2007.

59. Government of India 2008.

60. Quoted in Ramachandran 1998, 308.

61. Ramachandran (1998, 255), writing about the role of literacy in Kerala’s achievements, notes: “Literacy is the foundational feature of Kerala’s political culture, crucial in the creation of public opinion and essential to that consciousness of individual and political rights that is so conspicuous a feature of social and political life in Kerala.” It appears that zealous Protestant missionaries who opened schools to educate the lower castes shamed the government of Travancore into following suit and making the historical declaration of 1817 that made universal education, paid by the state, a goal of state policy (*ibid.*, 269).

62. Mehrotra 1997, 395.

cidental, therefore, that Cuba successfully organized one of the best free public school systems anywhere, as we noted earlier. A notable aspect of mass participation, especially important in health care, has been the pivotal role of “women’s agency.” Not surprisingly women make up nearly half of all physicians as well as directors of hospitals and polyclinics.⁶³

The literacy campaigns may be regarded as among the pivotal and symbolic “moments” in the historical paths Kerala and Cuba have traveled in their respective cultural revolutions. In the wake of globalization and economic reforms there is now need for a new debate about cultural changes such as middle classing (embourgeoisement) and consumerism, and their implications for their HD models.

3. Globalization, Reform, and New Challenges

Neither Cuba nor Kerala has been able to escape the forces of neoliberal globalization, and both have had to reorient their economies to a changing world market. Broadly, both embraced reforms that included deregulation and market liberalization, privatization, and fiscal austerity measures that involved reduction in public spending on some social programs. Both sought private and even foreign investments (Cuba more successfully in sectors such as tourism). But obviously, there were also major differences between socialist Cuba and the sub-national state of Kerala, which is part of liberal-democratic India. Even the contexts were different: the reforms came to Cuba with a big bang following the collapse of the Soviet Union and to Kerala somewhat more gradually in the wake of India’s liberalization but in the midst of its own crisis created by a prolonged period of economic stagnation. Cuba embraced the reforms with some collective soul searching, and still-ongoing debates, but with a certain consensus that these were needed to deal with the crisis and to put Cuba on a sustainable path of economic growth. And here the reforms have been more state controlled, selective, and hesitant, but after Raúl Castro became Cuba’s president they have gained greater momentum. Kerala has had less control over the reform process since it was imposed by the central government in Delhi. But here too there has been a certain consensus amidst ongoing debates, and the reforms have been embraced by enthusiastic supporters from the political right, and accepted by more reluctant and critical supporters from the left. The trajectory of the reforms has not been smooth in either case; there have been ideological shifts, debates, and divisions. But in both cases the impact of the reforms has been far reaching and complex, and they are still being assessed. The observations we make here are brief and indicative rather than exhaustive.

Economic Growth and Human Development

Kerala and Cuba both seem to have succeeded in generating above-average economic growth that has moved them beyond periods of stagnation (in Cuba’s

63. Ibid., 402.

case a period of decline during the crisis) onto paths of “virtuous growth.”⁶⁴ Their experience supports the claims of those who argue that early gains in education and health are beneficial for economic growth especially during later periods of reform. Cuba has established some niche areas of strength in its economy such as health care, biotechnology, and organic agriculture for which it has also created export markets. Kerala too may have benefited from its comparative advantage in human capital in some limited areas of growth such as communications, software, and tourism.⁶⁵ In general, however, the relationship between HD and economic growth is more ambiguous in Kerala because growth there is driven more by consumption, and this, in turn, is driven by remittances. While the nature of this relationship may be worth exploring further, our main interest is in seeing the impact of the changes, including the higher economic growth, on HD and social well-being and on the models that promoted these.⁶⁶ As will be seen below, navigating the turbulent waters of globalization has been challenging, but it is worth noting here that Kerala and Cuba have indeed sustained and even enhanced their human development gains through the post-reform period and have done so in sharp contrast to the experience of the former Soviet bloc countries that embraced neoliberal reforms. Cuba moved up steadily in the HDI to its current rank of 52; Kerala’s HD score improved from 0.591 to 0.638 between 1991 and 2000.⁶⁷

Crisis in Public Provisioning

This progress takes only the UNDP’s HDI measurements into account. But as Sen has famously said, human development is more than the Human Development Index; it is, above all, about creating an enabling environment for enhancing people’s choices in all fields vital to human well-being. Hence we need to examine the impact of the reforms on the basic public institutions that provide for education, health, and environmental protection, and sustain equitable distribution of society’s resources. When we examine these we see a more mixed record with both societies showing some erosion of gains and both facing serious challenges. As we do this, however, it is important to keep in mind that their record should be seen against the experience of many other third world societies that came under the impact of global neoliberalism with far more devastating effects including monstrous inequalities, increasing hunger, and even food riots. In Kerala the reform period that began in 1991 saw the state’s system of public provisioning in education and health, two major pillars of the Kerala model, come under considerable strain. Public spending declined under fiscal

64. Kannan 2005; Government of Kerala 2006; Ahluwalia 2000; Ranis, Stewart, and Ramirez 2000; Espinosa 1999; Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez 2005; Echevarria 2007.

65. For the argument about the sectors benefiting from Kerala’s comparative advantage, see Kannan 2005; Heller 2007, 84.

66. That in both cases the growth is dependent in important ways on substantial inputs (and infusion of cash) from economies and societies outside their own models raises the issue of the continuing lack of dynamism within these economies, a subject that is undertheorized. But this subject belongs to another study.

67. Kannan and Pillai 2004.

constraints and austerity prescriptions imposed by the reforms while there was a new move to commercialization and privatization of education and health care that quickly reached a feverish pitch. The principle of universal coverage and access has been compromised in both areas and a two-tiered system (one for the poor and one for the rich) has become institutionalized.

Public spending on education, which had been at or above the recommended norm of 6 percent of NSPD (Net State Domestic Product), fell below 4 percent during twelve out of the seventeen years from 1990–91 to 2006–07, and spending on education as a percentage of total government spending fell from its unusually high peak of 35–40 percent in the 1970s to 17–20 percent from 2006 to 2009.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, “unaided” private English-medium schools (i.e., schools not receiving any subsidies from the state) have sprung up across the state to cater to the middle classes. Particularly noteworthy has been the proliferation of self-financing professional colleges in fields such as medicine, engineering, and business administration. Oommen reports that by 2007, 82 percent of engineering seats and 45 percent of seats in medical colleges were in the self-financing sector.⁶⁹ These positions are accessible only to those who can afford to pay their high tuition and “capitation fees,” the latter being a substantial “price” for admission that private institutions exact. And these institutions are promoted and controlled mostly by churches and other “communal” organizations.⁷⁰ In Kerala, communal organizations have emerged as the new entrepreneurs in the business of education and health. In the face of the growing demand for these institutions, the inability of the government (which is already under severe fiscal constraints) to meet the demand, and the power wielded by these organizations, even the Left government has been unable to stop this trend. In fact, the Left government’s attempts to rationalize the fees structure and admission rules in order to facilitate access for economically weaker sections of society have not succeeded due to court interventions.

Public provisioning in health has eroded even more rapidly with serious consequences for the poor. Public expenditure on health and family welfare fell both as a percentage of total expenditure (from 9.34 percent in 1990–91 to 4.74 percent in 2007–2008) and as a percentage of State Domestic Product (SDP) (from 1.75 to 0.90) during the same period. Meanwhile private hospitals and health care centers have mushroomed with nearly 65 percent of hospital beds now in the private sector. In tandem with the rising demand for private sector health care the quality of care and services in the public sector has deteriorated due to inadequate supply of equipments, drugs, and service personnel who have increasingly found employment opportunities in the private sector more attractive. As a consequence, some 70 percent of the poor now rely on the private sec-

68. This section draws heavily on Oommen 2006, 2007, and 2008, papers prepared as part of the Kerala–Cuba project.

69. Oommen 2007, 21.

70. These are organizations of castes or religious “communities”; the distinction between the two is ambiguous and subtle in India. Even the Christians of Kerala are divided along often overlapping lines of caste, sect, and rite. Tharamangalam 1996 discusses the issue of caste among Christians in India.



A home in Kerala. "...the relationship between HD and economic growth is more ambiguous in Kerala because growth there is driven more by consumption, and this, in turn, is driven by remittances.... With the continuous influx of remittances into Kerala and the skyrocketing land prices that followed in the wake of this infusion of funds,... land has now become real estate, a high-value economic asset sought after by investors and speculators." (Credit: www.keralahomeslive.com)

tor. Add to this the general *mediflation* in a rapidly rising consumer society and the increased price of drugs resulting from changes to Indian Patent Rights policies imposed by the World Trade Organization, and the real crisis in health care is clear to see. The poor are forced to spend as much as 40 percent of their income on health care as against 2.4 percent by the rich.⁷¹ A recent study that uses household

expenditure data from the National Sample Survey (NSS), 55th round (2005), reported that 14 percent of rural and 11 percent of urban people in Kerala incurred catastrophic expenses (in excess of 15 percent of their income) in health expenses and that such expenditures pushed 3.5 percent of individuals in rural and 4.5 percent in urban Kerala below the poverty line.⁷²

In contrast to Kerala, Cuba has largely sustained its generally high quality free education and health care systems intact, and has kept its commitment to the principle of universal access. The Cuban state has had much better capacity to prioritize policies; while it did neglect some vital areas such as housing and transportation (to which it has given serious attention only very recently), it gave high priority to education and health and food ration entitlements. The changes in these areas involved rationalization and decentralization (discussed below), which aimed at making the services more accessible, cost-effective, and efficient.

Another basic public provision that came under strain during the post-reform period in both Kerala and Cuba is the food rationing system (also called the public distribution system or civil supply system). In Kerala the food rationing system has arguably been the single most important policy responsible for the rapid reduction in hunger and malnutrition among the poorest sections of the population.⁷³ In Cuba the food ration card, the *libreta*, has been the symbol of a revolution that has declared that no one shall go hungry or malnourished⁷⁴

71. Kunhikannan and Aravindan 2000.

72. George 2005.

73. George 1979; Suryanarayana 1999.

and since 1962 has guaranteed every Cuban a basic basket of food. Now this system is under threat. In Kerala the threat came from the government of India (GOI), which under neoliberal policy compulsions restricted ration entitlements to a targeted population below a now largely discredited poverty line, a policy many scholars cite as the main contributor to the rise of hunger and malnutrition in India unseen since colonial times.⁷⁵ After the GOI substantially reduced its PDS subsidies to Kerala in 1997 the state government was able to sustain universal coverage by making up the short-fall from its own budget and by introducing a differential pricing system that provides ration entitlements to those below the Poverty Line (BPL) at a lower price than those above the poverty line (APL). While this system has created some new problems such as lower overall use of the PDS, Kerala *has* sustained the system better than most other Indian states.⁷⁶

Cuba's ration system has come under pressure as it is being reviewed by policy-makers concerned about its mounting cost, continuing inefficiency, and the way it now benefits even the new rich along with the needy. A full-page editorial in *Granma*, the Communist Party newspaper, on 9 October 2009, declared, "The *libreta* was a necessity at one time but it has become an impediment to the collective decisions the nation must take to adjust to the new economic environment." But indications are that the *libreta* will remain largely untouched for the foreseeable future in response to strong popular demand to sustain a program that had been the very symbol of food security and the right to food, and one that large numbers of Cuba's people regard as an entitlement.⁷⁷

Return of the Inequality/Poverty Predicament

The post-reform period in Kerala has also been characterized by a rise in poverty and inequality. Kerala continues to outperform other Indian states in avoiding extreme poverty and malnutrition — because of the support systems still in place — but studies are indicating that the state's rapid poverty reduction effort may have stalled. Available data on Head Count Ratio (HCR)⁷⁸ show that the rate of poverty reduction has slowed down during the post-reform period.

In Cuba poverty as a social problem has reappeared as a subject for study and attention, but social scientists and policy-makers are quick to add that Cuba's poverty is *sui generis* since no Cuban citizen is without some protection. While analysts have used somewhat different methods to measure poverty, they gener-

74. See Benjamin, Collins, and Scott 1984, 180.

75. Patnaik 2007; Tharamangalam 2009; Suri 2006.

76. Cyriac, Vishishta, and Jacob 2008 provides a recent review of Kerala's PDS.

77. Interviews with a group of Cuban social scientists, February 2010.

78. Himanshu 2007; Aravindan 2006. HCR data are notoriously unreliable and controversial, especially in India. See Deaton and Kozel 2005 on the great Indian poverty debate. A study by the Kerala Shashtra Parishad used the same methodology as the official National Sample Survey, but included a much larger sample. (See Aravindan 2006.) This study showed a significantly higher HCR for rural Kerala in 2004–05 (22.9 vs. 13.2). In general, evidence showing a slowdown in poverty reduction in Kerala is consistent with other indicators and with our observations during fieldwork.

ally agree that poverty increased during and after the Special Period.⁷⁹ Reports prepared by a team led by Angela Ferriol at the Institute of Economic Studies, Ministry of Economics and Planning in Cuba, reveal that the “population at risk of not meeting some essential need” rose from 6 percent of the total population in 1988 to 14.7 percent in 1996 and to 20 percent in 1999–2000.

Evidence about increasing inequality is clearer and less ambiguous than that about poverty for both Kerala and Cuba. In the case of Kerala, we have already discussed the increasing disparity in access to education and health care. Analysts note that there has been a quantum jump in the Gini coefficient during the period between 1993–94 and 2004–05 from 30.1 to 38.3 for rural and 34.3 to 41.0 for urban Kerala.⁸⁰ Rural Kerala’s Gini of 38.3 is the highest among all Indian states and way above India’s 30.5; urban Kerala’s Gini of 41.0 is the second highest among Indian states and above the Indian average of 37.6. Data on Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) are consistent with this finding. Kerala’s consumption boom (with the highest MPCE among all Indian states) has not benefited all sections of the population. For example, between 1999–2000 and 2004–2005 Kerala’s MPCE increased by a whopping 15.75 percent, but the increase for Scheduled Castes (SCs) was only 10.33 percent and for Scheduled Tribes (STs) 0–32.78 percent. It is important to keep in mind that the SCs and STs, who are also the poorest sections of the population, are practically excluded from many of the economic sectors driving Kerala’s new growth. They benefit little from remittances from abroad since they have not had the resources — the qualifications, the contacts, or sufficient funds — to obtain jobs abroad.⁸¹

Kerala has also seen increasing concentration of land ownership during the post-reform period. Kerala’s land reforms had mostly benefited the higher and middle castes of tenants, not the landless untouchable castes who had no tenancy rights and who had received only titles to tiny plots that housed their huts. With the continuous influx of remittances into Kerala and the skyrocketing land prices that followed in the wake of this infusion of funds (as much as US\$75,000 to \$80,000 for one acre or 0.4 hectare of rural agricultural land with road access), land has now become real estate, a high-value economic asset sought after by investors and speculators. In fact, the post-reform period has seen a sharp increase in land concentration. A 2006 study by Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishath (Peoples Science Movement) shows that in the five years prior to 2004, 33,023 hectares of land passed into the hands of the highest (richest) of Kerala’s four economic groups, while the bottom three economic groups were net losers.⁸²

79. Zabala 1999, 2007; Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez 2005.

80. Himanshu 2007, tables 1 and 2; Subramanian and Prasad 2008.

81. I have found it striking that in the Kerala Diaspora communities with which I have come into contact in Canada and the United States in the past forty years I have not met a single person of Dalit origin; even those from “Other Backward Castes” have been very few.

82. KSSP’s classification of the population into four economic groups is based on a composite index that includes the condition of houses lived in, per capita income, educational status of members, and land ownership. See Aravindan ed. 2006.



In spite of the pressures of privatization and the impact of so-called tourism apartheid, "Cuba continues to provide universal access to publicly funded education, health, and basic security and food entitlements." (Credit: ILO Photo/Deloche P. 2000)

The pattern of increasing inequality in Cuba shows some similarities with that of Kerala, but there are also major differences. As seen above, Cuba continues to provide universal access to publicly funded education, health, and basic security and food entitlements. And in socialist Cuba there is no concentration of land in private hands. But inequalities in income and consumption have shown some significant increase during the post-reform period. A study by Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez reported a "shocking increase of 33 Gini points" (from 22 to 55) between 1986 and 1995.⁸³ Economists based in Cuba estimate that the increases were more modest: Ferriol, for example, calculates an increase of only 13 points (25 to 38), which turns out to be only 5 points (25 to 30) after imputed values of various subsidies for health, education, and food are taken into account.⁸⁴ The most visible forms of inequality in Cuba are those associated with policies such as privatization, the opening of a tourist sector, and especially the introduction of a dual currency (first the U.S. dollar and later the convertible peso). An estimated 50 percent of Cubans have access to U.S. dollars, which they receive from relatives abroad, from tourism-related work, or as payments the Cuban government makes to Cuban professionals it posts abroad. Having U.S. dollars provides exclusive access to the dollar stores that sell high-priced or imported goods (ranging from food to cosmetics to imported liquor and electronic goods) unavailable to those without this currency.

83. Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez 2005, 72.

84. Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez 2005. Zabala (2007) also uses these lower figures.

Tourism in Cuba is also a double-edged sword: On the one hand, the tourist industry is a major source of foreign currency,⁸⁵ which the largely benign and efficient state uses to maintain publicly funded services and subsidized food. On the other hand, the industry has created what critics call “tourism apartheid” or “enclave tourism,” meaning that ordinary Cubans are kept away from the best tourist beaches and resorts, and even — until recently — from the upscale hotels the tourists frequent.⁸⁶ What is more, the influx of tourist dollars has also created a curious situation of taxi drivers, restaurant waiters, and other workers associated with the tourist industry earning incomes that may be several times that of a doctor or a university professor.⁸⁷

The Problem of Sustaining the Environment

Protecting the environment is another factor that must be taken into account when assessing HD in a country. On this score Cuba’s record is impressive. Indeed, according to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Cuba is the only country in the world to have achieved high human development in an ecologically sustainable manner. In 2006 WWF’s *Living Planet Report* explained that Cuba had achieved high HD (greater than 0.8) with a sustainable ecological footprint of less than 1.8 hectares.⁸⁸ Cuba has also created institutions and policies for sustaining the environment. Analysts regard its organic agriculture (including urban and backyard agriculture) as a success story in terms of ecological sustainability, local self-sufficiency, and food security.⁸⁹ Its substantial tourist industry poses many risks to the environment, but state policy gives priority to environmental protection in the event of a perceived conflict.⁹⁰

Kerala stands poles apart from Cuba in regard to its record on environmental protection. A Working Group on Environment (WGE), belatedly appointed by the Left government in 2006, indicted the Kerala state and its citizens for failing “individually and collectively” to uphold their constitutional obligations to “arrest a rapid decline in its [Kerala’s] environmental health.”⁹¹ Kerala is blessed with an exceptionally rich ecosystem that comprises tropical rainforests, coastal

85. This surpasses Cuba’s traditional export industry, sugar.

86. In March 2008 the government of Raúl Castro removed this restriction, opening all hotels to Cuban citizens. *The Washington Post*, 1 April 2008. Available at www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/31/AR2008033100703.html (accessed 28 December 2009).

87. There seems to be some evidence of a resurgence of racism in employment in these lucrative economic sectors (receptionists, waitresses, etc.), with whites favored over Blacks, but mostly visible in the foreign-owned tourist hotels and restaurants. It is interesting to note that the issue is quite openly debated within Cuba. This writer witnessed such debates in several sessions of the annual meetings of the North American and Cuban Philosophers and Social Scientists in 2005 and 2007. We have also found considerable openness among all sections of the population in discussing the issue during our interviews.

88. World Wide Fund for Nature 2006. Ecological footprint is “a tool used to measure the impact of human activities on the environment. It estimates the surface area required to produce everything that an individual or population consumes (transport, accommodation, food, etc.) and to absorb the resulting waste. It is expressed in hectares (ha) per person per year...”

89. Tharamangalam 2008a and 2008b; Rosset and Benjamin 1993; Rosset 1998 and 2000.

90. Whittle, Lindeman, and Tripp 2003; also discussion with various experts in Cuba and the Cuban ambassador to Canada at Dalhousie University, 24 November 2006.

91. India Together 2007; on this, see also Oommen 2007.

freshwater and brackish water wetlands (supported also by forty-four river systems), and coastal marine coral reefs, all within a relatively small geographical area. But this ecosystem is increasingly fragile in one of the most densely populated regions in the world — an area that has experienced very rapid changes in lifestyle and land use patterns. The sources of degradation include denudation of forests and depletion of water sources, rapidly increased and inequitable consumption (the highest among all states in India), and heavy quarrying and river sand mining by the construction industry. Despite years of public discussion and government promises and legislation, the Kerala government has been unable to stop or adequately control even the ruinous practice of sand mining in its rivers.⁹²

In both Kerala and Cuba there is pent-up demand for increased consumption. The question is: How can levels of consumption be increased indefinitely without damaging the environment? Will there be a new cultural revolution based on a critique of the culture of consumption and of the post-Enlightenment Western ideology of progress (as continuous increase in consumption and the exploitation of the ecosystem)? Both these societies have environmental movements supported by large numbers of well-educated people and states that are well equipped to act (more weakly and belatedly in Kerala). Whether public action can counter the lure of high consumption within an increasingly globalized culture remains to be seen.

Can Decentralization Be the Solution?

In the 1990s both Kerala and Cuba followed most other third world countries in initiating a policy of decentralization (also known as local development, localization, or municipalization in Cuba) to devolve powers to local bodies for local development, planning, and administration. Decentralization was a new initiative promoted by both global policy-makers as well as by left democratic popular movements, and the concept came to mean different things and the promotion of different agendas. The World Bank agenda included downsizing the state and creating more space for NGOS, private businesses, and markets; the left-populist agenda included democratic popular rule and rights-based, pro-poor development at the local level.⁹³ In Kerala and Cuba the left (the CPM in Kerala) and the left-ruled state initiated decentralization in the context of market reforms, formulated the basic theories and policies, and mobilized popular support. They saw decentralization as an attractive instrument for social/political mobilization, greater democratic participation, and ideological

92. It is widely believed in Kerala that behind this is the sinister power exercised by a “sand mafia,” also related to the “land mafia” and the “forest mafia,” organized crime widely believed to be enjoying patronage from major political parties including the CPM. Our research did not probe into this issue and cannot substantiate these allegations beyond stating that some circumstantial and anecdotal evidence from cases of violent crime and murder reported in local newspapers suggests an association with organized crime.

93. For general discussion about the emergence of decentralization as a major global initiative and for case studies from Asia and Latin America, see, for example, World Bank 1999; Törnquist 2002; Fung and Wright 2003.

renewal as much as for addressing the economic crisis in their respective countries through local development. In both cases, the left leaders in particular believed this initiative could offset some of the negative effects of the reforms. In Kerala the initiative was accompanied by a major campaign and a “big bang” approach (called by some observers, the “new democratic initiative” or even the “new Kerala model”) that sought to devolve as much as 35 to 40 percent of the state’s five-year plan outlays to local (district and subdistrict level) bodies. In Cuba localization did involve a similar campaign, but one that was part of a larger mobilization effort to adopt varieties of new changes to meet the unprecedented crisis. Both Kerala and Cuba introduced measures for devolving powers and transferring substantial funds to local bodies, but significantly in both cases the program was state-initiated and coordinated and while the powers of local bodies are real and significant these do not involve any serious weakening of the state.

More than a decade after the introduction of the decentralization program, and many changes through its trajectory, the outcome on the ground is still difficult to assess, and there is no complete agreement among analysts.⁹⁴ We cannot make any detailed assessment of the program; our purpose here is only to ask if and how decentralization has helped to meet the new challenges discussed above in the view of most analysts and on the basis of our own observations and the evidence we have collected from our own fieldwork. As for Kerala, the most widely shared view among those who have assessed the program on the ground and those involved with the program (including spokespersons of the CPM) is that in general it has been a positive step in democratization, but that its achievements have fallen short of the great promise of the campaign. It has helped to democratize and to improve delivery of social services such as drinking water, sanitation, and primary health, and special programs aimed at disadvantaged sections of the population such as scheduled castes and women. But it has done little to stimulate the productive sectors of the economy; in fact, the decade of decentralized planning and development efforts has seen the largest decline in agriculture, especially in food grain production. The program is beset with many problems including lack of technical and professional expertise in planning and implementation, a disconnect between broader (macro-economic) and local level policies, and a lack of coordination among levels of policy-makers and administrators. Substantial Plan outlays, received from the state, have remained unspent, and many programs are unimplemented.⁹⁵ One of the

94. Our discussion on decentralization in Kerala draws on many sources including Isaac and Franke 2000; Oommen 2007; Government of Kerala 2009; Törnquist 2002; Kannan 2000; Chathukulam and John 2002; Tharamangalam 2006; Mathew 2006. I have also benefited from extensive discussions on the subject with my colleague M.A. Oommen over the past four years during his three visits to Canada and during my five visits to Kerala. My sources on Cuba include Guzon, ed., 2006; Limia and Guzon 2007; Roman 2003; Saney 2004; and Funes et al. 2002. I have also drawn on several presentations made at a two-day workshop in Fomento, Cuba, on local development as well as extensive discussions with Ada Guzon, director, Institute of Local Development in Havana, and Miguel Limia David, a senior researcher and president of the Council of Social Sciences of the Ministry of Science Technology and Environment (CITMA), during visits to Cuba in 2008, 2009, and 2010.



Urban agriculture in Cuba. "Cuba's record [on environmental protection] is impressive. Indeed, according to the World Wild Fund for Nature (WWF), Cuba is the only country in the world to have achieved high human development in an ecologically sustainable manner." (Credit: Photograph from the film "The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil" © 2006. See www.powerofcommunity.org.)

most puzzling and critical problems has been what some observers have called a political deficit, a depoliticized development effort.⁹⁶ Not only is politics kept out of the village council where the focus is on implementation of programs, but the very same left politicians who spearheaded the initial campaign seem to have lost interest and keep out of local development issues.⁹⁷

95. In a village *Panchayat* (the lowest of the three levels of local governance, below the district and the block) in Alapuzha district where our team conducted fieldwork in November 2007, the completion rate for projects implemented over the previous nine years ranged from 45 to 95 percent. Just five months into the end of the current Plan, at the time of our fieldwork, several project approvals were still pending — implying that the funds allocated for these projects would simply lapse. Panchayat representatives blamed bureaucratic hurdles and delays.

96. Törnquist 2007.

97. Our assessment of Kerala's program differs from the more enthusiastic appraisal presented by some writers such as Heller (2007) who, in our view, have been misled by the enthusiasm and promise of the early "campaign" and some successful early model experiments and celebrate the program as "deepening democracy." The problem, in our view, is that they failed to adequately assess the actual outcomes on the ground. For a critique of the "deepening democracy" narrative, see Mannathukkaren 2008 and 2010. Our own work on decentralization in Kerala (forthcoming) and a host of studies by local activists and scholars support our view. Our early assessment, which drew on many such studies and saw the program as holding many promises but only modestly successful on the ground, appeared in Tharamangalam, ed. 2006. A recent study by an official committee appointed by Kerala's left government, and chaired by M.A. Oommen, who is also a team member in our Kerala-Cuba project, also sees the program as only modestly successful, but beset with many problems. See Government of Kerala 2009.

We believe that Cuba has had greater success with decentralization in terms of sustained and organized popular participation, and especially effective implementation of development programs and actual outcomes. Local bodies have been actively involved in the planning and implementation of new economic and social policies, including initiatives in developing local industries, new agricultural programs such as Cuba's successful and now famous organic and urban agriculture, and the organization of new cooperative farms called Basic Units of Cooperative Production (UBPCs).⁹⁸ Decentralization has also extended to environmental protection programs and postsecondary education (even Cuba's premier University of Havana established extension centers outside Havana).⁹⁹

In our view, Cuba's greater success in decentralization and local development is attributable to several factors, chief among them a more effective state apparatus and administrative system that is able to plan and coordinate policies and well-established participatory institutions (described above) that could adapt to changes during this period. Moreover, in a country where the private sector is so marginal in all sectors of the economy, participation in publicly managed development efforts (such as cooperative farms) is critical for large numbers of people to access and sustain their livelihoods. It should be noted, however, that Cuba's relative success with decentralized development is not proving to be adequate in itself to meet all the challenges discussed above. For example, as Cuba's policy-makers are well aware, its relatively successful organic and cooperative farmers will not solve the crisis in agriculture and food security. Cuba continues to spend its entire earnings from tourism (US\$1.5 billion in 2007) to buy food from abroad, much of it from the United States, for which payments are made up front in hard cash.

4. Conclusion. The HD Approach and the Lessons from Kerala and Cuba

The HD approach and the UNDP's *HDRs* have brought countries and regions like Kerala and Cuba to the attention of the world. Previously such areas had not figured in mainstream development discourse, which equates development with GDP growth. The achievements of Kerala and Cuba, despite many continuing problems and challenges, are worthy of such attention. Indeed, these are of world-historical significance in that they have shown that even poor countries can remove chronic poverty and endemic deprivation, and can do so in a short period of time and at relatively low costs. The excuse that poor countries cannot

98. Cuba's "revolution" in organic agriculture has attracted worldwide attention. In 1999 the Right Livelihood Award (also known as the Alternative Nobel Prize) was awarded to the Cuban Organic Farming Association. The literature on this subject is substantial; a summary of some of these is provided in two papers, Tharamangalam 2008a and 2008b; the most important sources include Rosset 1998 and 2000; Rosset and Benjamin 1993; Funes et al. 2002; Koont 2004; and Sinclair and Thompson 2004. We have also benefited from several visits to organic farms near Havana and two interviews with the manager of a much-visited farm in Alamar near Havana.

99. In a municipality in Sancti Spiritus in central Cuba where we held two days of discussions with municipal and local development experts and practitioners in December 2007, we found con-

afford to provide basic security and services to their people has been exposed as an ideology legitimating prevailing power structures and systems of resource allocation.

The two cases bring to light the centrality of public action for HD. Public action encompasses public and democratic institutions as well as public space for public discourse and public reasoning.¹⁰⁰ The central public institution is, of course, the state, which in both Kerala and Cuba has been proactive in public provisioning for education, health, and social and food security. The record of Cuba and Kerala in sustaining these provisions during the difficult years of liberalization and global neoliberalism is, on balance, better than that of other Indian states and most other third world countries. Free market advocates are at a loss to show a single country anywhere in the world, especially in the Global South, that has provided universal access to education, health, and food and social security through free-market strategies alone. Just as important, these outcomes are rarely produced by dis-embedded states (or benevolent dictators running such states). Both Kerala and Cuba have created states that work, in large measure, in synergy with society by means of institutionalized forms of democratic participation. This does not mean this relationship is unproblematic and without tension, but these institutional mechanisms have been demonstrably successful in resolving problems such as managing conflicting demands from different political parties in Kerala or, in the case of Cuba, managing rising social tension and discontent during a serious economic and social crisis.

In both Kerala and Cuba public action has involved class struggles of an intense kind, at least during some critical periods, and these struggles have helped to transform entrenched structures of inequality and power and of the state itself, which had to be turned into an agent that acted in the interest of the poor. The need to transform structures of power and to empower the poor and the disenfranchised classes does not figure very much in the HD paradigm advocated by the UNDP or in the Human Development and Capability approach that spawned it. Nor has the critical issue of the institutional instruments or mechanisms needed to bring about the transformations behind the HD outcomes received much attention. The “methodological individualism” that underlies the liberal conception of capability and freedom seems to be at the root of this neglect of the institutional and structural transformations that have been so critical in the paths followed by Kerala and Cuba. In the end our study of these two cases leads us to believe that the HD approach contains far more radical possi-

siderable enthusiasm and satisfaction with the planning process and the implementation of programs. Several programs, efficiently planned and implemented, included cooperative farms producing for local consumption and export, and small-scale processing of local marble for export. The local municipality also owned and managed a hotel that offered Cuban citizens room and board at subsidized rates, but charged foreign nationals US\$2 per room per night. The major complaint was a lack of funds.

100. The concept of “public reasoning,” as used especially by Amartya Sen is useful in providing a “mind/thought” dimension to public action and participation, something we have done in our section on cultural revolution. Sen draws on John Rawls, among others in this usage. See especially, Sen 2005 and 2009. The concept was originally used by Kant in his essay “What Is Enlightenment?”

bilities than the UNDP's policy models as it leads us to examine the methods that have really worked in eliminating hunger, malnutrition, and atrocious inequities.¹⁰¹ The two cases also show the importance of a public culture of HD rooted in the cultural revolution discussed above. The transformative values of social justice and equality, of rights and entitlements, and the pursuit of the public good must not only become enshrined in constitutions and legal systems; their implementation must also be ensured by an organized and vigilant public.

Finally, what does the future hold for Kerala and Cuba given their present challenges? Although the heyday of neoliberal orthodoxy may be now behind us, the consequences of globalization and its reform initiatives, still in progress, and of imbalanced economic growth (much of it predatory in nature, especially in India) are serious for both societies. Both Kerala and Cuba have shown considerable resilience; they have sustained their basic social welfare programs albeit at reduced rates, and public action has been at work when basic entitlements such as the rationing system have come under threat. Rising inequality is a major concern, but this issue is also complex. On the one hand, there is a greater appreciation among policy-makers in the post-crisis and post-stagnation period for the need for higher economic growth to sustain social welfare programs; on the other hand, high growth has brought rising inequality and has seriously compromised the ideals of equity. The return of the inequality predicament remains a major concern, and the question of how to achieve adequate growth without increasing inequality is slowly moving into the center of the debate among policy-makers and analysts. Public action has not been absent or entirely ineffective, but we believe that more such action is needed and can be expected in the future. On education and health, Cuba has done much better, as seen above, but it is important to recognize that Kerala's education and health systems were built with considerable private involvement of state-subsidized community organizations. What is new during the reform period has been the rise of self-financing institutions and the subsequent creation of two-tiered systems in education and health. While self-financing private schools and professional colleges are bad enough, as they deny access to low income groups, the greater threat to the Kerala model is in the privatization of health, in our view. As we have seen, the poor in Kerala no longer have their basic safety net; they can no longer afford adequate health care. Given the state's diminished capacity for public provisioning in all areas, we think that health care ought to receive greater and more urgent attention. Public action in Kerala is undermined not only by the diminished capacity of the state for public provisioning, but also by the diminished capacity of the public to act. Civil society appears to be less active than in the past, and Kerala's dominant left party, the CPM, long known for its organizational strength, vigor, and popular support, is itself split into fac-

101. Our colleague in the project, Henry Veltmeyer has prepared a critique of UNDP's approach to HD, especially in relation to the HD experience of Cuba. See Veltmeyer 2007; and Rushton and Veltmeyer 2008.

tions, its leadership believed to have become increasingly corrupted. It now seems to have less capacity to mobilize support to counter some of the new policies such as mounting costs of health care for the poor. The rapid increase in consumption and the spread of a consumer culture among the middle classes are also undermining some of the ideals and values spawned by the earlier cultural revolution.¹⁰²

Cuba's situation is, in many ways, different. Against considerable odds, Cuba has shown a resilience almost unmatched elsewhere — overcoming the severe crisis of the early 1990s, sustaining its socialist system and its HD achievements (this, in sharp contrast to the experience of the Soviet Union), and maintaining a relatively high degree of social consensus and public participation at all times. Cuba's unique geopolitical situation and vulnerability to U.S. interference and a vicious blockade and its success in sustaining its socialist system in the face of many threats have provided a certain collective self-confidence to its leaders and its people. But the country faces increasing discontent, especially among the young as a result of rising and visible inequalities, increasing inability of the system to absorb its well-educated and qualified workforce and to provide them reasonable remuneration, and very low levels of consumption available to the masses in tandem with the rise of a new consumer culture and erosion of the earlier revolutionary culture.¹⁰³ The prospects of sustaining Cuba's form of socialism combined with reforms and growth seem to be realistic at the moment although much may also depend on economic and political changes in the United States and the international community in the coming years (e.g., a possible economic decline and a subsequent move to more right-wing politics).

Neoliberal globalization has proved to be a perilous road for many countries of the Global South. In general, countries with strong traditions of public action (interventionist states and vigilant publics) have negotiated globalization better, sustaining their social safety nets and avoiding excesses of privatization and the dismantling of public institutions as happened in many other countries (e.g., in Eastern Europe).¹⁰⁴ Kerala and Cuba have assets unmatched in the Global South. They have used these in the past and can put them to greater use in the future: their traditions of public action and the very product of their sociocultural transformations, an educated and healthy population, a well-informed public, considerable space for public reasoning and public discourse (especially in Kerala), and a hard core of the lower classes still behind the Left parties. The most optimistic scenario is that the current turbulence in Kerala and Cuba will lead to a renewal and revitalization of public action.

102. Mannathukkaren 2008, 2010.

103. Petras and Veltmeyer 2009.

104. Sandbrook et al. (2006) make a strong case that "social democracies in the global south" have been more successful in preserving their social achievements under global neoliberalism. These social democracies have interventionist states and strong traditions of democratic participation, the main ingredients of "public action" in our usage. The four cases they examine in detail include Kerala whose successes they exaggerate, in our view.

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