INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM AND MATERIALS

HISTORY AND AIMS

Roots of Change is a unique, self-guided group learning program requiring no academic background. ISEC first set up The Roots of Change study program in 1994. The goal was to bring together concerned individuals in communities around the world to explore the systemic causes of today’s global and national problems. The curriculum provides a framework within which small groups of individuals (study circles) discuss and plan strategic responses.

The aims of Roots of Change are:

- To encourage a broad analysis of the origins and workings of the global economy.
- To promote discussion of the impact of corporate globalisation on participants’ own communities and around the world.
- To facilitate and inspire strategic local action and ‘translocal’ partnerships.

Feedback from past Roots of Change groups has been extremely positive, with group members saying that they found the process generated a strong sense of commitment to action, as well as proving extremely rewarding on a personal level. Many of the groups stayed together long after they had completed the study program, being inspired to work together to start local newsletters, local food initiatives and other campaigns.

WHY STUDY CIRCLES?

Learning and working for change is both more fun and effective when we do it as a group. Of course individual action has an important part to play, but when we join together with friends, neighbors and other like-minded people, we increase our power to make things happen much faster and we can gain emotional strength and support from a sense of shared purpose.

THE CURRICULUM AND THE LEARNING PROCESS

The curriculum
The study materials that you will be using consist primarily of articles and book excerpts that have been organised into topical sections, or ‘modules’. These are taken from the writings of the world’s leading ‘new paradigm’ thinkers - in the fields of economics, politics, ecology, culture etc. Below you will find a basic outline of the study circle topics and a list of the most current readings. These will give you an overview of the terrain that your group will be traversing.
To help your study circle approach the broad range of ideas covered in the curriculum in a systematic way, the modules are arranged in a sequential order, each with a brief introduction, a list of the contents of that module and a set of questions to guide discussion. While we have clustered readings in this way, it is important to remember that each part is best understood when it is viewed in relation to the preceding modules.

**The learning (and unlearning) process- re-examining our ideas and opinions**

Our materials help you to see the “big picture”, stepping back to challenge basic assumptions about issues such as economics, development, ecology, culture and technology. Looking at the interconnections between these different spheres encourages you to see beyond single-issues, towards the ‘root causes’ of the crises facing the world today. We have found that examining these issues *systematically* is the best way to stimulate creative thinking about strategic local initiatives and global partnerships. As author Manish Jain notes, the learning process often involves ‘unlearning to see new possibilities’.

**The learning process - working with our feelings and emotions**

Ideas are only part of the picture. It is also important to reflect on how we are personally affected by the current system, acknowledging and addressing how we feel about what is happening to the world. This is not always an easy task as there is a tendency to shy away from discussing our own emotions. However, failing to do so can lead to what is known in the sphere of activism as “burn out”, or simply to individuals feeling that they are alone in their fears and sense of despair. Talking as a group, in a supportive setting, about feelings that come up as you work through the material can be a very important and valuable aspect of the study. Each group and participant will be different, but it is important to express feelings such as frustration, anger and powerlessness, as well as excitement, inspiration and hope.

**The learning process - working towards action**

Clarifying our understanding and emotions on a wider scale, will hopefully provide a clearer framework from which to approach issues of concern in your local neighborhood. Local solutions have to be part of the global solution, and vice versa. We are one world - we are all connected.

Finally, we also want to emphasise that the curriculum should not be thought of as chiseled in stone. We hope that your discussions will lead you to suggest other readings and discussion questions that will improve the materials for the benefit of future groups. Periodically, we may also send other material that will add to the existing articles. We look forward to your feedback and comments.

**HOW A ROOTS OF CHANGE GROUP WORKS:**

Study circles may vary in size from 6-20 people, with 8-12 generally being optimal. It is up to each group to decide how frequently they meet, and the length of each session.

Each group will need to select a co-ordinator who will be the point of contact with ISEC. This person will be responsible for communicating with us regarding the group’s needs and we will send information and materials directly to them. Whoever initiated the study circle may be happy to continue to play this role, but if not then another participant will need to volunteer to take on this responsibility.
Groups may or may not wish to appoint a facilitator for the meetings. This person will help lead the meetings and ensure that discussion does not stray too far off topic. This role can be filled by one person, or rotated amongst the group.

We have tried to cap full individual modules at 50 pages of reading (sometimes adding optional bonus readings). Most modules are a little, but a few are longer. The latter have been divided into submodules. It is up to your group to determine how fast you move through the readings. Some study groups choose to discuss a new module every week, others, once or twice a month. Study circles in the past have taken as little as three months and as long as one full year to finish. We recommend working at a pace that provides plenty of time to reflect and that doesn’t overburden any individual group member with too much reading between meetings. Participating in this program should be stimulating and enriching, not anxiety-inducing. If it becomes the latter, we recommend having a group discussion dedicated to revisiting your pace and process. Groups with greater time constraints, might consider splitting up and assigning the readings to individual group members or subgroups. At the discussion meetings each subgroup can then take turns presenting their readings to the rest of the group. Alternatively, if your group (or individuals within the group) can only read an abridged version of the curriculum, we recommend following Tracks 2 or 3. And finally, study groups can look through the full curriculum and design their own tailored paths.

**Track 1: Full Curriculum**
Modules 1-14

**Track 2: Abridged Curriculum—Core Modules Only**
Modules 1-5, 9, 10 and 14 (Track 1 minus most of the thematic modules such as Economy; Science and Technology; Consumerism; Education, etc).

**Track 3: Abridged Curriculum—Core Readings Only (All Modules)**
Includes all readings with a star (*) symbol (see the complete list of readings below).

We encourage study circles to read the entire curriculum, as each individual module fits into and builds upon a larger narrative. In so doing, you will gain a deeper appreciation of the interconnectedness of many of today’s most dire challenges, and hence, the need for systemic solutions (see Modules 9-14). However, as noted above, study circles are free to read selected modules instead of the entire curriculum.

**ISEC PROVIDES:**

**The curriculum.** We will send a master copy (in CD form) of the curriculum to the co-ordinator once it is ordered from our online store. It is up to the co-ordinator to organise the photocopying of each article for distribution to group members.

**Guidance.** Notes about such areas as structuring meetings, keeping members involved, moderating discussions, and helping the group achieve its goals (see our guidelines for participants and facilitators).
Training: ISEC will organise facilitation training, as well as workshops on the issues that are covered in the curriculum if there is enough interest (usually from two or more study groups). Depending on the location of the study group, ISEC staff can organise in-person or interactive on-line trainings using Skype (or similar programs).

Support: An ISEC Roots of Change program assistant will be available to answer questions, help troubleshoot and offer moral support to coordinators and group members. ISEC staff will also be available to help facilitate the move from education to action by connecting group members to inspiring resistance and renewal initiatives in their area.

WHAT WE NEED FROM YOU:

Fee. We have to charge participants a small amount to join the program in order to help offset some of ISEC’s production, administration and mailing costs. We are asking for a $50/£30 fee for the cost of shipping and materials, which can be paid by you individually, or divided among group members. The only other cost that groups have to bear is that of photocopying the materials that we send to the co-ordinator. We are happy to consider reducing or eliminating the fee for those unable to cover this cost. Please send a short letter explaining your needs.

Feedback. We also ask that our groups keep in close touch with us through the co-ordinator. Feedback from running Roots of Change groups is invaluable for the program and helps us to keep our groups up-to-date and in touch with each other. After three months from the starting date, we will send you an online feedback survey and also provide a printable feedback form with the rest of the materials for groups that have completed the curriculum.

To order the complete Roots of Change curriculum CD, or to learn more about how to start a study circle, visit our website at: www.isec.org.uk or send us an email at:

infoUK@isec.org.uk (UK | Europe | Africa)
infoUSA@isec.org.uk (North America | Central America | South America | Asia)
THE CURRICULUM IN BRIEF

Over the last 500 years, numerous, predominantly local and human scale societies have been transformed—becoming increasingly industrialized and globalized. In the process, both the distance between people and power, and the separation between production and consumption have grown, and people have become alienated from each other and from the natural world. These broad, structural changes—and the forces that have animated them—are at the root of many of the crises we face.

The first part of the *Roots of Change* curriculum (‘500 Years of Progress?’) unravels this history. In the process readers will be treated to a selection of powerful voices that question a number of widely-held assumptions about progress, growth, wealth, and development. **Deep questioning of this nature can be exciting and liberating, but it can also be overwhelming.** In recognition of this, the curriculum also includes the *Hope Trove*, full of beautiful and moving excerpts of poetry and prose on hope, on working through despair, on expanding our boundaries, and on personal/social transformation.

The second half of the curriculum (‘Resistance and Renewal’) provides readers with a broad understanding of the steps needed at the local, national, and international levels to shift the world in a more sustainable direction. We have taken pains to showcase examples of *resistance* to the dominant order, as well as *renewal*, through brilliant ideas and initiatives that prefigure a much more humane, healthy, and happy future. **For every critical exposé in the first section, we include in the second, new ideas and tangible, instructive, living solutions that will inspire.** Where the curriculum ends, the journey of action begins.
OUTLINE OF STUDY MODULES

Overview: 'Shifting Directions: From Global Dependence to Local Interdependence'

SECTION I: 500 Year of Progress? | From Local to Global

Module 1—'Cultures of Place': Scale, Place, Community
Module 2—Colonialism and the 'Tragedy of Enclosure'
Module 3—Development
  a. Overview and Drivers of 'Development'
  b. Questioning 'Development'
  c. 'Colonisation of the Mind'
Module 4—Paradoxes of Progress and Growth
  BONUS Module—Economy
Module 5—Corporate Globalisation | Corporations
  a. History / Structure
  b. Costs of Corporate Globalisation
  c. Corporations
Module 6—The Politics of Science and Technology
Module 7—What is Education For?
Module 8—Consumerism and the Myth of Consumer Sovereignty

SECTION II: RESISTANCE & RENEWAL | From Global to Local

Module 9—'The Big Picture
  BONUS Module—'A Movement of Movements' | 'Resistance is Global'
Module 10—Alternative(s to) Development
Module 11—Rethinking Education
Module 12—Rethinking Science and Technology
Module 13—Beyond Consumerism
Module 14—Toward Diverse, Local Living Economies
  a. Challenging Corporate Power | 'Degrowth'
  b. From Global Dependence to Local Interdependences
  c. Grassroots Economics—Tools for Creating Diverse Local Economies

GETTING STARTED—What Can We Do

  a. 'Resistance & Renewal—Organisations & Initiatives for Change'
  b. 'Films for Change'
FULL CURRICULUM OUTLINE
(* Indicates core readings for 'Abridged Track 3')


Section I. 500 Years of Progress? | From Local to Global

Module 1—'Cultures of Place': Scale, Place, Community


Module 2—Colonialism and the 'Tragedy of Enclosure'


Module 3—'Development'

a. Overview and Drivers of 'Development'


b. Questioning ‘Development’


c. ‘Colonization of the Mind’


Module 4—Paradoxes of Progress and Growth
New York: Routledge.


**BONUS Module—Economy**


Module 5—Corporate Globalization | Corporations

a. History and Structure


b. Costs of Corporate Globalization


c. Corporations


Module 6—Mechanistic-Reductionism and the Politics of Technology


Module 7—What is Education For?


Module 8—Consumerism and the Myth of Consumer Sovereignty


Section II. Resistance and Renewal | From Global to Local

Module 9—The Big Picture


**BONUS Module—'A Movement of Movements' (BONUS)**


**BONUS:** Fighting FTAs/Bilaterals (2007) 'Learnings from the struggles' p. 1-5 in...
Module 10—Alternative(s to) Development


Module 11—Rethinking Education


Module 12—Rethinking Science and Technology
*Pimbert, M. (2009) ‘Transforming Knowledge and Ways of Knowing’ p. 3-35 (minus all ‘Boxes’ and section “7.2.3. Decolonizing Economics” and 17-21); i.e. 3-4, 6, 9, 10, 14, 16-17, 22-24, 26-27, 31, 35) in Towards food sovereignty: reclaiming autonomous food systems. London: IIED.


Module 13—Beyond Consumerism


Lives’, interview in The Multinational Monitor, 30(1), July / August.


**Module 14—Toward Diverse, Local Living Economies**

**a. Challenging Corporate Power | 'Degrowth'**


**b. From Global Dependence to Local Interdependence**


Brangwyn, B and Hopkins, R. (n/a) ‘Transition Initiatives Primer’ (Version: 26)

**c. Grassroots Economics—Tools for Creating Diverse Local Economies**

Miller, E. (2006) 'Other Economies Are Possible' p. 11-15 in Dollars and Sense, July / August, and 'Solidarity Circle and Key.'

Gibson-Graham, J.K. (n/a) 'A diverse economy: rethinking economy and economic representation', http://www.communityeconomies.org/papers.php


