

# Good Governance: A Central Theme

“Our daily butchery” is how the well-known scientific journalist Jeremy Rifkin recently described our way of living in the light of our headlong plunge into urbanisation and the progressive destruction of up to 55,000 animal and plant varieties (butchery!) per year as a result of our unsustainable lifestyle. Rifkin warned against the unrestricted urbanisation that has and will continue to contribute to the separation of human beings from the rest of the natural world. In the next phase of human history we must, according to Rifkin, find a way to live in harmony with what our planet still has to offer by way of subsistence. This is necessary if our species is to survive and the planet be preserved for humanity.

## What Does It mean?

But whether or not one agrees with Rifkin’s somewhat pessimistic view, it should be clear to everyone that there is a need for action. The appropriate keywords are sustainable development in urban and rural areas, strengthening civil society, and the practice of good governance. These three concepts form an indivisible unity; indeed they are triplets. Really sustainable development on our planet is probably only achievable if we place more emphasis on “civil society” and “good governance”, i.e. on a new distribution of responsibility and new ways of reaching decisions. UN authorities, World Bank, OECD, the European Union and many international states and cities have long committed themselves to the principle of good government. Many NGOs such as the FIG, and professionals such as geo- and environmental experts, also frequently use the expression “good governance” without, however, exploring in detail what this means and setting out its practical application. Why

## Grassroot Level

“Good governance” sounds good and is a favoured expression. But for many people it seems too abstract and/or not always appropriate. This is also true of the terms “civil society” and “new community of responsibility” between state, economic sector and civil society. What is needed here is an implementation of the principles of good governance: concrete technical principles involve not just words but actions. This has been done, for example, by the Canadian NGO “Institute on Governance” for its own activities as a partner of government agencies (“Partnerships: Putting Good Governance Principles in Practice”). This checklist may help the FIG to break down the concept of “good governance” for its broadly based socio-political and professional contributions in the fields of SDI, Land Management, Land Administration or Urban and Rural Development. This has not happened up to now! The starting signal could be given, for example, within the framework of a plenary session during the FIG Working Week in May 2007 in Hong Kong. The Report of the German Bertelsmann Foundation on the subject Good Governance at Grass Roots Level for the Quality of Life could be helpful here. For it is only when “good governance” and “civil society” are made relevant at grassroots level that people will be prepared, as expressed by Jeremy Rifkin, to set out on a new path of unison with our planet; in other words, on a new path of sustainability.