



Auroville Outreach

A newsletter from Auroville international township

July 2001

Auroville Economy 2001

Based on distinct social, economic, educational and spiritual values, Auroville was conceived as a place for research and experimentation in all fields of life - a "living laboratory for the future". One of the main areas of experimentation over the past 33 years of Auroville's existence has been in the field of economy.

Right from its inception a very radical economic principle, based on Auroville's Charter, was introduced, namely **no private property**. As a result, all land and buildings, whether built with private funds or not, belong to Auroville and are held "in trust for humanity as a whole". This also applies to all commercial activities in Auroville. Though maximum freedom is given to

commercial unit holders to manage their businesses and share their resources, all assets and capital belong to the community. In other words, Aurovilians are not owners but only "stewards" of any collective property under their care.

A second radical principle, closely connected with the first, is **no inheritance rights**. Since there is no individual property, the customary inheritance rights which apply all over the world are automatically abolished. This implies that, along with the parents, the community carries a considerable responsibility for the care and future well-being of Auroville's children.

These two fundamental principles placed Auroville from the start in a different value system, providing a basic framework in which to experiment with the forces of money

Auroville is an international township in Tamil Nadu, South India, founded in 1968.

Inspired by the vision of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, over 1,500 people from India and some 30 other nations are building a township dedicated to an experiment in human unity, with the eventual hope of contributing to international understanding and the evolution of human consciousness. Nearly 5,000 of the 40,000-plus local people living in the dozen-or-more villages that comprise the Auroville bio-region are also involved in the project, providing their skills and labour.

The township, projected for 50,000 people, will radiate out from the central Matrimandir and its surrounding gardens in 4 zones, the International, Cultural, Residential and Industrial. A large forested area, the Green Belt, will eventually surround the entire township area.

Present activities in Auroville include wasteland reclamation and reforestation, organic farming, village development, education, health care, renewable energy, appropriate building technology, arts and culture, handicrafts and small-scale industries, architecture and town planning.

As described by its founder, Auroville aspires to be "a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities."

For more general information visit the website: www.auroville.org



During 'Auroville Economy 2001' seminar in SAWCHU building

and possession. However, to add to the complexity of this challenge, two more principles were introduced.

The third principle is that there should be **no monetary 'remuneration'** or salaries for Aurovilians. Ideally, they should receive no remuneration for their work for the community, but be maintained in kind by the collective according to their needs. Several attempts have been made to date to implement this principle, but have been only partially successful. Today, Aurovilians receive a basic 'maintenance allowance' in exchange for their work for Auroville. However, there is no direct connection between the type and level of work and the amount received. In general, Aurovilians work with the attitude of serving the community and with a deep sense of dedication to the vision Auroville stands for. A number of highly skilled and experienced residents could earn a sizeable income in their own country, if they chose, but have committed themselves instead to use their skills for the realisation of Auroville's ideals. In other words, their motivation is service-driven.

The fourth principle, given by the Mother in messages on Auroville's ideal economy, is **no exchange of money**. One could call it the ultimate challenge. Creating a complex, multi-faceted society for 50,000 people carrying out a wide range of activities without exchange of money between residents, sounds almost impossible. However, Auroville has tried this in the past, and continues to be inspired by this radical proposition.

It is in this context that Auroville's Circle experiment began in February 2000 and has since expanded to include some 300 adult Aurovilians. The Circles involve groups of anything from 8 to 40 people pooling their resources to meet the needs of the entire Circle. Those who have more to contribute generally put more into the "pool" than they spend, with

the result that those who have less than they ideally need can access more goods and services than their 'maintenance' would normally provide for. Over the past year, the Circles have helped increase sharing, caring and communication among many of their participants.

However, Auroville wanted also to address other areas of its economic life - a closer integration of its commercial units, an increase in self-sustainability, the need for an expanding, shared wealth and further steps towards an economy based on the "no money exchange" principle.

In February this year, Auroville had the good fortune to host French economist Gilbert Thiaffey, who gave a workshop on alternative economics and complementary currencies. Also German architect, environmentalist, community-builder and alternative economist Margrit Kennedy, whose ground-breaking book "Interest and Inflation Free Money" is known worldwide, visited Auroville during the same period and participated actively in a 4-day seminar on the "Auroville Economy 2001".

What has come of all these inspiring visits and stimulating discussions? Several implementation steps are under way, including:

- 'Aurose', Auroville's own internal, complementary unit of exchange, is being introduced. Aurose (same



Margrit Kennedy

word for singular and plural) stands for the Auroville rose, which the Mother called LOVE, a perfect symbol for collective sharing. All Aurovilians, Auroville units, services and projects will be invited to use this electronic (Aurose will not be printed) currency as much as possible.

It is envisioned that all units, commercial or service, won't "sell" anymore but rather distribute their goods and services, at cost price, to Aurovilians. The equivalent value



*Symbol for
the Aurose*

of this distribution will be entered in Aurose on a special "Free-Flow" account of the unit. The unit will then utilize these Aurose to pay for exchanges within Auroville, such as maintenance allowances to Aurovilians and supplies from other units. After all internal expenditures have been paid in Aurose, the unit can convert the balance into rupees to pay for salaries and wages to its employees and to buy goods and services from outside Auroville.

In this way, a first step will be made towards clarity about the flow of goods and services within Auroville. By constantly re-circulating our wealth within the township, we should be more supportive of each other, and give our internal activities a boost to develop and flourish without using normal money. Later, Auroville could even consider creating more Aurose to stimulate internal production.

We anticipate that, in the long run, the Aurose will become superfluous. Once there are enough goods and services to support everyone, Auroville will be able to truly demonstrate the ideal economy Mother spoke of, with no exchange of money, all individuals giving according to their capacity, and the community maintaining them. *"For in this ideal place money would no longer be the sovereign lord; individual worth would have a far greater importance than that of material wealth and social standing. There, work would not be a way to earn one's living but a way to express oneself and to develop one's capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual's subsistence and sphere of action."*

(The Mother, *A Dream*)

- 'Prosperity' and 'Maheshwari', two new sharing circles, are being initiated. The latter is envisioned to be entirely self-regulating, and is intended to allow its members to move closer to "no money exchange". Both will require their members to constantly maintain a sense of responsibility and awareness for the overall balance in the circle's account.
- In addition, Auroville is setting up a 'corpus fund' ("For All, Pour Tous"), a green investment option for all who want to support Auroville, but don't wish to contribute their capital. This fund will be used to stimulate Auroville's development towards self-sustainability, providing seed money for new services and units that fulfill the needs of Aurovilians and the future township.

All these initiatives serve several aims: an increase of awareness about the flow of Auroville's resources, a renewed sense of sharing and community support, the expansion of options for those who

would like to support Auroville, and the introduction of innovative methods to increase Auroville's self-sustainability. But, above all, they are inspired by alternative, future-oriented values and the fundamental economic principles upon which Auroville was founded.

For more information e-mail:
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Housing for the 3rd millennium

In the past few years Auroville has become increasingly aware of the need to develop medium-to-high density housing if it is to eventually accommodate within its designated area the 50,000 inhabitants the township is planned for.

In a research project designed to cater to this need, plans have been drawn up to build the first of a series of curved super-blocks in the Residential and Industrial Zones, known as Lines of Force (LoF), each housing several hundred people, some constructed using specially developed compressed earth block technology. The super-blocks are likely to consist of some half dozen modules, steadily increasing in height from ground-plus-2 floors to as much as ground-plus-6 floors. Each will have different numbers and sizes of apartments, and different facilities, and will incorporate pillared supports at ground level at certain points to allow air movement beneath and around the building.

The main aim of the project is to research into and promote a more collective lifestyle. Everything from

kitchen/cooking/dining facilities, TV/video rooms, gymnasias, games rooms and laundrettes to libraries, terraced areas, gardens and so on will be accessible to all residents equally. Separate water storage facilities will provide potable water and hold recycled water, all water being recycled for maximum conservation. Solar panels will provide as much power as possible. Lifts will carry people and goods to the upper floors of taller sections, but inclined slopes may also permit cycle access to such levels. Biological and material waste will be communally dealt with and recycled. Individual gardens will be discouraged, but anyone wanting to take care of an area of communal garden will be free to do so. Children will be given the opportunity to live in designated "youth" sections, where they can enjoy a degree of autonomy; and at the opposite end of the spectrum, older inhabitants will be able to live in closer proximity to each other, if desired. Parking for motorised vehicles (so long as they continue, and are not replaced by electric or solar alternatives) will be underground and well clear of residential areas. Lastly, nature will be incorporated into the blocks by way of hanging walls of greenery and well sited planters on all floors. Needless to say, each 'Line of Force' super-block will be collectively managed by its residents.

Obviously the challenge in such a concept is to find a balance between the need for individual privacy and the establishment of a more collective lifestyle. Such a project would almost certainly be more difficult in the West, where everyone insists on living in



Model of 'Line of Force' building

their own private world; but Aurovilians have come here to experiment, to develop appropriate lifestyles for the third millennium. The key to the success of these LoF's will be not so much the physical construction and facilities provided, but the SPIRIT in which people live there; and in Auroville there is already a well developed understanding of that spirit, and what it demands of each person.

Construction of the first LoF, called "Progress", located between the settlements of Prarthna and Prayatna, has now started. Initially only a first low level module of approx 300 sq.metres with 3 apartments and a few collective facilities will be completed, but once it is clear that there are no flaws or unforeseen problems in the design concept, more modules will follow.

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Auroville and the Internet

Recently Aurovilians were having problems with e-mail reception and transmission. Mail sent from outside was often failing to reach its addressee in Auroville, or being returned with an "Unauthorised access. We do not relay" note; connection to certain destinations/providers was being denied; and the number-hunting facility which had worked before was now defunct. Something needed to be done, requiring special skills in the field of computer technology and systems management.

Fortunately all these problems coincided with the return to Auroville of long time Aurovilian Ulli Blass, probably Auroville's most widely acknowledged computer expert, who had been in USA for 6 months, following handover of the highly successful software company he had

been running earlier. He volunteered to help, and soon found several problems needing attention.

For a start, he found messages were bouncing back to senders without delivery because the fall-back mail server was refusing to handle Auroville for back-up. Further investigation revealed that "auroville.org.in" was now on a black list where 'spammers' (distributors of unwanted amoral or ad material, who use unprotected relay features to send out huge quantities of unsolicited mail) would be listed. Ulli found we had no protective mechanism in place to avoid being used by spammers, so had drawn attention to ourselves as a relay station for unnatural amounts of mail, leading to service providers refusing to accept mail from us.

The first thing Ulli did was to locate an outside service provider which could receive mail on our behalf as back-up. He next studied the spamming problem, finding that the Microsoft software we were using had been incorrectly installed, therefore was preventing changes which could otherwise have been done simply. He also found that the licenses Auroville had acquired were now insufficient to support the 800 or more users we had. With the choice between going again for a Microsoft option (costly, and always ultimately at the mercy of Microsoft) or going for an open license solution (with free software, source code freely available worldwide, the possibility of any skilled engineer being able to solve problems, and freedom from Microsoft) he chose the latter. Asked about this choice Ulli says, "I felt that for Auroville, with its spiritually based aim of finding solutions of a more global nature, and maintaining a degree of independence from external control, operating systems like that offered by Linux, which we have gone



Ulli Blass

for, are more appropriate. It's like the difference between a computer guided car, with onboard GPS system dictating where to go etc, and a normal car. Of course such systems are more difficult to install and manage, but we placed a contract for that with our old colleagues, Nexus Computers. As this new Linux system has spam protection, we are already off the black list and can now send mail to any destination. Number hunting has also been dealt with, which makes life much easier."

While all this was going on, Ulli also oversaw the general tidying up and improvement of the 3-server network topology to facilitate easier maintenance, and put pressure on the 800+ users to ease the burden on the servers by getting rid of old files. The result is a facility now much better able to meet the overall needs of Auroville, with enormously improved security for internal communication. It has been a huge work, demanding not only technical knowhow but also patience and perseverance in the face of considerable hardware, software and related infrastructure difficulties, but by the time this issue comes out everything should be working fine.

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Enquiries or feedback relating to this newsletter and its contents are always welcome, and can be communicated to: Auroville Outreach, Bharat Nivas, Auroville 605101, India E-mail: outreach@auroville.org.in

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