



*About Us*

## About the coalition for Moral Forces for Sustainability (cMFS)

### **Preamble:**

There has been a great deal of progress that has been made by the numerous developmental programs that have been undertaken by a large number of International Developmental Agencies, Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations, as well as Private Initiatives - all of them to help alleviate the suffering and pain of rural communities, especially in developing and third-world economies.

As we have said, a great deal of progress has been made ... but it has been the experience of the Founding Members of the coalition of Moral Forces for Sustainability (cMFS), that there *still* remains a great disparity in the quality of life of people living between urban centers and rural villages. We tend to believe less in the statistics and glossy annual reports that are put out by these myriad institutions, when we discover to our dismay when we actually visit the villages and remote districts - even those which have been exposed to these developmental programs - that the index of misery and deprivation is more or less uniformly applicable to entire communities. In quite a few cases, this disquality exists almost unchanged since the end of the colonial era.

Of course! There are pockets of affluence - but these have mostly occurred wherever the uncommon people of these pocket boroughs have been visited and empowered by benevolent and catalytic change agents, to take the development effort into their own participative hands.

The cMFS was therefore founded on the premise that we have to build a Non-Governmental Organization that takes a different approach - thinking "out-of-the-box", as it were - at sustainable community development.

An important ingredient to the pot has been our focus on the morality of our intervention strategies. International and National developmental agencies have poured billions of dollars to help these poor people, but their misery remains unmitigated. A great deal of money has been spent by high-powered officials in international meetings and bodies (these have somehow always been located at fancy urban or scenic locations) to talk about how to spend the money better - but on the ground, the misery of the poor people remains unabated.

There is a strong feeling that we have to talk less and do more! We already have many answers. We do not need conferences to decide what we have to do. All we have to do is to look into our own hearts ... and do the first few things that come to mind. These are usually unalloyed with greed. These are the paths we have to trek, and make sure that we don't change course in transit. Hence the morality paradigm. Invariably, we tend to change the trajectory of our path, when greed gets into the equation.

## 1 The mandate for cMFS

Usually, the first thing that we do or think is the moral thing ... that degenerates into immorality as greed gets into the way of our thinking. Perhaps that is why it is so important to uphold our founding constitution, whether be it a compact of people to form a nation, or the compelling belief of one single, moral person.

The ultimate goal of human civilization is self actualization. Thus, women and men everywhere are born unalloyed with greed. However, as Spinoza had thought, the guiding goal of man is self-preservation. This survival instinct promotes desire as an emotion. We are induced to seek that which brings joy or pleasure for self-preservation, since anything to the contrary will bring sorrow or pain – the fear of death itself. The act of seeking joy or pleasure is therefore not immoral as long as it promotes self-preservation and does not transgress the bounds of reason. It is only when greed enters the equation that we use our uniquely human power of reasoning to override our passions and transgress the bounds of morality, into a state of perfidy.

On one hand, we have the orthodox school of thought that promotes a frigid interpretation of morality to implement the social contract. The infamous ‘Puritans’ of Hawthorne’s America and sectarian zealots everywhere epitomize the kind of people who would sacrifice the universal brotherhood of man and feelings of compassion to achieve their stunted view of morality. That is not the kind of moral force that we seek.

On the other hand, the path of enlightenment embodied by Buddhist philosophy is an ideal that we can only hope to reach at the end of our individual lives. Whilst we hold such beautiful thoughts with respect and admiration, we do not seek our personal salvation through the activities of Sankalpa.

The mandate for Sankalpa’s cMFS – the coalition of Moral Forces for Sustainability – is to promote the simple truth that the essence of sustainability is morality.

We shall accept the fact that we presently live, and will probably live forever, in a Pareto principled world that is polarized between the minority haves and the majority have-nots. We do not contribute to the Leveler’s school of thought, who only aspire to pull people down to a uniform level of misery. Nor do we aspire to be Utopian and live comfortable lives ourselves, whilst pulling down the shutters on Sankalpa’s *raison d’être* - the needy and dispossessed people clamoring for succor. We will, however, strive to make this world a better place to live in by discovering innovative and incontrovertible ways to diminish the gap between the haves and the have-nots. We will achieve this not by pulling everyone down to a lower level, but by building a coalition of people with moral integrity and vision, who can nurture and sustain a program of grassroots activities for continuous improvement and upliftment in the standards of living and in the quality of life of the needy and dispossessed people, globally.

Sankalpa’s cMFS will therefore have work to do as long as there is a discernible disparity in the social milieu of human societies, and by corollary, we will cease to exist when we have achieved our goal of global sustainable development through moral force.

## 2 Paradigms for sustainable community development

cMFS promotes the belief that there are several routes for sustainable community development. Each member brings with her or him a different perspective. However, just as there are various religions on this earth that speak in remarkably similar tones about a higher state of consciousness, it will be cMFS's endeavour to favourably hold high the endearing qualities of each member's vision of the way forward for realizing sustainable community development.. Using the conciliation and consensual decision making processes defined in Section 3, the morality of cMFS's members will highlight the defining character of this movement, which we hope will bring sustainable community development into fruition.

The following pages define the members' visions and paradigms for sustainable community development.

### 2.1 The 'Sankalpa' Pyramidal Model for Rural Development

Sankalpa's strategy for working towards total empowerment of rural communities is based on the pyramidal model for sustainable development shown on the right.

Participatory practices promote total empowerment of rural communities ('Sustainable Knowledge') through the following four foundation-level developmental programs:

#### 1. Sustainable Livelihoods:

The 'Training & Education Center' provides the resources for employment generation through a variety of community and infrastructural development programs, including watershed development, arts and handicrafts, vocational training programs, etc.

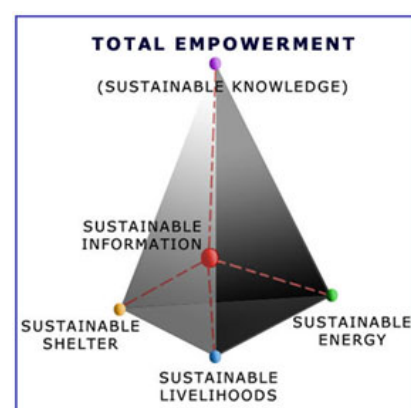
2. Sustainable Shelter: The 'Building Center' provides for eco-friendly shelter products and services

3. Sustainable Energy: The 'Renewable Energy Center' facilitates dissemination of appropriate technologies for rural electrification and rural household and commercial energy requirements.

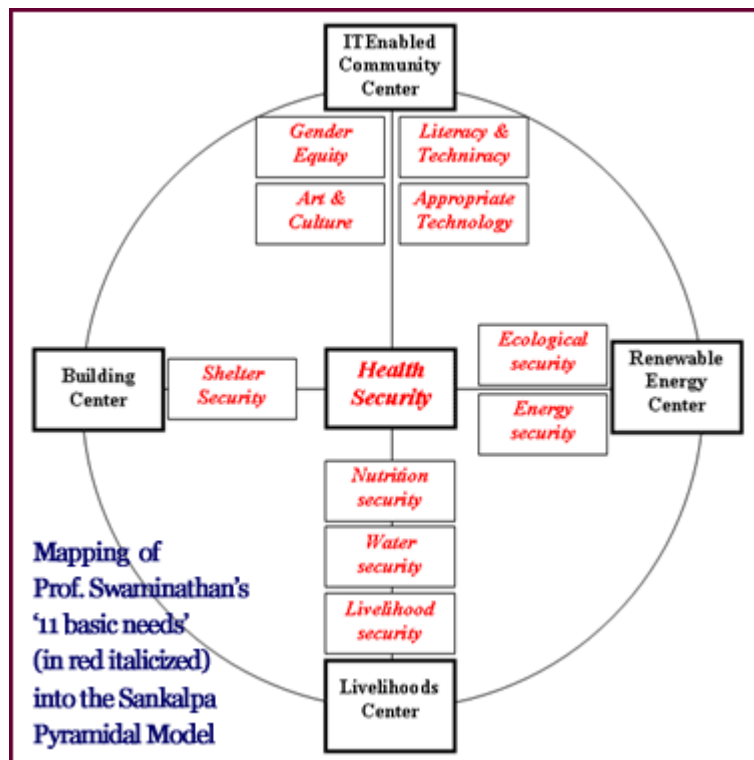
4. Sustainable Information: The 'Information Technology Center' provides Internet-based and IT-Enabled Services, and is the focal point for continuous improvement, dissemination of appropriate technologies and sustainable development.

It is believed that, besides poverty elimination, the ultimate goal of achieving the overall socio-economic development of rural communities, including primary education, health and hygiene, social networks, human rights, gender equality and social equity will be possible after these four foundation level developmental programs have been firmly established and sustainably actualized in the target rural communities.

We have had the opportunity to validate this model with several serious practitioners of rural development. Although there are apparently many intervention strategies that are needed for all-round rural development, it appears that almost all agree that the "Livelihoods-Shelter-Energy" trio constitute the 'primary colors' of rural development. If we have these three primary building blocks -- held together in place by 'sustainable information technology' -- then it appears that we can produce all other rural development initiatives -- including health, education, water security, and so on, as discussed below.



2.1.1 Relation of Sankalpa Model to basic community needs:



In ‘A major contribution of the human development reports is in sensitizing nations on the need accord priority to basic needs’. Prof. M S Swaminathan<sup>1</sup> cites the following eleven groups of indicators, which can be used for ranking States from best to worst in the measurement of human development in their societies:

1. Nutrition Security	2. Water security
3. Literacy and Techniracy	4. Health security
5. Shelter	6. Ecological security
7. Livelihood security	8. Energy security
9. Gender equity	10. Folk, classical and modern art, culture, music and drama.
11. Technological leapfrogging and providing the substrate conditions essential for enhanced national and foreign investment.	

It appears that all these measures can be brought within the purview of Sankalpa’s “IT-Livelihoods-Energy-Shelter” pyramidal model. Perhaps “Health Security” is the single attribute that comes closest to being on its own, being almost equidistant from all four pyramidal elements. Can any community - rural or otherwise - consider ‘health security’ measures, before achieving sustainable (livelihood + shelter + energy) securities. The corollary presents itself: ‘health security’ can only be obtained after a rural community has already achieved sustainable (livelihood + shelter + energy) securities, held together with sustainable information technologies. QED! ☺

Which logically brings us to ‘Appropriate Technology’!

<sup>1</sup> “The best State: Eleven steps to excellence”, by Dr. M. S. Swaminathan, published in The Hindu Magazine, Sunday, December 2, 2001.

### 2.1.2 Appropriate Technology

Schumacher is believed to be the first person to have defined ‘Appropriate Technology’. He has been compared with Prof P C Mahalanobis of ISI - Calcutta fame: whereas Schumacher was a western economist supposedly steeped in materialism, he believed that ‘small is beautiful’, whereas Mahalanobis came from the land of Rabindranath Tagore, and yet he in collaboration with Nehru was the architect of India’s steel mills and ‘big is beautiful’ legacy. Regrettably, it was realized too late that man cannot eat machines ...



Appropriate technology addresses a need by providing a solution that fits the village resources and goals within the local culture. “Appropriate technology is the skills, knowledge and procedures for making, using and doing useful things, while making optimum use of human, natural, and person-made resources in the village -- with ‘optimum’ determined on a village-specific basis by the villagers themselves.”

“Hard technology” describes an operable and mechanistic system that is derived from knowledge of natural sciences. It relates to the skills, tools and rules that are employed by people to alter, accommodate and manage nature for human survival and development.

On the other hand, “soft technology” is derived from knowledge of the social sciences, non-natural science, and is essentially non-scientific. It is based on the common laws or experiences in economic, social and humanistic activities, and organically generates its own rules, mechanisms, means, institutions, methods and procedures that contribute to the improvement and control of its environment and surrounding community.

Hard technology does not stand alone. “Appropriate hard technology relates to engineering techniques, physical structures and machinery that meet a need defined by the village, and use materials at hand or readily available.” Hard technology must be surrounded by appropriate soft technology, such as social and organizational structures, human interactive processes, motivational techniques and a wide variety of education and training programs. Soft technologies are now considered to be vital for the success of hard technologies.

It is this combination of hard and soft technologies that enable communities to successfully implement capacity building and community development programs, which fuels the continual redevelopment of newer and better forms of appropriate technologies. This is ‘Continuous Improvement’ at its best.

## 2.2 Participatory Practices

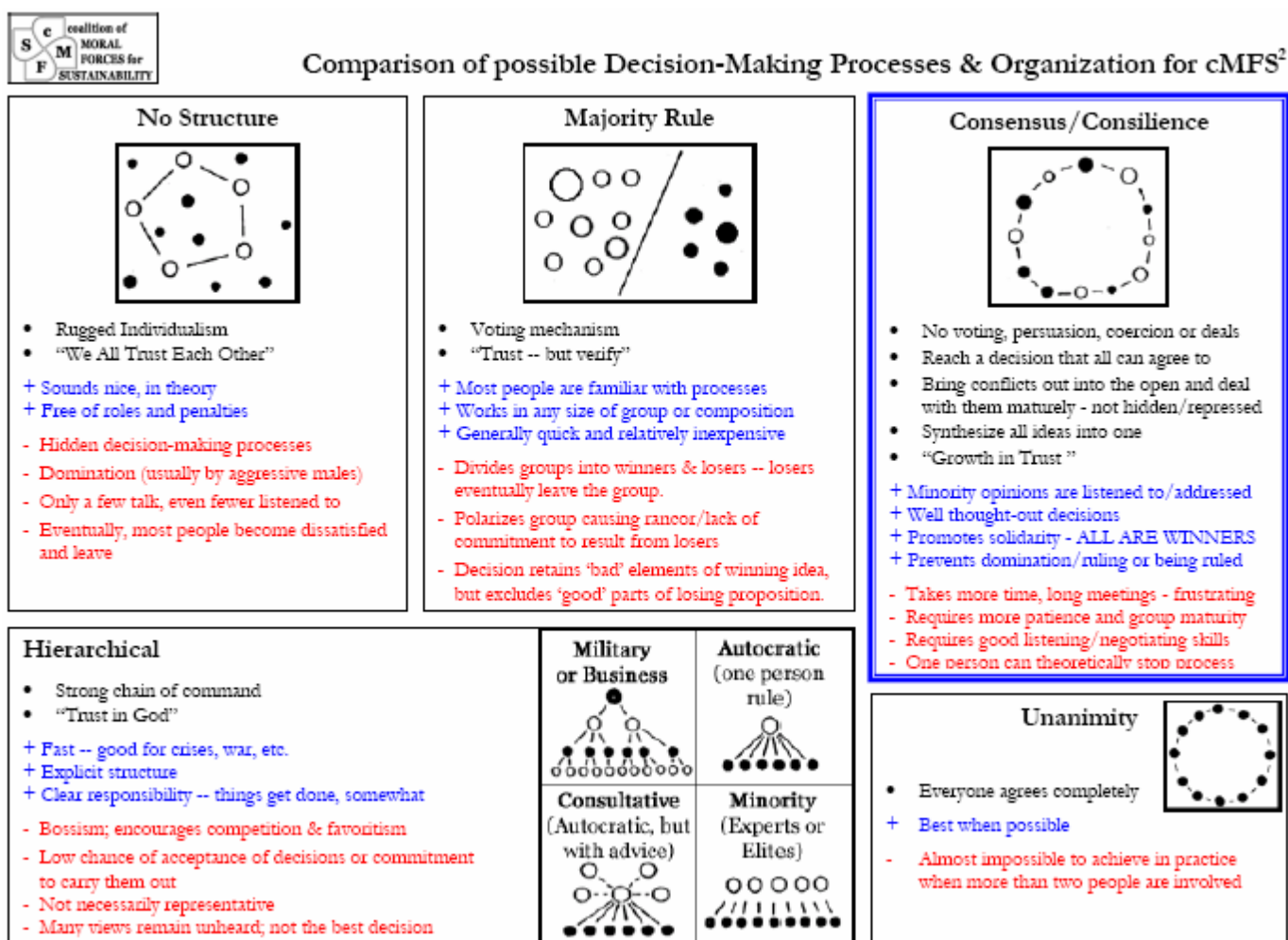
Another paradigm for community development relates to participatory practices. In this view, the focus should be on <Lynette to complete>

### 3 Organization & Decision Making Processes

At cMFS, we believe that:

- No one should be in charge;
- No one should have power over anyone else, and no
- No decisions are final until everyone is satisfied with the outcome.

We have come to this conclusion as a result of our study and comparison of different “Decision-Making Processes” & “Organization Structures” -- see figure below - ‘Comparison of possible Decision-Making Processes & Organization for cMFS’, or click here to download.



We have come to the conclusion that this “collective” organizational structure that lacks a hierarchical structure and is defined in the ‘blue box’ under “Consensus/Consilience” is most sustainable, although it will require a great deal of time and effort to bring to fruition. If we fail, then we would not have lost too much in any case, because all the other forms of decision making are in any case short-lived, and will not yield the kind of long-term sustainability that cMFS seeks. In short: **It is either consensus, or bust.**

In retrospect, cMFS will have an organizational structure that is fairly unique in our society. None of the “ ‘X’ is President, ‘Y’ is Vice-President, the majority rules and the minority is screwed” proposition that most of us are probably used to.

Basically, we will all have to take turns in leading/facilitating the meetings, where the important cMFS decisions are made. When someone has an idea or a plan, we will discuss our thoughts and concerns about the plan, and then make changes and compromises with the plan until it takes a shape that everyone likes, or at least one that everyone can live with. Granted, the process can be time consuming and difficult.

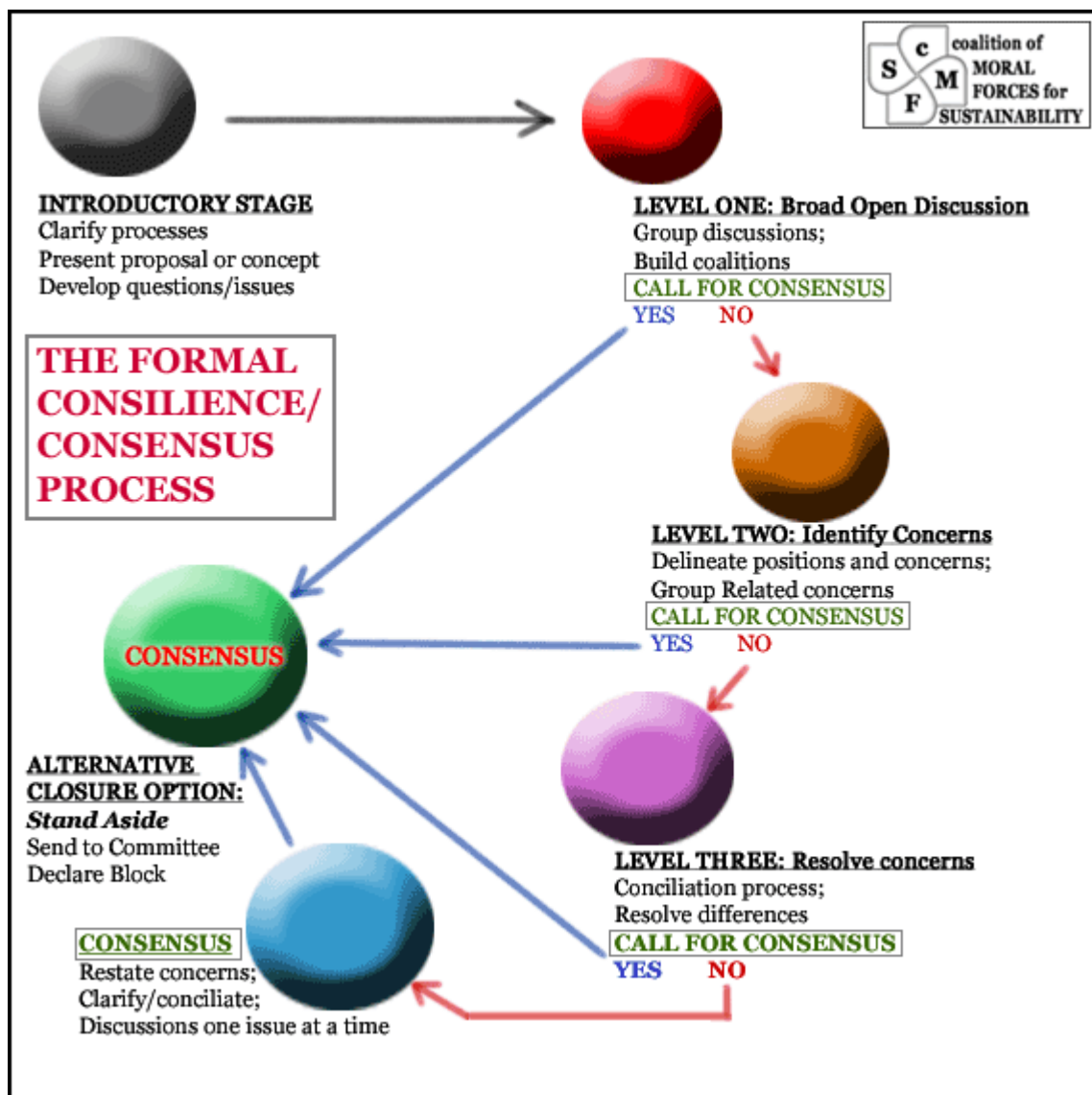
Democracy is theoretically wonderful, but it is divisive, and its guiding principles are invariably hijacked by authoritarianism. In contrast, consilience and consensus is really one of the most fair and equitable ways for groups of people to make decisions, and we shall discuss and clarify what it is that we seek..

**3.1 Consilient and consensual Processes:**

Consensus is a decision making process in which each member of a group agrees to the decision of the whole group. The objective is to have the final decision acceptable to everyone involved.

By doing so, we promote a community based on trust (please visit <[www.consensus.net](http://www.consensus.net)> for more information on this subject).

The formal consilience/consensual processes are shown in the figure below.



### 3.1.1 General Assumptions to Allow for Consensus

- The way that we work for social change is a vital link to the change itself;
- Each individual is important to the group;
- Differences of opinion are normal and healthy and can be worked through. They need not result in a divided group;
- Creative solutions are possible; and
- Every member of the group has a right to be heard<sup>2</sup>.

### 3.1.2 Why should we use consensus?

- When each individual shares in the decision of the group, then all have a greater commitment to implement the group's decisions;
- Better decisions are made because more ideas are generated and discussed which creates more freedom for creativity and innovation - the ability to ***“think out of the box”***;
- Consensus helps to avoid the adversarial confrontations and the anger and potential for hurt feelings generated in a win/lose style of decision-making; and
- It increases group strength by decentralizing authority, and allowing more people in the group to take on leadership roles. This really helps to increase personal empowerment.

### 3.1.3 Conditions needed for Consensus

- We need a group that shares values and goals. This emphasizes the importance of our group to come up with a mission statement together.
- Members must have commitment to the group and its processes;
- Equal access to power means elimination of hidden hierarchical structures;
- Members must be aware of issues that can lead to inequalities of power, and constantly guard against its emergence. Some of these relate to the need for diversity and gender balance;
- There must be willingness to acknowledge differences of opinion, and the willingness to take the time to work through them; and
- One of the toughest challenge for members is having the willingness to let go of ego-identification with one's own proposals and ideas. The guiding motto is: ***“Once an idea leaves your mouth it no longer belongs to you.”***

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<sup>2</sup> The last point is most endearing, and reflects the *raison d'être* of Sankalpa, and the thinking of its founder President, the Late Subhas Mukhopadhyay, Poet Laureate.

#### 3.1.4 Conclusion

For a group to use consensus it demands responsibility from the members, which means not only a commitment to the group, but also a commitment to the self. Each member must be able to listen to others as well as speak on issues about which they have strong feelings.

Consensus decisions take a lot more time than voting. The time we need to spend is an invaluable investment in cMFS, and its constituencies. Groups will be much better off if objections and concerns are expressed, respected and creatively resolved. The alternatives end up with hasty decisions in which objections are suppressed. We realize this can damage our group and cause unnecessary pain, which in the end can take much more time to repair.