Nonviolence is an inherently positive force therefore constructive work fits it best.

CP can go on when resistance isn’t possible.

In addition to continuity it builds community.

Nothing bonds like working together.

Nothing bonds lastingly like working together for a positive end.

CP does not rouse a repressive response.

On the other hand, it can be highly revolutionary, striking the system at a leverage point.

Therefore it can have both ‘stealth’ and ‘keystone’ potential.

CP reassures the reference public that resisters are not just destroyers of order.

CP builds the new society so the collapse of the old does not leave a dangerous power vacuum.
Resistance in El Salvador

Multinational corporations are seeking the rights, through trade agreements like the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), to sue governments that get in the way of making profits off a country’s natural resources.

The people can influence the policies of corporations. Bechtel, for example, was defeated in Bolivia in the 1990s. It is possible.

Today in El Salvador, gold mining has led to the poisoning of valuable waterways, making the color of water coming from mined mountains into towns at times orange at other times cranberry red.

Corporations responsible for the poisoning of water, such as Canada’s Pacific Rim Mining Corporation and OceanaGold, refuse to clean up the mess, and have instead sued the Salvadorian government for loss of mining rights in the country. The lawsuits have resulted in over $300 million in losses through a World Bank-based dispute center, equivalent to more than 1 percent of El Salvador’s economy.

Inspired by the Nation article, “A Strategic Fight Against Corporate Rule” by Robin Broad and John Cavanagh.
At first people in El Salvador were interested in jobs in mines, but after seeing damage in other areas and countries, decided that it was not worth it. A campaign slogan was, “We can live without gold, but we can’t live without water.” Not to mention that pay for workers was at most $1.20 per day while CEOs made millions.

A rise in tensions between pro-mining elites and people living in affected areas have been emerging since at least 2007, including the rise in murders of anti-mining activists.

Besides working in anti-mining campaign activities, activists have also turned to constructive program, building what they need without dependence on multi-national corporations.

In Chalatenago, for example, a system for delivering clean water to houses was established, as well as a sugar-cane producing cooperative, a fish-hatchery, and honey production. Non-GMO plants are cultivated by women, such as beans and corn, as well as products such as soap, shampoo and homeopathic medicines.

Constructive program has a valuable role in our struggles: to build community, meet our needs and maintain morale.

We can learn from the people of El Salvador not only in their struggle against the destruction of their environment and lifestyle, but in the way they are building a more sustainable community to replace the old system in the process.
Navdanya (nine seeds) is the name of Dr. Vandana Shiva’s farm in Uttarkhand, India.

The Punjab violence of 1984 and the Bhopal tragedy at a pesticide plant in Madhya Pradesh, painfully reminded the world of the need to shift gears and move away from violent modes of food production. The thirst for nonviolence in farming practices that nurture and protect farmers and the environment drove Vandana Shiva to create Navdanya biodiversity farm as a place for cultivating biodiversity and application of Gandhiji’s principles to the cultivation of seeds and preserving age-old knowledge of women seed keepers—women who do not read or write, but distinguish and name seven hundred different varieties of rice by looking at them. Dr. Shiva took Gandhi’s Salt Satyagraha as inspiration for her own Bija (seed) Satyagraha against patent laws that make seeds “property” of global agricultural companies and the ancient practice of seed keeping among farmers, a crime. She considers multinational corporations to be contemporary versions of the British Raj and nonviolent non-cooperation with them, duty of every citizen of planet earth.

[I decided to participate in Navdanya’s workshop at Earth University or Bija Vidyapeeth hoping to create the perfect opportunity to interview Dr. Shiva for a documentary film on nonviolence. What I gained from my short residence turned out to be much more than an interview.]
Gandhi, Globalization and Earth Democracy is a nine day residential workshop focusing on the relevance of Gandhi’s struggle to free India from British rule to overcoming contemporary global ills, all of which, stem from structural and cultural violence perpetuated by globalization, i.e. corporate colonization of the entire globe. Earth Democracy proposes a worldview of nonviolence and inclusiveness as a viable alternative to globalization.

Each day would begin with yoga and meditation and group reading of inspirational passages. During the day participants would gather outdoors for lectures that always began with a prayer followed by steaming cups of freshly made chai from Navdanya’s bustling all vegetarian kitchen. Sleeping quarters consisted of huts with straw roofs and walls covered in cow dung to reduce fluctuations in temperature since there was no source of heating and Dehradun is notorious for its chilly nights infused with a Himalayan breeze from the north. Each room housed three to six people. My room had six beds in it and although at first, I thought of the prospect of sleeping in the same room with five strangers as somewhat of a challenge, it soon became clear that my roommates and I would get along like six sisters. We all had tears in our eyes while saying goodbye and hoped to see each other again.

Earth democracy promotes a paradigm based on four forms of sovereignty: Beej Swaraj (Seed Sovereignty), Anna Swaraj (Food Sovereignty), Jal Swaraj (Water Sovereignty), and Bhu Swaraj (Land Sovereignty). Earth democracy presents a viable alternative to the violence embedded in globalization by promoting a “worldview in which humans are embedded in the Earth Family, we are connected to each other through love, compassion, not hatred and violence.”
Holding this worldview will allow “ecological responsibility and economic justice” to replace “consumerism and competition as objectives of human life.” Earth democracy will allow Sarvodaya (well-being or uplift for all) to replace Gross Domestic Product as the measure of progress. This is possible by “making peace with the earth” through overcoming the illusion of superiority of humans over the planet and its inhabitants. It means opening up to the reality that “human democracy is a subset of earth democracy” because after all humans do need the earth for their survival!

Vandana Shiva is the kind of woman that I have always wanted to (and still want to) grow up to be like and her Earth University is the kind of place I wish everyone could visit. Somewhere between harvesting turmeric and weeding the herb garden with my bare hands, I managed to grow up and out of myself for a brief moment and see myself as part of a thriving system of interconnected beings with the earth at the center of it. It was then and there, in a farm outside of smoggy Dehradun, with the Himalayas in the background, that I found my place on earth as a servant of this incredible planet and all of its inhabitants.

It was then and there that I finally got a glimpse of that “certain kind of magic that comes out of overcoming divisions and overcoming illusions that create division.” The same kind of magic that gives Dr. Shiva the inspiration and creativity “to imagine a world where there is more freedom and prosperity” for all “precisely by protecting every dimension of life and diversity.”
Building a movement of Peace Teams

If you are interested in getting trained in the skills and strategies for building a national movement of local peace teams, we have good news. MPT is going to be going on a nationwide tour to do just that. You can find out more about where they will be at this link, http://www.metapeaceteam.org/#!national-training-tour/cjlr and contact them if you would like to host them in your town.

How do we address violence: not only violence in our communities but violence from those who are supposed to protect community (aka “peace” officers)? We need people who are trained in creating safe spaces, and the slightest hope that it might be possible to create such spaces—is what drives organizations like Meta Peace Team (MPT, formerly Michigan Peace Team). MPT’s goal is not to take sides, not even really to come up with solutions, but simply to create safe spaces where people might be able to deal with the challenges of conflict without violence. As MPT staff member Mary Hanna quips, the teams are not there to quell disturbances but to protect against violence: “Sometimes people think of us as parade marshals – we’re not there to make sure your event goes swimmingly, we’re there to make sure nobody gets hurt.”

Efforts to scale up this concept of peace teams have brought MPT to the next stage of its journey as a founding member of the Shanti Sena Network of North American peace teams. This network is composed of a variety of organizations across the U.S. and Canada, and it was inspired by Gandhi’s idea of a shanti sena, or ‘peace army.’ Mary explains that “when something big (violent) was happening, we wanted to be able to deploy peace teams as quickly and as effectively as the military deploys their troops and as the police deploys officers.” To do this, the groups need to develop a standardized training and a network to mobilize people in response to violence—to get those trained teams to the places where they are needed, and to do it quickly. They are beginning by coordinating their curricula to include a basic training that all agree is foundational for peace team work, and they hope that this coordination and cooperation in training will also start to build up the networks of relationships that can later be used to mobilize and dispatch trained teams to situations where violence threatens. Over the long haul, they hope to bring Gandhi’s vision of a ‘peace army’ to life in North America.
One of Gandhi’s 18 projects in his constructive program framework was Nai Talim, or “new education.” In today’s world, what might new education look like? Many forms of education today perpetuate the old story of separation that is the underlying cause of injustice and violence - seeing humans as separate entities with minds to be filled with knowledge. At the heart of new education is the new story - the understanding that we are all connected. Nonviolence is the expression of this interconnection, and since many of us did not have the opportunity to learn about nonviolence in school, we can embrace Gandhi’s ideal of lifelong learning and begin by learning about nonviolence right now.

If you are intrigued by what you learned in this issue of Emergence and feel inspired to deepen your understanding of nonviolence and constructive program, please consider joining us for the Metta Center Certificate in Nonviolence Studies program which will take place online from April 7 through October 5, 2014. Through the certificate program, you will have the opportunity to undertake an in-depth study constructive program and other related concepts, and will also have the chance to discover ways you can begin working on constructive program in your own community.
The course is designed to systematically guide you through the history, theory, practice, and application of nonviolence in your life and work. The learning path follows the Metta Center Roadmap, and explores the process of discovering person power, learning about nonviolence, and developing strategies to take nonviolent action and contribute to the global movement for a nonviolent culture. If you have been looking for a way to deepen your understanding of nonviolence and study it in a systematic way, this course is ideal for you.

This program is open to anyone who wishes to develop his or her knowledge and understanding of the science and theory of nonviolence and learn how to practically apply nonviolence. The coursework consists of readings, podcasts, videos, reflection questions, and weekly assignments to apply the concepts. You will also engage in a supportive community of learners who are also passionate about creating a nonviolent world.

To register, please visit: http://mettacenter.org/research-education/metta-certificate-nonviolence-studies/

For questions, please email education@mettacenter.org

We hope you’ll join us!

Stephanie Knox Cubbon is the director of education at Metta Center for Nonviolence