New Approach to Collaborative Problem Solving and Citizen Peacebuilding
An Introduction to the Potential of Clearinghouse Websites
for Community Visioning Initiatives and Community Teaching and Learning Centers

[**Special Note**: All of the links in this document are to websites no longer in existence. However, this introduction highlights the potential of clearinghouse websites for Community Visioning Initiatives and Community Teaching and Learning Centers, and such clearinghouse websites, if created, can still provide significant community service.]

The websites, the documents, and the approach

We are in uncharted territory, for there is no culture or association of societies that ever existed on planet Earth which has had to resolve the kind of challenges the next few generations of people will have to resolve [see "A List of Ten Critical Challenges" (also accessible from the last page of all four key documents below) and the longer Table of Contents for "Many Dangers Signs Flashing Red"].

This introduction provides an overview of an approach to collaborative problem solving and citizen peacebuilding which emphasizes Community Visioning Initiatives and Community Teaching and Learning Centers.

The websites which are introducing this new and comprehensive approach to collaborative problem solving and citizen peacebuilding are:

1) Community Visioning Initiatives Clearinghouse (at www.cviclearinghouse.net)
2) Community Teaching and Learning Centers Clearinghouse (at www.ctlcclearinghouse.net)

The "clearinghouse" part of the titles emphasizes that—since both websites have Discussion Forums— these websites can serve as gathering points and aggregators for related resources, shared experiences, and thoughtful discussion about the 4 Key Documents (below), the "125 Related Fields of Activity", (some of which are listed on the left side of the clearinghouse webpages), and any other topics which will be helpful to resolving the critical challenge ahead.

The key documents associated with this new and comprehensive approach to collaborative problem solving and citizen peacebuilding are:

1. "Many Danger Signs Flashing Red" (62 pages) (Nov. 2012)
2. "The Potential of Community Visioning Initiatives (in 105 pages)" (Nov., 2012)
3. "The Potential of Community Teaching and Learning Centers (in 65 pages)" (Nov., 2012)
4. "Key Organizations, Initiatives, and Insights" (146 pages) (Nov., 2012)

This writer advocates for a combination of preliminary surveys to 150 local leaders (as preparation for Community Visioning Initiatives), time-intensive Community Visioning Initiatives supported by many "Community Teaching and Learning Centers" (offering workshops suggested by the preliminary surveys), and "sister community" relationships as a way of creating local community specific and regional specific "constellations of initiatives" responses to the challenges of our times.

About Community Visioning Initiatives (CVIs)

Community Visioning Initiatives can be described as a series of community meetings designed to facilitate the process of brainstorming ideas, organizing the ideas into goals, prioritizing the goals, and identifying doable steps. One of the main goals of Community Visioning Initiatives is to maximize citizen participation in identifying challenges, and in solution-oriented activity.

One very important advantage of the Community Visioning Initiatives kind of approach to collaborative problem solving is that it does not set out a preexisting set of goals. Organizers who believe the transition that needs to happen will eventually happen, and the urgency and awareness that needs to come will come, would be focusing more on building a collaborative problem solving approach which people with many different backgrounds and agendas could believe in… could believe will make best use of the knowledge and skills each person has to contribute.

The document "The Potential of Community Visioning Initiatives (in 105 pages)" includes information on how to identify key leaders in the community (to be recipients of the preliminary surveys), suggestions for how key local institutions and local newspapers can contribute to organizing and implementing Community Visioning Initiatives, "9 Sample Questions for Preliminary Surveys" (in Appendix C), a detailed 15 Step Outline for a Community Visioning Initiative (in Appendix B), and "15 Sample Questions for Evaluating a Community Visioning Initiative" (in Appendix D).

Note: Three of the four Key Documents have a section titled "9 Sample Questions for Preliminary Surveys" in their Appendices. As preliminary surveys are tried, and results shared in the Discussion Forums, the most useful questions can be identified. This is an example of the advantages of having a clearinghouse with a Discussion Forum.]

 The Community Visioning Initiative approach to collaborative problem solving and citizen peacebuilding (supplemented by many Community Teaching and Learning Centers) emphasizes personal and civic responsibility, maximizing citizen participation in identifying challenges and solution-oriented activity, giving people an opportunity to become actively involved in a solution-charged environment, and minimizing the risk of "transformation unemployment"; and is especially appropriate to the building of "close-knit" communities of people… communities with a healthy appreciation for each others strengths, communities with a well-developed capacity to resolve even the most difficult challenges— and communities which demonstrate a high level of compassion for their fellow human beings.

About Community Teaching and Learning Centers (CTLCs)

Yes, most of the challenges ahead are very complex, and thus it will be best if people making decisions at the local community level sift through some of the evidence (with the assistance of local "teacher-leaders"). But their motive for sifting through some of the evidence need not be understood as part of studying for a Ph.D on the subject, or as part of deciding how to "vote" for a particular candidate in elections. From this writer's point of view, it would be best if their motive was *so they can make informed decisions regarding how they invest their time, energy, and money in the everyday circumstances of their daily lives.*

Consider carefully the following observations:

The ways we "invest" our time, energy, and money have a direct impact on the "ways of earning a living" that are available.

The investments of time, energy, and money that each of us make in our everyday circumstances becomes the larger economy.

People who are not sufficiently informed about critical issues are everywhere, and they are investing their time, energy, and money—voting—all the time.

The absolute necessity [see "A List of Ten Critical Challenges" (also accessible from the last page of all four key documents below) and the longer Table of Contents for "Many Dangers Signs Flashing Red"] for citizens from every variety of circumstances to become more aware of the consequences of all the "little events" in their everyday community life will require an exponential increase in neighborhood accessible education centers, and an exponential increase in affordable workshops.

Community Teaching and Learning Centers have the potential to be a) a multi-purpose support center for implementing Community Visioning Initiatives (CVIs) b) a neighborhood meeting place and workshop center and c) a critical part of a low cost lifelong learning education system.

 Community Teaching and Learning Centers can function as

1) information centers, resource centers, and clearinghouses (on how residents can deliberately channel their time, energy, and money into the creation of "ways of earning a living" which are directly related to resolving high priority challenges)

2) locations for workshops on topics suggested by the "Preliminary Survey" (see Step 3 in "A 15 Step Outline for a Community Visioning Initiative"), and as determined by the "Community Teaching and Learning Center" Coordinator

3) practice sites for the development of "teacher-leaders"

Creating the knowledge base and skill sets necessary to resolve the challenges of our times will require encouraging as much formal and informal meetings as possible between neighbors—and people living in the same local community. Community Teaching and Learning Centers can provide a place—in local neighborhoods—for discussion, information sharing, mutual support and encouragement, fellowship and friendship—so that the exchanging of information and resources will also include the building of a close-knit community of people with a healthy appreciation for each others strengths.

Both the Community Visioning Initiative Clearinghouse and the Community Teaching and Learning Centers Clearinghouse website will eventually provide links to educational material on (at least) "125 Related Fields of Activity"—and the Discussion Forums can accelerate the formation of local learning networks and study groups.

Regarding affordability, it is possible to imagine workshops being offered at a rate of $100 for a 2 hour workshop (Note: this example uses the current value of the U.S. dollar), with the number of teachers and participants varying. An important part of workshop affordability is that as the number of participants goes up (towards a reasonable limit) the cost per participant would go down. Thus, if there were two teachers and 25 participants for a two hour workshop, the participants would only pay $4 each, and the teachers would earn $50 each. (And even the $4 cost to the participants could be paid in

"local currency", if there was a process by which residents could earn "local currency" by making "solution-appropriate" investments of time, energy, and money in their local community.)

Time-intensive Community Visioning Initiatives, supported by many "Community Teaching and Learning Centers", are one way people at the local community level can learn how to make wise choices about how they use their time, energy, and money… so that all the "little events" in the circumstance of everyday community life have a positive and cumulative effect on the challenges they have identified as priority challenges.

Document "Key Organizations, Initiatives, and Insights" highlights potential linkages

Creating an exponential increase in neighborhood accessible education centers, and an exponential increase in affordable workshops, will require an understanding of people and organizations who have already been working on appropriate responses to the critical challenges of our times—and how such people and organizations can link together to form meaningful collaborations.

The "Key Organizations, Initiatives, and Insights" document (146 pages) provides much detailed information which can serve as a starting point for identifying such people and organizations, and this information can be expanded through the use of the Discussion Forums. The detailed "Table of Contents" for the "Key Organizations…." document is offered as a quick reference guide and "Executive Summary" of important resources and potential linkages.

Here are some excerpts from the "Key Organizations…." document which highlight important resources and potential linkages:

Gaia Education--"Since 2006 Gaia Education has successfully supported the delivery of more than 135 programmes on five continents."

La Via Campesina--"….La Via Campesina launched the idea of 'food sovereignty' at the World Summit on Food 1996"…. "La Via Campesina comprises about 150 local and national organizations in 70 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. In all, it is about 200 million farmers and peasants."

Oxfam--"Oxfam is an international confederation of 17 organizations networked together in more than 90 countries, as part of a global movement for change, to build a future free from the injustice of poverty."

Women in the Marketplace--"The results show a clear opportunity to harness the immense power of the individual, in particular women who make the majority of the decisions about the food their families eat and control around $12 trillion or 65% of the world's annual consumer spending. " (From "Food Transformation: Harnessing Consumer Power to Create a Fair Food Future"—Oxfam)

Sustainable and Responsible Investing--"Sustainable and Responsible Investing (SRI) is a broad-based approach to investing that now encompasses an estimated $3.07 trillion out of $25.2 trillion in the U.S. investment marketplace today."

Fairtrade--"There are now 827 Fairtrade certified producer organizations in 58 producing countries, representing over 1.2 million farmers and workers."

BALLE--"The Business Alliance for Local Living Economies(BALLE) is a growing North American alliance of nearly 60 fully autonomous local business networks with their own names, missions, and initiatives, representing about 20,000 US and Canadian entrepreneurs."

Berkshares--"Launched in the fall of 2006, BerkShares had a robust initiation, with over one million BerkShares having been circulated in the first nine months and over 2.7 million to date. Currently, more than four hundred businesses have signed up to accept the currency."

Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)--"…provides emergency medical care to millions of people caught in crises in nearly 60 countries around the world."

Religions for Peace (and the Global Network of Women and Faith)--"…recognizes that women of faith around the world have enormous capacities for leadership and effective action in all areas of human development….." "At present, the Global Network of Women and Faith includes more than 1,000 Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Indigenous, Sikh and Zoroastrian religious women's organizations."

United Religions Initiative--"Since the signing of our charter in 2000, we have touched the lives of millions of people of different faiths around the world through a network of 527 interfaith Cooperation Circles (CCs), whose members number half a million."

Sister Cities International--"The organization's global network is comprised of 600 U.S. cities partnered with 2,000 communities in 136 countries.

"At over 59 million, teachers are the largest group of trained professionals in the world. As transmitters of knowledge and community leaders, teachers are powerful catalysts for lasting global change."

Global Fund for Women--"Since its inception in 1987, the Global Fund has granted over $93 million to more than 4,400 women's groups in 172 countries.

Workshops at Community Teaching and Learning Centers can focus on subject matter identified as critically important by preliminary surveys (to 150 local leaders). Workshop curriculum contributed by (for example) Gaia Education, La Via Campesina, Oxfam, BALLE, Fairtrade, Doctors Without Borders, United Religions Initiative, Global Network for Women of Faith, Sister Cities International etc. can guide Socially Responsible and Sustainable Investing, and can lead to a careful and deliberate channeling of time, energy, and money in the marketplace—to support Community Visioning Initiatives, Community Teaching and Learning Centers, Food Sovereignty, Ecovillages, Permaculture, job training, emergency assistance, "sister community" relationships, local currencies, and a just transition from dysfunctional systems which are very complex to functioning systems which are much less complex.

Here it is worth highlighting the benefits of local currency. Such a just transition can be accelerated by the practice of introducing local currency as payment to people who deliberately re-channel how they use their time, and how they make their basic needs purchases—so that such "investments" support action plans identified as priorities by the Community Visioning Initiative. This strategy can assist with "transformation unemployment"—caused by unprecedented shifts in the nature and composition of local and regional economies; and since local currencies are only accepted within the community, its use would encourage the development of a mutually supportive network of locally based businesses.

The "Key Organizations, Initiatives, and Insights" document includes the following Sections in the Table of Contents (see number 1); and a list of "125 Related Fields of Activity" is included in the Appendices (see number 2 below for a sampling of those related fields of activity).

1) Preliminary Surveys (as Preparation for Community Visioning Initiatives); Community Visioning Initiatives; Community Teaching and Learning Centers; Ecovillage Design Education and Permaculture; Food Sovereignty; Socially Responsible Investing; International Human Service Organizations; Interfaith Peacebuildng; Sister Community Relationships; Key International Funding Networks; Inspiring Role Models

2) Agrarian Reform, Alleviating Hunger, Alternative Gifts, Apprenticeships, Appropriate Technology, Carbon Footprint, Child Sponsorship, Community Economics, Community Land Trusts, Community Supported Agriculture, Community Visioning Initiatives, Composting Toilets, Cradle to Cradle, Ecovillages, Fair Trade, Food Autonomy, Food Co-ops, Holistic Health Care, Inspiring Role Models, Job Fairs, Local Currency, Local Stock Exchanges, Open Courseware, Permaculture, Questionnaire Development, Renewable Energy, School-Business Partnerships, Service Learning, Sister Communities, Socially Responsible Investing, Swadeshi, Village Industries, Water Supply and Management, Women's Rights, Zero Waste

Concluding Comments

The Community Visioning Initiative approach to collaborative problem solving and citizen peacebuilding (supplemented by many Community Teaching and Learning Centers) emphasizes personal and civic responsibility, maximizing citizen participation in identifying challenges and solution-oriented activity, giving people an opportunity to become actively involved in a solution-charged environment, and minimizing the risk of "transformation unemployment"; and is especially appropriate to the building of "close-knit" communities of people… communities with a healthy appreciation for each others strengths, communities with a well-developed capacity to resolve even the most difficult challenges— and communities which demonstrate a high level of compassion for their fellow human beings.

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The sharing of Community Visioning Initiative experiences and Community Teaching and Learning Center experiences through the clearinghouse websites would be a key (if we will use it) to making the most of learning experiences worldwide—and such sharing would surely contribute much to transforming the many challenges ahead into inspiring experiences of collaboration, peacebuilding, and community revitalization.

If many people could see and feel the practical value of carrying out similar forms of Community Visioning Initiatives, such collaborative, solution-oriented activity could become a common experience… a common cultural tradition… a cultural tradition which can link many diverse communities of people together, in a fellowship of people working towards the greater good of the whole… and a cultural tradition which can help pass on to future generations the best ideas humans have accumulated in more than 5,000 years of human history.