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Turning UN Agreements into Action:
*The Role of Civil Society
in the Monitoring and
Implementation of
Multilateral Agreements*

FIM was established in 1998 in Montreal as a global alliance of individuals and organizations with the goal of improving the influence of international civil society on the United Nations and the multilateral system. FIM believes that the stated goals of the UN are beyond reasonable reproach and that the challenge of the FIM alliance is to assist meaningfully in bringing them to fruition.

FIM provides a neutral setting for an annual Forum for reflection and active learning about the interaction between international civil society and the multilateral system. In so doing, the Forum draws lessons from experiences in different sectors, regions and multilateral institutions that can strengthen the voice and participation of civil society actors in the multilateral system.

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Turning UN Agreements into Action:
*The Role of Civil Society in the
Monitoring and Implementation of
Multilateral Agreements*

*Proceedings from FIM's third Forum,
held in Brisbane, October 2-4, 2001.*

This publication has been designed to provide the reader with an introduction to and discussion of the third annual Forum of FIM, and it includes detailed analysis of civil society's influence on follow up to various UN summit agreements. The articles include a discussion paper commissioned prior to FORUM 2001, and two papers which review the proceedings of the Forum and the discussions which took place during the three-day event.

Additional copies of this publication are available for a small charge. Please contact the FIM Secretariat (address on inside front cover).

The feature articles in this publication represent the opinions of the authors.

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FORUM 2001 proved beyond any reasonable doubt that the annual Forum, while modeled to encourage a contemplative, retreat-like environment, is inevitably very much influenced by events of the day. Our first Forum predicted Seattle; FORUM 2000 was shaped by the aftermath of Seattle and took place in the shadow of Prague; and FORUM 2001 was held shortly after the shocking events of September 11.



These influences are, in fact, part of the Forum dynamic. After all, the majority of the Forum invitees are activists of one sort or another and it is normal that at any given Forum, several of them will be directly involved in ongoing critical issues. It would be wasteful to bring together such a strong and experienced group of people – all of them highly trained in working under conditions where the unknown and ambiguity coexist – and then ignore crucial last-minute events reshaping our globe. To borrow a phrase from industry, FIM has had to learn how to inject into the Forum a capacity to deal with issues on a ‘just-in-time’ basis.

World events are the sustenance of activists. Activists cannot wait for ‘the terms’ to be defined and codified. They do not require a feasibility study to determine the validity of their path, nor can they undertake painstaking research to develop a ‘scientifically objectified’ explanation of their choices. All of these are important social roles, but they are not those of the activist.

The activists’ main professional resources are *experience* and *intuition*. These are applied within a coherent *conceptual framework* and together, these three components form the lens through which strategies are analyzed. All of these tools are useless if they are not rooted in a carefully nurtured set of *explicit values*. It is this combination – relevant experience, a trusted intuition, and an articulate conceptual framework, each in consonance with a clear value system – that gives birth to strategies and their subsequent implementation.

Notwithstanding this important recognition, the Forum remains an all-too-rare chance to capture, distill and savour knowledge that has been gleaned from previous civil society actions. This remains its prime objective.

Our experience with the Forum to date is that interest among activists in learning applicable lessons from successful experiences of CS activities is high and growing. There remains for some, however, a tugging sense of guilt that the time and expense given for this type of reflection might be a bit of a luxury. For this reason, in each Forum, we emphasize collective strategizing for the year ahead. It is also why we are willing to add to the prepared agenda the time required to analyze a major current event, for which in most cases no background paper will have been prepared.

And so it was with FORUM 2001.

In many ways we had no choice. The impact on the Forum of the events in New York was quickly evident. The number of last-minute cancellations by invitees was double that of previous years. Gradually it became clear that the majority of our confirmed participants from Muslim countries were not going to receive entry visas from the host Australian government. In fact, only one Muslim participant arrived. While none of the others were refused visas, none received them in time to attend the Forum.

Further complicating the issue was the fact that, for very diverse reasons, none of the authors was able to attend. To everyone’s disappointment, this eliminated the dialogue session between participants and authors. In the case of Charles Abugre’s overview paper, Manuel Chiriboga courageously agreed to present its content to the other participants and respond to the ensuing discussion.

Because of these exceptional circumstances, the FIM Board of Directors subsequently decided not to publish case study papers in this journal. We have included the overview paper, which was extensively discussed in the Forum. As well, in order not to lose all of the very valuable experiences and insights that are found in the draft case study papers, we have presented summaries as well as several ‘call-outs’ from them throughout these pages.

In addition to influencing the numbers attending FORUM 2001, the events of September 11 were clearly a priority issue for the majority of those who arrived. In the pre-Forum FIM Board meeting, it was decided to allow whatever space was required for discussion on the implications of September 11 for CS in the upcoming year. Within the Forum itself, by decision of the participants, follow-up to September 11 was selected as one of the three substantive issues to be dealt with by the Forum. A summary of that rather remarkable discussion, coming as it did so soon after the event itself, is included in this journal.

I will attempt to paraphrase one of the participants of that discussion group, who summarized his concluding thoughts along the following lines. "I arrived at the Forum overwhelmed by the drama of September 11, confused by its real significance, and, like just about everybody else on this planet, I had not had the time to reflect upon it, or discuss it in any depth. I feel privileged to have been able to participate in an international grouping of experienced thinkers and to have had two full days to reflect upon this tragic event and, together with them, to have identified some priority areas of action."

There were two other important issues highlighted by participants. One grouping dealt entirely with the issue of capacity building, while a third group looked at the important issues of building bridges between the local and global levels.

Each Forum has its own unique difficulties, challenges, and successes. The evaluations that we received, formally and informally, about FORUM 2001 have been overwhelmingly positive. The friendships made are treasures for life. The global solidarity that each Forum brings carries us all through the intervening difficulties inherent in civil society work: the struggles for funding, the lonely fatigue of swimming upstream, and the inevitable, ephemeral self-doubts – all the factors of our chosen work that impinge upon our natural need for security.

FORUM 2001 succeeded because of the combined efforts of all involved.

The FIM Board, as always, gave us the benefit of their considerable knowledge and insight as they deliberated over the choice of a timely and instructive theme. The preparatory work by FIM staff and our Commonwealth Foundation colleagues in Australia provided us with a wonderful setting and virtually worry-free logistical support. Our facilitators, Bernie Lovegrove and Sandy Morrison, did an outstanding job, with their meticulous attention to detail and to the general ambiance of each session. Each of the authors helped to clarify and enrich the work of all who participated.

Ultimately the success of the Forum depends upon the participants, upon their knowledge and skills, and upon their readiness to share openly and trustingly. Thanks to all of you who did just that, and who were able to combine consideration of some of the globe's most pressing problems with zestful, and at times, jocular enthusiasm.

And thank you to Colin Ball, for the daring suggestion that we hold FORUM 2001 in Australia. I think it is safe to say that we all came out on top down under.

For FIM, 2002 will be marked by our first conference, **Global Governance 2002**, to be held in Montréal, October 13-16. The sub-title is '**Civil Society and the Democratization of Global Governance**' and our slogan is '**Redefining Global Democracy**'. We hope to see you there.

Nigel Martin
President / CEO

Case Study Presentations for FORUM 2001

FIM is very grateful to the five authors who contributed draft case studies to FORUM 2001. Four case studies related to the experience of civil society in the 'UN+5 reviews', a term used to describe the special UN high-level meetings held five years after summit agreements were approved with the purpose of assessing 'progress' in their implementation by nations and the international community. The fifth case study relates to the involvement of civil society in the renegotiation of an important north-south multilateral trade agreement (i.e. the 'Lomé framework' of agreements). All five case studies provided extremely useful insights into the experience of civil society actors in reviewing and monitoring the implementation of summit agreements, a dimension of global governance that has received insufficient attention to date.



NANCY KACHINGWE

Nancy Kachingwe is a native of Malawi and works for MWENGO, a reflection and development centre for NGOs in Eastern and Southern Africa, located in Harare, Zimbabwe. She has worked as a Programme Officer, Civil Society and Advocacy (CSA), since 1995. The aim of the CSA programme is to help strengthen NGOs in the area of policy work, either through sensitization of various development issues – particularly at the global level, or by directly trying to increase input from civil society in various policy arenas, such as EU-ACP development cooperation.

The Lomé IV Trade Renegotiations: Assessment of African civil society interventions

Nancy Kachingwe of MWENGO outlined the role that African civil society groups played during the Lomé IV renegotiations and the lessons learned for the future.

African CSOs helped to raise awareness of the Lomé renegotiations for CSOs and the private sector, to analyze the EU proposals, to assess the impacts of Regional Economic Partnership Agreements (REPAs) and to lobby governments to oppose EU REPA proposals. In addition, they presented alternative positions to REPA proposals in various position papers, influencing the wording of the final document.

CSOs organized multi-stakeholder meetings and workshops that grouped together various sub-regional African, Caribbean and Pacific Group (ACP) organizations. The meetings increased awareness of REPA proposals and their impacts on civil society members and government actors. CSOs also participated in governmental processes through their involvement in the stakeholder committees.

CSO involvement in governmental processes however was ad hoc due to the limited human resource and financial capacity of many CSOs. In the future, there will be a need for greater planning and pooling of human and financial resources in order to ensure enhanced CSO cooperation in the governmental level of trade negotiations. Creating networks between CSOs and ACP governments is also crucial for increasing ACP influence in multi-stakeholder negotiations.

Awareness-raising efforts must be aimed at other sectors of civil society so that they may engage more effectively in advocacy efforts. Awareness raising also needs to be targeted at the general media to further mobilize different social actors. A web site may help to further disseminate information as would a more strategically-targeted information dissemination strategy (i.e. the initiation of a strong common campaign against indiscriminate liberalization).

Finally, it is critical to strengthen networks between various CSOs that are active in trade negotiations and link EU-ACP negotiations to others such as those within the WTO and the US-Africa trade pact talks. This is paramount since multiple parallel trade negotiations at international levels are stretching the capacities of ACP countries and civil society to participate meaningfully in agreement negotiations and monitoring.



WAGAKI MWANGI

Since the end of the 1980s, Wagaki Mwangi has been active nationally and internationally in NGO and development media movements promoting environmental sustainability, gender equity, democratic development and economic justice. Following the Rio Summit, she was one of the founders and subsequently the co-ordinator of ECONews Africa, an advocacy, research and communication NGO centre on environment and development issues. Ms. Mwangi is currently completing graduate studies in international public policy in Kenya and Zimbabwe.

Climate Change: What lessons for NGOs?

Wagaki Mwangi's contribution is illustrative of the critical role that CSOs have played in the UN-sponsored climate change negotiations and in the monitoring of resulting agreements including the Kyoto Protocol which, four years after adoption, is yet to enter into force. As negotiations neared conclusion in November 2000, new challenges emerged that saw the withdrawal of a key party, the United States, from the Protocol. This was the culmination point of a decade of negotiations.

Mwangi's paper examined the role and involvement of CSOs in the process; CSO strengths and weaknesses; and lessons from the setback arising from the US withdrawal, in order to guide future action by CSOs. A primary question is what CSOs can do to salvage a crisis-prone process.

The key lessons identified in the case study paper included:

- CSOs have a role to play in assessing a Party's threat to withdraw from a process, and their assessment should be based on the gravity of the issue and the significance of the Party to the problem.
- Indicators of crisis-prone processes exist, but CSOs have limits as to how much they can do.
- To support implementation of agreements, CSOs have a role to play in civic education on climate change issues, particularly in the US, while recognizing combined challenges arising from industry's power and federal governance systems.



ATILA ROQUE

Atila Roque is a historian and political scientist. He is a former director of the Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organizations and co-founder of the Social Watch Initiative. Presently he is Coordinator of IBASE (Brazilian Institute of Social and Economic Analysis) and a member of the Organizing Committee of the World Social Forum.

The Copenhagen+5 Process and the Social Watch Experience: Notes for a debate

Atila Roque explores the experience of Social Watch in the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) processes as an example of civil society bridging multilateral concerns with local/regional concerns.

Evolving from discussions in the Social Summit preparatory processes, Social Watch soon became an important network of organizations able to maintain vigilance with regards to the WSSD commitments. Social Watch's membership from both the North and the South helped bridge the 'traditional unilateral approach' of north-south solidarity by uniting all members around common concerns.

Social Watch also played a vital role in mobilizing various national civil society actors through the building of national platforms. These national networks of 'social watchers' helped monitor their governments' commitments by creating annual reports which in turn pressured governments, raised awareness and mobilized people on the national level.

Social Watch continued to play an important role in the annual Commission on Social Development WSSD follow-up. Its Index of Fulfilled Commitments and its international report provided an important monitoring mechanism in bridging national and international concerns by exposing the contradictions in national policy to the international community.

Social Watch also helped to ensure that the Copenhagen commitments were to be considered by mobilizing national organizations through the creation of benchmarks for inclusion in the Social Summit reviews. The document included the need for financial flow control mechanisms, specific poverty-eradication targets and the promotion of an enabling global environment. The persistence of Social Watch networks in the UN General Assembly Special Session helped these issues to remain on the discussion table, even in the face of resistance from some countries.

Social Watch continues to provide an important example of the potential to integrate local dimensions and concerns into the international agenda.

GITA SEN

Gita Sen is the Sir Ratan Tata Chair Professor of Globalisation and Civil Society at the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore, India. She is a development economist whose research focuses on gender and development. Her recent work includes research and policy advocacy on the gender implications of globalization and economic liberalization, the gender dimensions of health and population policies, and the linkages between population and the environment.

She is a founding member of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), a network of Third World researchers, activists and policy makers committed to alternative development and gender justice. She is currently DAWN's research coordinator on the Political Economy of Globalization.

BENE E. MADUNAGU

Bene E. Madunagu is an Associate Professor of Botany at the University of Calabar in Nigeria. In 1982, she co-founded the feminist organisation Women in Nigeria (WIN).

Bene is the chair of the Board of Trustees of Calabar International Institute for Research, Information and Documentation (CIINSTRID) which operates an anti-sexist programme for Conscientising Nigerian Male Adolescents (CMA). She is also the chair of the Board of the International Centre for Reproductive and Sexual Rights (INCREASE).

For DAWN, Bene coordinates the African regional programme on Sexuality, Reproductive Rights and Gender Justice. She is also the DAWN Anglophone African Regional Coordinator.

Bene coordinates the South East zone of the Nigerian Chapter of the International Reproductive Rights Research Action Group (IRRRAG). As well as serving on several boards of trustees, Bene is a member of the African Regional Advisory Committee of the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF).

Between Globalization and Fundamentalism:

Gender justice in the Cairo+5 and Beijing+5 Reviews

Gita Sen and Bene Madunagu of DAWN outlined the role that southern women's networks have played in making a priority of gender and global economic justice issues at both the Cairo+5 and Beijing+5 reviews.

The UN institutional environment during Cairo+5 and Beijing+5 posed obstacles to tackling gender justice issues. Delegates from New-York-based missions, with their own routine macro-economic agendas, were not well informed about women's issues and were susceptible to the pressures of fundamentalist opposition to advancing women's rights.

International feminist networks played an important strategic and tactical role in consensus building at both Cairo+5 and Beijing+5. They helped to educate uninformed delegates on the gender dimensions of the discussions. They facilitated the building of coalitions around women's issues among southern governments and analyzed the political direction of the discussion.

Southern-initiated networks such as Some Latin American Countries (SLAC), which emerged in Beijing+5, pushed the G77 to overcome its systematic obstacles (conservative opposition), by mobilizing many southern governments around issues of gender justice and global economic justice, thus aiding the creation of a final document.

SLAC, now known as the GOR (Group of Rio) is an important, ongoing example of a southern feminist network that has enabled gender justice and global economic equality to get the attention they deserve on the global agenda.



VICTORIA TAULI CORPUZ

Victoria Tauli Corpuz is an indigenous activist who belongs to the Kankana-ey Igorot people in the Cordillera region of the Philippines. She is the Executive Director of Tebtebba Foundation (Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education), an NGO based in Baguio City, Philippines, which is run and managed by indigenous peoples. Since 1993, she has served as the co-convenor of the Indigenous Peoples' Caucus of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. She participated in the Rio Summit and followed up on almost all UN-CSD sessions.

Civil Society Participation in the Post-UNCED Process: Lessons learned

Victoria Tauli Corpuz presented a paper on the experience of civil society participation in the post-Rio process. The UN Summit on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992 witnessed an unprecedented and massive participation of civil society actors from various arenas (later identified as the 'Major Groups'). In contrast to the mobilization movement leading up to and at the Summit itself, the post-summit participation of civil society actors became more institutionalized as exemplified by the establishment of the NGO Steering Committee of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (the UN institutions charged with the implementation and monitoring of the Rio agreements). Corpuz highlighted the problems and opportunities faced by civil society in their engagement with the official UN processes, and in particular, through the NGO Steering Committee mechanism. Key lessons discussed by Corpuz include:

1. The challenge faced by civil society in the post-Summit years to keep their constituencies mobilized, while at the same time maintain pressure on governments and multilateral agencies to effectively begin implementation and dedicate sufficient resources.
2. Giving greater importance to research and analysis on how the Rio agreements were being (or not being) implemented in order to formulate stronger recommendations and be better equipped and effective in their engagement with the UN and governments. CSOs could have invested more in post-Rio global strategy meetings and initiatives on how best to work on more effective post-summit implementation.
3. The need to have international dispute settlement mechanisms accessible to global civil society networks to help resolve institutional conflict, leadership crisis or legitimacy challenges. Resorting to such mechanisms could have been useful in the case of the NGO Steering Committee addressing a situation of conflict that persisted and that impacted negatively the effectiveness of the body.
4. The sharing and learning among different NGOs and CS networks on different coordinating bodies and strategies deployed across UN settings and sectors (sustainable development, women, social development, habitat, etc.) should become more systematic.

Global Conferences and Global Civil Society in the 1990s

New arenas of social struggle or new illusions?



CHARLES ABUGRE
ISODEC, Ghana

Charles Abugre is currently the Executive Director of the Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC), Ghana, and a doctoral student at the School for Social Sciences and International Development at the University of Wales, Swansea. Mr. Abugre has been active in development management and civil society activism for nearly two decades. He has managed development and research/advocacy projects in many parts of Africa, Asia and Europe and co-founded several organizations including the Third World Network-Africa which he coordinated until the year 2000. He is on the governing bodies of many international charities including Oxfam (GB) and Third World Network (Malaysia), and is a member of the Civil Society Advisory Committee of the UNDP Administrator. He has written extensively on a wide range of development issues.

Introduction

The 1990s witnessed one of the largest concentrations of UN-inspired global summits and high-level conferences, addressing a variety of complex social policy¹ issues, of any decade.² These summits and conferences produced various plans of actions, declarations, conventions and protocols. A significant characteristic of these events was the expression they gave to large numbers of non-governmental voices who were integral, rather than peripheral, to the negotiating processes. This integration inferred visibility, legitimacy, and participation rights to a category broadly classified as civil society networks or representatives. The participation of these actors transformed the character and outcomes of these events, as well as the domain of international governance. It also brought renewed visibility and perhaps legitimacy to the UN system at large.

However, the true significance of these events, the impact on the outcomes of the events by the participation of civil society actors, their perception of themselves, and the goals of their interventions are subjects of much debate.

To explore these issues, this paper is organised as follows. First, the significance of these conferences is stated, placing them in the historical context of the UN's role in development policy and the political economy shifts of the past decade or so. Then the dynamics of the civil society movement at these conferences is examined – their general purpose in the emerging political economy, their strategies and tactics, and the lessons we can draw for the future of “pluralistic governance”. In assessing the gains this movement has made – that is, the combined pressures of progressive global civil society and the UN system – we will be sensitive to the contradictory trends of social change and global power relations.

This paper was commissioned by FIM and provided a basis for the discussion which took place at FORUM 2001 in Brisbane, Australia.

The significance of the recent global (UN) conferences

If we ask the question “To what extent have the numerous UN development decades, and global summits and conferences produced visible improvement in the well-being of the majority of the world’s populations - especially those living in developing countries - and the protection of the global commons and indigenous populations?”, the answer will almost certainly be, “not much”. Do we conclude that these conferences were a waste of time and resources? The answer to this question is, of course, more complex. It depends on how, and at what level, we evaluate the impact, the comparisons of the norms governing the alternative fora and mechanisms of global dialogue, and the value placed on multilateralism as a framework for resolving global problems.

If, on the other hand, we evaluate these conferences against the context of the global political economy of the 1990s, I would argue that the appropriate basis for assessing these conferences is to examine the extent to which they collectively represented, reflected or promoted:

- A re-assertion of the redistributive norms and aspirations of the UN system,
- A rejection of the “cult of impotence”,
- A manifestation of the norms of pluralistic governance at all levels, from the global to the national to the local, including the inherent values of multilateralism.

The UN and global political economy

Without historical perspective, it is difficult to understand the significance of the UN Conferences of the 1990s in shaping the identity and role of all post-war institutions, including the UN. There are two issues which are particularly important to note: the struggle of the UN system to have a role in development policy, especially economic issues; and the pervasive influence of the neo-liberal agenda, especially the Washington Consensus in the 1980s and early 1990s, in shaping the UN’s agenda and domestic ideologies in both developing and developed countries.

For much of its history, the developmental role of the UN has been cast under the shadows of the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) and their free-trade agenda. It is important to note that the creation of the Bretton Woods Institutions preceded the creation of the UN, and was essentially a North Atlantic regional association reflecting the interests of the US, Canada, the UK and France. It was conditioned by the circumstances of the post-war settlement and European reconstruction. The imposition of a free-trade agenda on these institutions was in conflict with the desire of the developing countries (mainly Latin

American) that participated in the negotiations to introduce an active objective in which developed countries would contribute to developing countries through preferential policies. The failure of the developing countries to achieve this implied that development was left outside the official agenda of the BWIs, and that any development agenda adopted under the UN system would be circumscribed by, or in conflict with, the free-trade principle.

This essentially conflicting context has bedevilled the UN from its birth, with the result that, on the one hand, Article 55 of its Charter commits the UN to a social and economic development and human rights agenda³, and on the other hand, to an effective exclusion of economic development as one of its basic objectives. Even the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) preparatory meeting in 1947 to set up the International Trade Organisation (ITO)⁴ – the third leg of the BWIs – was a failure. Not only was there little concern for development issues in the UN, there was also a limited constituency for it until the 1960s when many developing countries gained independence and joined the UN.

The 1960s and 1970s stood out as the period in which the UN made the most significant progress in asserting a role in economic development, social policy and pluralistic global governance. The UN development agenda incorporated the twin objectives of decolonisation: rapid development, and global redistribution of wealth. The period witnessed the establishment of specialised agencies such as UNCTAD, the UNDP, UNEP, UNICEF, UNIDO, FAO, ILO, UNRISD, and the UN regional economic commissions, and gave birth to such norms as the right to development and preferential treatment for developing countries.⁵ It also witnessed the expansion of human rights law to encompass social and economic development, to outlaw racism, to protect women from multiple repression, and to protect minority cultures from being rolled over by the dominant and aggressive cultures of the West. These and many others gave shape to the growing body of international law and norms which protect the powerless and the oppressed, whether they be persons, bodies, the commons or states.

It was at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), created in 1964, that the key battles for development were fought. UNCTAD, under Raul Prebisch, sought to transform the nerve centre of global economic relations – the rules governing trade and industrialisation – by proposing radical reform of both the theory and practice of international trade and investment. It is important to remember that UNCTAD was created after GATT, and was in part a response to the failure of developing countries to secure their interests through GATT, especially regarding the problem of commodity dependence. In Prebisch’s writings, the preclusion of

regional associations (other than a full customs union), the inability of GATT to deal with terms of trade problems resulting from commodity dependency, and the preferential market access needs of developing countries made the GATT fundamentally useless to developing countries. These arguments gave birth to UNCTAD and inspired the development of organisations of developing countries such as the G77, the Non-Aligned Countries, and OPEC.

The initial in-roads that UNCTAD and the UN system made to address the asymmetry in the international system also became their undoing and set the stage for a radical backlash in the 1980s. The introduction of the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) to promote preferential market access to manufactured exports of developing countries was swiftly neutralised by the Most Favoured Nations (MFN) tariff reduction negotiated under the GATT. The Integrated Programme on Commodities (IPC), aimed at negotiating 18 commodity agreements for the purpose of stabilising commodity prices at levels remunerative to producers, produced only three short-lived commodity agreements (natural rubber, cocoa and sugar) as developed countries evaded them and placed more attention on the GATT rules.

Perhaps most alarming to developed countries was the 1974 General Assembly decision to launch the New International Economic Order (NIEO), in which more favourable prices of commodities would replace international aid. It tacitly supported import substitution industrialisation within a regional market context. The NIEO was just one of many issues that the developed countries viewed as an effort to redistribute global power and threaten their interests. There were also UNCTAD's initiatives to regulate Transnational Corporations (TNCs) through enforceable codes of conduct, UNESCO's efforts to regulate the press, initiatives such as the Law of the Sea, and the Agreement Governing Activities of States on the Moon and other Celestial Bodies, and the UN system as a whole.

The 1980s, by contrast, represented a significant rollback of certain gains, such as the successful demonstration of practical initiatives aimed at redressing global imbalances and asymmetry through the principle of "special and differentiated treatment" for developing countries. It was the success of these activities that helped to galvanise global consensus favouring redistributive values, as represented by the approval of the NIEO by the UN General Assembly, and it is these values that were seen as a threat. This is the context in which the true purpose of the rapid rollback of the UN's economic development agenda since the 1980s, its confinement to peacekeeping and humanitarian activities, and occasionally its role as a legitimisation tool for the military agenda of the north, should be interpreted. Therefore the degree to which

redistributive values and values of "democratic multilateralism"⁶ were revived in the global conferences, and the amount of consensus unleashed around these values, represent, in my view, a useful framework for evaluation. In this sense, as discussed below, the conferences collectively scored high marks.

It is equally important to understand the nature in which the backlash manifested itself in order to assess the usefulness of the agendas of the conferences and their outcomes in terms of the redistributive principle and the positioning of the UN institution vis-à-vis its rival peers.⁷ How did this rollback manifest itself? This is a large and complex issue far beyond the scope of this paper. For that reason, we will emphasise two issues underlying the two-pronged approach to institutional dismantling (or re-organisation) and the retooling of the economic agenda to re-impose the free-trade ideology.

In terms of institutional dismantling, we can recall such jungle tactics as the use of the US 'power of the purse' to condition change in its interest.⁸ Under the guise of inefficiency, parts of the UN system dealing with social and economic issues were closed, starved of funds or pruned down.⁹ The UN Centre on Transnational Corporations (TNCs) was effectively dismantled and there were moves to close down UNCTAD and UNIDO.¹⁰ The budgets of the specialised agencies such as UNCTAD and the UNDP – institutions that promoted the NIEO rhetoric – were substantially reduced and the US pulled out of UNESCO after failing to have its Secretary General dismissed. Organisations like the UNDP are still convulsing under the pressure of the north to define an agenda and relevance away from the economic sphere.

The backlash was most merciless in the economic development arena. A South Commission report (1999) noted that the developed countries refused to honour their part of the various global development compacts, especially debt relief, market access and aid flows, to enable Third World economies to recover from a period of recession.¹¹

More than anything else, the 1980s represented perhaps the most successful neo-conservative assault in the century, giving birth to an even more formidable phenomenon: globalisation. The neo-liberal assault, using as its excuse the crises of the welfare state in the north, and debt and public finance crises in the south, imposed the discipline of the Washington Consensus, a politically appealing (to the emerging conservative leadership) and logically consistent theory (ignoring the scantiness of its assumptions). The core of this was aimed at dismantling state-assisted capitalism in developing countries (Bello, 2000), including the dismantling of trade protection and investment rules, and opening the way for the untrammelled operations of transnational capital. It challenged the central principle of

the universality of social welfare that underpinned most of the post-war social order, including notions of equity and social justice which were presented as old-fashioned “ideology”, or destined to be swept away by globalisation. In this sense, development as the objective of public action was replaced with such symptomatic indicators as growth and price stability.

Globalisation itself was presented not as a matter of political choice but as an economic necessity and an uncontrollable external force to which governments can do little except follow its dictates or be swept aside by its tide (Mkandawire and Rodriguez, UNRISD, 2000). In this sense, globalisation provided the excuse to set aside the agenda of equity and justice for those governments who chose to do so (ibid).

These disciplines were enforced in multiple ways: through the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the IMF, the World Bank and the Regional Development Banks; through drastic reforms of the aid agenda to conform to the agenda of the BWIs; through attempts to change BWI statutes to make them more aggressive in enforcing liberalisation of trade and finance; and more importantly, through an aggressive use of the WTO to discipline world trade and get the system into shape in the interest of corporations. Of course these dictatorial and repressive measures, and the consequences of inequality and marginalisation that they unleashed, solicited angry public responses throughout the world. They triggered social movements fighting for various causes, ranging from the rights of indigenous people, women, ethnic minorities, and labour, to the protection of the environment, debt cancellation and protection of the poor.

This was the context in which most of the global conferences were held. The UNCED was held in the shadow of the final stages of the Uruguay Round negotiations, which gave birth to the WTO. As such, much of the UNCED agenda naturally “glanced over the shoulder” to the goings-on in Geneva and elsewhere. It was also held at the height of the global environment movement, and a maturing global alliance of north-south development organisations ensured that credible pressure was independently exerted on both the UN system and corporate players. The social development summit and the Beijing Conference were held at the height of what UNRISD calls “states of disarray”. Inequality, unemployment, poverty and social exclusion were at their peak in many countries, while SAPs were on the retreat as exemplified by the efforts, albeit cosmetically, to find human faces for these policies. The Beijing Conference for women was convened in the context of the dual repressive impacts of globalisation and growing religious/cultural fundamentalism on women (see the draft case study presented for discussion by Gita Sen and Bene Madunagu (DAWN), at FORUM 2001, Brisbane, Australia).

The efforts by the developed countries and corporations to reinforce globalisation and fundamentalism of all sorts (including those not limited to the hegemony of the north as pointed out by Sen and Madunagu), and their need to be defensive, owing to a growing popular anger, should be the basis for evaluating the conferences. These conferences inadvertently served two purposes simultaneously: as arenas of protest against, and contestation of, the hegemonic global agenda of developing countries and civil society, and arenas of containment of these angers by corporations and governments of the north. Viewed this way, the basis of the evaluation shifts from the degree of implementation to the nature and extent of compromise. The fact that the UN system was able to carry out the conferences in spite of the context described above, is owed in large measure to the resilience of the UN system in spotting and seizing the opportunity clearly desired by both set of actors for their respective interests.¹² In this context, the conferences served not only to enhance the image of the UN but perhaps more importantly to confront a hitherto “cult of impotence” (Linda McQuaig, 1998).¹³

The nature of the conferences: what has changed?

We have noted that the conferences of the 1990s and early 2000s, whilst representing the tenacity of the UN system and its values, were not unique to the UN’s history. Nevertheless, they were different in context and content, and the dynamics in which they were run. There were also differences between the main conferences and the review processes in terms of profile, quality, and dynamism.

In terms of context – we have argued that both periods were characterised by efforts to confront hegemony and asymmetry, albeit under varying historical circumstances – the 60s and 70s responded to the effects of forced integration (colonisation). In the 90s, there was a response to a different type of forced integration (an ideological assault combined with arm-twisting and occasional military threats) with a larger complicit domestic middle class and a more varied and fractured developing country voice.

The significant differences between the periods lie in three factors: the nature of participation, the issues on the table, and the follow-up mechanisms developed.

In terms of participation, we can identify the following:

1. Civil society organisations had come of age. They brought a combination of informality, resilience, and relative knowledge to bear on the issues. More importantly, unlike in the past, civil society networks integrated their own conferences and activism within the official conference process, bringing their variety and complexity to bear on the conferences, and adding legitimacy to the processes by facilitating direct participation of affected persons at the grassroots levels.

Similarly, civil society networks had become adept at developing institutional structures to manage their participation and follow-up.

2. Similar to civil society networks, the corporate sector had equally refined their public relations machinery to a high level of perfection, having learnt from the anti-TNC movement of the 60s and 70s. They brought to the negotiations a socially and environmentally savvy discourse in the area of business responsibility for sustainable development.
3. There was an evolution of the development aid discourse, which significantly elevated civil society organisations and business organisations into recognised “development partners”, and created more space and access for them than had ever been the case.
4. More sophisticated and enabling communications systems were effectively used in pre-conference consensus building and post-conference monitoring.

It appears, however, that participation in the post-conference processes either nationally (in terms of implementation and monitoring), or through UN official review processes, has not been as successful for reasons we will discuss below.

In terms of content, a number of observations are crucial:

1. Given the crucial twin objectives of the conservative assault – to take economic development out of the UN agenda, and to discredit or discourage social policy – the issues confronted at the conferences may be correctly described as a counter-assault. For example, the debates on the environmental impacts of trade at UNCED strengthened the resolve of CSOs to confront the WTO. Also, in spite of protests by the north at the WSSD to leave macroeconomic issues to the BWIs, the summit declaration included restraints on SAPs. Similarly, the impacts of SAPs were a central feature of the debates in Beijing on the impoverishment and repression of women.
2. Not only was development the central theme of all the conferences, but development was approached in its appropriately inter-linked dimensions. Those dimensions were:
 - the environment, as a crucial reflection of the failure of development and vice-versa,
 - economic development as a sub-set of social development,
 - development as an inherently political issue embedded in history, and
 - unequal power relations at multiple levels (local-global).

These were also set against the multiple dimensions of gender, race, and geographic location (see the draft case studies presented for discussion by Atila Roque, Gita Sen and Bene Madunagu, and Nancy Kachingwe, at FORUM 2001, Brisbane, Australia). This analytical framework ensured that all of the conferences confronted power asymmetry linking the local (household) to the global.

3. The inter-linked analytical framework, brought about in large measure by the civil society movement, not only ensured that the struggle for justice at the global level found roots at local levels, but that the dynamics of local struggles were brought to bear on the global picture. Once the pattern of asymmetry was defined in these ways, different social movements that were once at war with each other found unity on the grounds of common, but differentiated, powerlessness. In this way, they reinforced each other's struggles and unleashed multi-issue networks, for example, combining gender justice with environmental justice (WEDO), gender justice with economic justice (DAWN), or human rights with development rights. This also created the condition for the emergence of national and international platforms to promote post-conference agendas in a multidisciplinary way.
4. In spite of the complexities of the issues, it was still possible to reach compromises in each one. This led to the adoption of declarations and programmes of actions, and/or the reinforcement of an environment for the negotiations of specific binding protocols and conventions such as the Climate Change protocol, the biosafety protocol, and the convention on biological diversity. The declarations of Beijing and Copenhagen were significant in that they re-established global norms on social development and provided ethical support to struggles against globalisation and hegemonic relations in general.

The role played by civil society and the scope of its influence

We have stated that the conferences would have been different without the participation of the civil society actors. But did their influence arise from factors inherent in their identities and purpose, or the nature of their participation? The answer, obviously, is both. Do these same factors explain the limitations of their impact and the resilience of their influence?

The contradictions of identity and purpose

The debate about who represents civil society actors and what they stand for is an inconclusive one, and beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, the tensions in the debate about their identity and purpose are relevant to an

assessment of their impact on the conferences and post-conference processes. Is civil society inclusive of the business sector or is it outside it? Are CSOs associated with specific values and purpose, conflicting ones such as religious fundamentalism and patriarchy, or are they largely products of the international aid system? Are they “bulwarks against institutional despotism” and if so, is the principal source of that despotism perceived to be the state (including inter-state institutions) or the market?

These questions are not just theoretical. They partly explain the differential, and sometimes conflicting, focus of civil society groups all over the world. For example, if civil society is defined by the following – that the state is fundamentally despotic, and civil society’s role is to aid in the struggle for the individual’s freedom from state despotism, then civil society has an essential role as watch dogs over democracy, human rights and freedom. Thus, the relationship with the state can only be one of conflict.

If, however, the purpose of civil society is viewed as being tied to the emergence and despotism of the market – and its focus on freeing the economy from the arena of politics and extra-economic relations – then the source of conflict is integral to interests between classes and groups. The purpose of civil society, then, is to contain the economy within politics. Seen in this way, the essence of civil society is not simply a struggle against state despotism but also against the dominance of the institutions of the market over these interests.

The essence of these distinctions is not to define an either/or approach but to recognise that these factors reflect themselves in the attitude of different civil society organisations. There are those who are essentially antipathic towards the state and governments (including inter-governmental bodies), and others who are antipathic towards the market and their institutions. These attitudes affected inter-NGO relations, manifested most obviously during the UNCED negotiations, and were a defining factor that divided “development” from “environment” NGOs. It appears that whilst these sharp tendencies may have receded over time, they still exist.

But this market/state divide is significant for another purpose: to evaluate the extent to which declarations and plans of action targeted the market compared to the state, and the effectiveness of civil society strategies directed at both. It seems that the preliminary verdict shows we have been more preoccupied with targeting the state than the market and its institutions (except the BWIs) so far, although recently, there is a significant shift in attention of social movements in these directions.

CSO strategies

The success of the transnational civil society movement lies in multiple strategies, the foundations of which were

built in the periods preceding the conferences, and reinforced through self-learning and greater rapprochement. For want of space, we will identify the key elements of this strategy as follows:

1. ***Convergence of values:*** The convergence of values among different social movements over time has been significant in consolidating and amplifying voice. This “voice” has radicalised over time, thanks largely to the feminist movement, and the “coming of age” of developing country NGOs.
2. ***Institutional frameworks for supporting civil society inputs:*** These include identifiable organisations, especially in the north, shouldering the responsibility for raising funds and supporting participation of peoples from the south. This was particularly crucial in the early days. In an ad hoc fashion, they also include the increasingly creative means by which institutional capacity is built in conjunction with the conferences.
3. ***Perseverance and consistency have paid off:*** The perseverance of civil society groups, and the passion with which they approached the issues, eventually produced a hearing. The consistency of the participation of civil society actors from preparatory conferences to review conferences turned CSOs into both technical advisors to government delegations as well as the depository of history. This participation paid off as CSOs were integrated into official delegations.
4. ***Knowledge and capacity for multidisciplinary analysis:*** The ability to relate issues at multiple levels, and the depth of knowledge acquired by some CSOs, made their messages difficult to dismiss. This ability to convey social justice messages, through complex technical language, gained CSOs significant respect, with the result that some became background drafters of negotiating texts for governments (in the north and south). The resilience of this influence is also reflected in the emergence of new forms of negotiating groups such as the Group of Rio (in the Rio+5 process) and the Group of SLAC (in the Beijing+5 process), devoted to integrating a feminist perspective into environment and development issues.
5. ***A supportive international aid discourse:*** The aid discourse favouring the participation of non-state actors created the environment for positive responses to civil society’s demands for more room and resources to support their participation. The effectiveness of civil society’s critique of the global architecture was greatly supported by the retreating positions of the BWIs, which were caught under the weight of failure in the form of growing poverty and inequality.

6. **Practical but innovative mechanisms for follow-up:** Perhaps the most enduring follow-up mechanisms were the emergence of various south-south and north-south issue-based networks and coalitions devoted to collaborating on the basis of their comparative advantages. The Social Watch, as an example, represents more than that. It represents both a movement and a benchmarking tool, each giving shape to the other and together reinforcing the influence on the implementation and review agenda.

Putting the scope and depth of influence in perspective: lessons for the future

We have argued that the achievements of these conferences owe their success in part to the influence of CSOs and their coalitions. What indeed are these achievements and how might we nuance them? In what way have the contradictions inherent in the nature and identity of the civil society movement influenced the scope of impact? What lessons might we learn for the future?

The enduring achievements of the conferences lay largely in three areas. They are reaffirming redistributive social policy (aimed at promoting the right to a life of dignity for every person), re-asserting pluralistic governance, and laying the foundations for a counter-attack on neo-conservatism in order to reinsert the economy in politics at all levels.

Defined this way, it is obvious that all the conferences made progress, but the level of that progress should be qualified.

1. The huge gulf between the commitments made by governments at these conferences and the extent of implementation raises questions as to whether this is a result of inadequate mechanisms, a reflection of the balance of power, or lack of will.
2. The increasing trends in global economic and social inequalities raise questions as to the effectiveness of the strategies directed largely at governments as opposed to the institutions of the market.
3. The increasing control of global norms by acts of unilateralism, or institutions of selective multilateralism, raises questions about the extent to which the global conferences significantly focussed on, or were seen to vote for, democratic multilateralism. The UN institutions continue to be undermined and the economic agenda continues to be promoted through the BWIs and newer shadowy institutions like the G20 and Davos. Does this call for a special effort to engage with the UN specialised institutions to increase their profile, or does it suggest an even narrower focus on the BWIs? Does the intransigence of the US call for a special focus on the US political system or does it call for leveraging the visibility of other political institutions?

4. When we express disappointment about the US withdrawal from the Montreal protocol, we should remind ourselves that former President George Bush (Sr) declared that “the standard of living of the people of the United States of America is not up for negotiation”. Even as Climate Change Protocol was being finalised, studies by the US intelligence community projected US energy consumption would rise by 50% over the next decade or two, making it necessary to maintain the energy-intensive living standards which are declared non-negotiable. If negotiated protocols and conventions can be violated in this way, doesn't it raise questions about the inadequacy of international law in containing those with power? If that is the case, how else can impunity be prevented or contained?

5. The limited nature of policy change at the local level, in spite of the increased focus on domestic governance in developing countries, raises questions as to whether this results from the inability to influence the domestic balance of power, or external actors' dominance over domestic policy. Is there an inability on the part of CSOs to mobilise numbers domestically and to translate the issues to the level of local politics? If there is an inability to organise and mobilise, is this because of communication limitations (e.g. economic literacy) or class distance?

There are also issues related to inter-civil society relations governing the transnational civil society movement for maintaining momentum in post-conference processes. This issue borders on the institutional mechanisms for organising and the power relations inherent in them (as reflected in north/south, gender, environment/development, and elite (intermediate) / grassroots tension). These tensions are articulated in terms of accountability, legitimacy or competing interests.

Are these tensions completely resolvable or are they inherent in all forms of social relations, therefore simply requiring management? If it is the latter, which I believe is the case, what are the issues to bear in mind?

1. **Institutional mechanisms for managing transnational coalitions:** Do some forms of institutional arrangements work better than others? Should we favour transient institutional mechanisms over more entrenched ones to reflect the fact that transnational alliances are essentially “temporary systems” changing in response to the rapidly changing global context (Jane Covey, 2000)? Or are there ways in which longer-lasting institutional frameworks can function, as is the case of the Social Watch? What are the lessons in the Social Watch experience that contrast with the experience of the NGO Committee for the CSD?

2. **The legitimacy issue:** We have argued that the inter-linkages between grassroots movements in the north and south with the more elite groups contributed positively to increasing the profile of civil society input as well as laying the framework for post-conference implementation and monitoring. But what represents legitimacy? Is it representativeness, inclusiveness, or the strength of the values being promoted? How might inclusiveness and greater voice be built on economic issues and global power relations at the grassroots level?
3. **Increasing the convergence of values and agendas:** We have argued that the feminist movement in particular contributed a great deal to bridging the gaps between different dimensions of powerlessness. Are there other parallels in the broader economic justice or environment movements? How might the principle of 'common, but differentiated' be understood and affect bridge building? Will an emerging peace movement, following the events of September 11, be consistent with and reinforce the gender and economic/environmental justice movements, or will it fracture and fractionalise the movement further?
4. **The North/South divide and the future of cooperation:** We have observed that there has been much convergence between NGOs in the north and south in the 1990s, and that these UN Conferences contributed significantly to this. Yet the remaining tensions in collaborative institutional frameworks point to the resilience of these issues rooted in a history of unequal power. What is the best way to manage these issues? How might comparative advantages be built not merely on division of labour but grounded on solidarity?

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- 1 Social policy is defined broadly as principles and actions designed to maximise space for individual and collective choices, and the satisfaction of needs.
- 2 There were at least six conferences in the 1990s: the UNCED in Rio (1992), The Human Rights Conference, Vienna (1993), the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), Cairo (1994), the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD), Copenhagen (1995), Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing (1995) and the Conference on Human Settlements, Istanbul (1996). In addition to these, there were the Conferences on Least Developed Countries often convened by UNCTAD, and many others.
- 3 Article 55 of the UN Charter states that the UN shall provide:
 1. high standards of living, full employment and conditions of economic and social progress and development.
 2. solutions for international economic, social (including health), cultural and educational cooperation.
 3. universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without regard to race, sex, language or religion.
- 4 JA Kregel, (UNCTAD), argues in an article entitled "How economic development disappeared from the UN agenda", that economic development was essentially made the preserve of the BWIs (including the WTO when it later emerged) leaving the UN with effectively no role until the expansion of the UN after decolonisation. Economic development further disappeared in the 1980s with the success of the Washington Consensus. In contrast, Childers, Erskine and Urquhart (1994) argue, in an article entitled "Renewing the UN Systems", that the UN founders clearly intended that responsibility for global economic affairs, including supervision of the BWIs should lie with the UN.
- 5 This was the period that gave birth to UNCTAD (and its Prebisch-inspired preferential policies for developing countries), UNDP (and its emphasis on cross-cutting grant-aided technical assistance to states and state-assisted enterprises in developing countries), and other issue-specific specialised agencies. This period gave birth to such critical human rights covenants and conventions as the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW), as well as various Declarations such as the Declaration on the Right to Development.
- 6 I use the term democratic multilateralism guardedly to distinguish between selective and/or exclusive multilateralism represented by multilateral institutions where participation and influence is defined by the size of one's purse, stock and sophistication of weapons of mass destruction, or any such discriminatory criteria. This is compared to the principle of mass common and equal humanity that underlies participation in the UN system.
- 7 These are the Bretton Woods Institutions: the WTO, OECD and the G7 for broadly defining economic and social policies and the global rules of exchange and international relations.
- 8 The US contributes between 20-25% of the UN budget. The Reagan administration withheld payments on grounds that the UN was using US resources to work against US interests.
- 9 For example, the post of Director-General of International Economic Cooperation and Development, a post central to the NIEO negotiations, was closed.
- 10 The Third World Resurgence (No 56, p.41) carried an article entitled "South Decries moves to close down UNCTAD and UNIDO", which reported that a biased independent Commission on Global Governance made a recommendation to that effect. Taken from Focus on the Global South: "Why reform of the WTO is the wrong agenda" (Feb. 2000).
- 11 "The Challenge of the South" (1999, New York, Oxford Press).
- 12 In the paper, we treat the global civil society movement more or less as having one voice, though this is far from the truth. These actors are riddled with contradictory interests and analysis. In this sense we are narrowing a component of these voices we describe as progressive. Moreover, we generalise that the positions and interests of the progressive civil society on the one hand, and developing country governments on the other hand, coincide. This generalisation is however qualified by Sen and Madunagu.
- 13 By cult of impotence, Linda McQuaig refers to the "there is no alternative (TINA)" or "end of history" phenomenon where globalisation and the Washington Consensus policies were presented as immutable.

Civil Society and the UN Plus-5 Conferences



MANUEL CHIRIBOGA

Each year, Montreal International Forum invites an author to prepare a synthesis of key points of discussion on the annual Forum and provide a summary of the lessons learned. For FORUM 2001, FIM has been privileged to have Manuel Chiriboga act as “rapporteur”.

In addition to preparing the report from FORUM 2001, Manuel provided this analysis of the draft case studies that were presented for discussion at the Forum. FIM is very grateful for his contributions.

An Ecuadorian citizen, Manuel Chiriboga studied sociology at the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium, where he also earned a post graduate diploma in development studies. He has taught at the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, FLACSO, (sede Ecuador), and at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador. Since 1994, he has held the post of Executive Secretary of Asociación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Promoción (ALOP), a Latin-American-wide, forty-five member NGO network. ALOP is a network which promotes participatory development, capacity building, and consensus building with the diverse sectors of civil society. The advocacy and policy work of ALOP focuses primarily on the Multilateral Development Banks and IFIs, regional trade and integration agreements, and aid and development cooperation.

As ALOP’s Executive Secretary, he was elected Chair of the NGO Working Group on the World Bank and Co-Chair of the World Bank NGO Committee. He is also a member of the Steering Committee of the Coalition against Hunger and Rural Poverty; a member of the Steering Committee of the International Forum on Capacity Building (IFCB) as well as being its regional Coordinator; and a member of the Interamerican Development Bank’s (IDB) advisory committee on Women and Gender.

Introduction

The Montreal International Forum (FIM) asked a number of active participants in the plus-5 follow-ups to the United Nations (UN) conferences of the 1990s to reflect on their experiences and draw some lessons that could be useful for similar civil society endeavors. Case study papers were commissioned to serve as a basis for discussion at FORUM 2001, the third annual edition of FIM’s Forum which took place in Brisbane, October 2-4, 2001.¹ The case studies presented for discussion covered the Copenhagen Social Development Summit plus-5 follow-up (Atila Roque); the Cairo and Beijing plus-5 reviews (Gita Sen and Bene Madunagu); the post-UNCED process (Victoria Tauli Corpuz); the implementation of the Kyoto protocol on climate change (Wagaki Mwangi); and the Lomé IV Trade Renegotiations (Nancy Kachingwe) (not a UN-sponsored process but a setting illustrative of important lessons on the role of civil society in the monitoring of existing agreements). All case studies emphasized the role of civil society actors. This paper synthesizes some of their main findings, but also draws on some of the discussions at and additional materials brought to FORUM 2001 in October.

This paper is organized around four broad thematic areas: the significance of the UN plus-5 conferences for civil society organizations; the strategies put forward by them; a discussion of some problems encountered; and the lessons that can be drawn for international advocacy activities of non-government organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs). This paper does not aim to discuss all aspects of CSO and NGO involvement at these processes; it limits itself to the ones identified by the authors and by participants at the FIM Brisbane conference.

The UN plus-5 conferences experience

The 1990s witnessed a number of major conferences dealing with critical elements of the international system. They were designed to systematically deal with issues of environment and development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992);

human rights (Vienna, 1993); population and development (Cairo, 1994); social development (Copenhagen, 1995); women and gender (Beijing, 1995), human settlements (Istanbul, 1996), and food security (Rome, 1996). Each one resulted in a significant number of political agreements, plans of action, and negotiations of binding protocols, which implied responsibilities to governments, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society organizations.

As described in Charles Abugre's paper, these agreements must be seen as the most serious attempt to countervail the neo-liberal policies that had been enacted by the Bretton Woods Institutions, under direction of the US and British conservative governments. These agreements had been an assault on some of the basic concepts that had guided the post-World War II and the decolonization process: the need for a New International Economic Order, international economic justice, and administered trade. The global conferences advanced some critical ideas: reassertion of the importance of development on broader terms than economic growth; a more rights-oriented approach to development; abandonment of a focused group social policy perspective as in the women-only issues, and movement towards mainstreaming gender in the global economic agenda; the importance of international redistribution as a principle that governs relations between developed and developing countries; and the idea of pluralistic governance at all levels. They also made the point of making the UN system the main international governance structure to which the economic Bretton Woods Institutions should be subordinated (Roque, International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW)). Most of these achievements were the direct result of NGO and other civil society activism, working on its own or in alliance with friendly governments and international bureaucrats.

The plus-5 reviews were an overall integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up assessment of each conference. Even though they were constructed on the basis of the work of each functional commission, the review meetings were meant not only to assess, but also hopefully to expand some of the commitments. To that end, they had to bring together all major stakeholders that had participated in the conferences: governments, non-governmental and civil society organizations including major groups and local authorities, inter-governmental organizations, and the private sector (UN Economic and Social Council E/2001/73).

The plus-5 conferences took place under a different context than the one that characterized the original summits and that context was marked by a number of challenges. The first came from the new US conservative government that moved aggressively against some of the international negotiations and, among others, decided to drop out of the Kyoto protocol negotiations on reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (Mwangi), and later, from the 2001 World Conference against Racism, held in South Africa. Challenge also came from fundamentalists, described by Sen and Madunagu as "national, religion-based, ethnic or other identities in which the assertion of "traditional" gender roles and systems of authority is central". These groups were able to hold a number of negotiations to ransom. A third challenge seems to have come from within the UN system, with the signing by the UN, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) of the document entitled *A Better World for All*, which filtered some of the Bretton Woods ideology and proposals (Roque). Finally, some of the criteria and negotiation principles that were being used at the World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations appeared at the Lomé IV trade renegotiations, as the European Union (EU) negotiators pushed for a reciprocal trade agreement – away from the non-reciprocal system that recognizes differences in development (Kachingwe). To a lesser degree these plus-5 conferences had to face some more functional problems:

The US threat and decision not to implement the Kyoto Protocol draws out important lessons for CSOs. The first relates to how CSOs could evaluate a Party's threat to withdraw from a process... a second lesson for CSOs relates to the question of civic education for multilateral processes where major successes of NGOs were awareness-raising on climate change and pressuring governments through media campaigns.

*From "Climate Change: What lessons for NGOs?"
(Wagaki Mwangi), a draft case study presented
for discussion at FORUM 2001.*

government delegates came from diplomatic circles in New York or Geneva, and had not been exposed to discussions at the national level. Also, in many cases inexperienced delegates attended. This is mentioned for the plus-5 conferences on Population, Gender, Social Development, and Environment and Development (Sen, Tauli Corpuz, Roque, ICSW). A second problem came from civil society participants, who came in lesser numbers than to the conferences themselves. A final problem that was strongly evident was stricter measures of security and control, which made access more limited both to the general premises and to the main negotiation meetings.²

In this context civil society delegates had to deal with a number of new challenges. They centered their advocacy efforts in two critical areas: the international governance issue, including UN reform, and the defense and possible expansion of the rights agreed on at the original conferences.

The discussion on the international governance system at the plus-5 conference was a difficult one, as it was

carried out at least in part under the pressure of the US government and its practices. Mwangi, reflecting on the Kyoto protocol negotiations, asks what are the implications of such behavior on future multilateral negotiations and if there is a transition in the international governance system, where one power exercises a veto power to all negotiations. Roque finds that NGOs emphasized the strengthening of the UN system as a way to advance world-scale democracy and reassert the role of the UN General Assembly as the adequate space to discuss macroeconomic aspects against the proposal of OECD countries to have them discussed at economic institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF or the WTO. ICSW also worked in that direction, pointing out the importance of the ECOSOC as the overarching forum for international economic and social policy negotiations.

NGO and civil society organizations who were focused on the plus-5 conferences faced critical agenda dilemmas.

For one, they had to defend and renew what had been achieved at the global conferences of the 1990s, defeating intentions to erase or downgrade these achievements, as conservative and fundamentalist groups tried to do on some of the key gender achievements. But beyond that, groups sought to expand commitments. For the Copenhagen Summit review, Social Watch and other networks defined 10 NGO demands, under what was defined as the Geneva benchmark. These demands were produced through an extensive communication with a broad constituency worldwide. It included mechanisms to control financial flows, well-defined targets for poverty eradication with strict deadlines, promotion for development in Africa and “less developed countries”, gender equality and equity, and an enabling environment for social development (Roque). ICSW for its part worked on an antipoverty pact after a number of regional consultations. The pact includes seven targets comprising specific and measurable targets and time-bound commitments to mobilize resources through matters such as official development assistance (ODA), debt relief, currency transaction taxes, anticorruption measures and military expenditure cuts (ICSW). The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, EUROSTEP, and the World Council of Churches prepared other key papers for the review. While similar, these and Social Watch and ICSW proposals had differences, but they were not necessarily discussed and narrowed. Nonetheless they had a very similar political umbrella.

Cairo+5 and Beijing+5 both had an amazing turnover of country delegates between the first and last negotiations. Over 50% of delegates from capitals were not familiar with the original documents or with the specifics of the controversies linked to the text under negotiation. Above all, there was often a disparity between “mission delegates”, who were indifferent to the agenda for gender-justice, and the more progressive delegates arriving from capitals. Consequently, at Cairo+5 and Beijing+5, a fundamental task of the international women’s networks was to inform, support and orient the “friendly delegations”.

From “Between Globalization and Fundamentalism: Gender justice in the Cairo+5 and Beijing+5 Reviews” (Gita Sen and Bene Madunagu), a draft case study presented for discussion at FORUM 2001.

The plus-5 strategies: the positive lessons

Advocating for new global governance rules and defending and expanding the 1990s conference commitments implied a number of concrete steps for the NGO and CSO networks and coalitions regarding the involvement of their membership, the interaction with other coalitions, and the search for more innovative governance structures.

While the presence at the plus-5 conferences was limited to a rather small number of such alliances and networks, many of them involved a much broader group in the preparation of their proposals and advocacy points. In the case of Social Watch this was done through a network of “social watchers” groups present in a number of countries, and by having active discussions with them through the internet. In the case of ICSW, this was done

through nine regional preparatory conferences representing southern and transition countries. In the case of the discussions leading to the Lomé IV trade agreements, the core group of African, Caribbean and Pacific Group (ACP) CSOs who were involved organized a significant number of national and sub-regional workshops and seminars. The preparations for the Cairo+5 and Beijing+5 took a similar path. These internet communication strategies and the face-to-face meetings not only brought together a critical mass of civil society and NGO activists, but also helped link the specific problems and struggles at the national and local levels to the

international discussion. As Roque says, “they provided the institutional basis for national NGOs to play an increasingly active role in building global agendas... introducing local struggles and political processes into the discussions.”³ This approach helped close the divisions between northern and southern groups and developed a truly global platform (Roque).

While these very creative mechanisms of consultation were used within networks and alliances, other steps were taken to bridge with other peer coalitions and alliances, to strengthen their voice and presence. In facing the attack of fundamentalists, Sen and Madunagu mention that “women’s organizations had to overcome their own internal disagreements and build strong coalitions across the global divides.” These divides reflected differences not only in positions on policy issues but also differences between

northern and southern agendas. As noted, “even the more progressive development NGOs (had the tendency) to leave gender equality to be struggled over by women’s organizations.” This bridging is also present in the social development arena, although it seems to work around families of networks.⁴ The bridging in the Lomé IV was done by a diverse group of subregional NGO networks and support organizations, covering most of the ACP region, which came together to form an apex ACP civil society forum.

Regarding the governance structure of NGOs and CSOs participating in the plus-5 conferences, basically two models can be observed: a centrally organized mechanism, and a less structured one by which each major group or network searches to develop its work, with minimum consultation with others. In the case of the early conferences – Environment and Development, and Human Rights – a well-structured mechanism was established at the conference or soon after: the CSD NGO Steering Committee, and the Global NGO forum respectively. Each brought together representatives from the major groups present at the Conference, had a formal steering committee, chairs and secretariats, and were designed to support the continuous presence, contribution, and participation of NGOs in the implementation and review of the conference. This approach has been called a caucus-led approach to policy development. They surfaced as initiatives of the NGOs themselves, as shown by the CSD NGO Steering Committee. After UNCED, and on the occasion of the first two meetings of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, NGOs decided to establish the CSD NGO Steering Committee, as a “self-organized, coordinating body representing NGOs and other major groups identified in Agenda 21 – with both southern and northern Co-Chairs and representatives of issue caucuses, major groups, and regional networks from major regions of the world (Tauli Corpuz).⁵ In the case of the Lomé IV, a similar mechanism was established.⁶

In the case of the other more recent plus-5 reviews no such mechanism was established, even though it seems to have been suggested by the UN officials. This less structured mechanism, based on constructive autonomy of major caucuses, groups and regional networks, has benefited strongly from the communications revolution brought about by the internet (listservs, world wide web pages, etc.), as it helps groups located in very different parts

of the world interact amongst themselves. It requires, however, the political will to reach out from their specific constituencies, to bring in at least a common umbrella of action points, even though each group keeps a specific agenda. This seems to have worked positively in the case of the Social Development+5 review, but also at the Cairo and Beijing reviews.

For CSOs to work effectively at the plus-5 conferences their work had to begin at the outset of the summits themselves and they had to maintain a presence at the functional commission meetings in the interim. This work involved a number of functions ranging from traditional information sharing to complex monitoring of results. In the first case, the central coordinating mechanisms were based in New York or Geneva and helped distribute information through steering committee members to the constituencies of caucuses, groups, and regional and

specialized networks. ICSW and the CSD NGO Steering Committee regularly published bulletins and magazines that sought to bring analysis and useful information to constituencies. A more complex and innovative experience was the one of Social Watch. Roque states that “Dialogue between the Development Caucus and the other networks... was essential in shaping the perception of the need for a mechanism to keep governments under ongoing monitoring regarding the Copenhagen agreements.” To assure a global perspective by which all governments, north and south,

would be monitored, they developed the Index of Fulfilled Commitments, which helped compare countries to their own previous achievements. Using the index, national platforms were set where networks, social movements, NGOs, intellectuals, and other actors came together to dialogue and develop campaigns regarding their own governments. Thus national processes were strongly linked to global advocacy done at the meetings of the Commission on Social Development, where the international report was launched (Roque).

A critical element in the lead-up to the 5-year review was the NGO presence at the functional commissions meetings, but also at regional prepComs and specialized consultations and activities. While only a few NGOs were able to attend all of them, some played critical roles in consulting widely in their constituencies to help deepen NGO involvement. Nonetheless, these meetings were not

After the euphoria of the Earth Summit the real work followed. Civil society actors reshaped some of their activities to fit within the framework of Agenda 21. Many more NGOs emerged. At the first session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), held in April 1993, civil society organized itself, and the traditional morning and evening briefing sessions were held. Things were worked out and representatives of some of the Major Groups presented interventions at the plenaries and high-level segments.

From “Civil Society Participation in the Post-UNCED Process: Lessons learned” (Victoria Tauli Corpuz), a draft case study presented for discussion at FORUM 2001.

always organized in a way that supported a constructive dialogue, and much of the effort was geared toward opening space for NGOs and CSOs. In many cases NGO delegates could not get involved in the drafting process, an element that is still dependant on the will of the commission presidency.⁶ This was not an obstacle when NGO members were part of the governmental delegations.

In some cases these preparatory workshops and seminars helped forge stronger alliances with government delegates who would go to the negotiation meetings and the plus-5 reviews. Nancy Kachingwe from MWENGO demonstrates how multi-stakeholder meetings were organized to bring together governments, CSOs, and academics. These meetings helped not only with the possibility of influencing African government positions, but they also strengthened their negotiating capabilities by “bringing forward new analysis, or supplementing and corroborating arguments against the Regional Economic Partnership Agreements (REPAs)”, the free trade proposal put forward by the EU.⁷ ICSW calls this ‘constructive regionalism’ and sees within it the possibility for a more balanced negotiation table, since at global negotiations, northern groups have more leverage.

At the plus-5 conferences themselves, NGOs and other CSO actors played critical roles once they defined their targets and concerns. This implied identifying key allies (and foes) both in government delegations, and within UN agencies and multilateral institutions, and working with them to ensure success in their endeavors. This was much more successful when NGOs had worked at the national and regional level. Roque states that “the social mobilization capacity of some national platforms and the dialogue channels that opened up with their respective governments reflected positively on the intergovernmental process.” At the review itself, NGOs had to work hard to “bring to speed weak and inexperienced delegations on the complexities, both technical and political, of the negotiations.” They also worked to support the building of strategic coalitions among governments that could defeat the conservative coalitions and groups. A key success in that direction was the establishment at Beijing+5 of the group known as Some Latin American Countries (SLAC), which was instrumental in achieving the goals that NGOs had defined (Sen and Madunagu). Relations with governments were not always forthcoming. Mwangi analyzes the difficulty in trying to influence the US government position at the Kyoto negotiation table, where

the US eventually chose to drop out. Her document argues that in such cases NGOs and CSOs should put more emphasis on public opinion education, both nationally and at the state level, which is critical in federal governments.

Finally, a critical element of NGO activism at the plus-5 reviews was relations with the academic circles and the scientific community. This, in most cases, strengthens NGO capacity to influence negotiations. These inputs brought in by NGOs helped both at the national and regional fora, but also at the intergovernmental level. At the national level, NGOs, as in Africa, produced a number of documents which were instrumental in preparing governmental negotiators. At the intergovernmental level, comparative analysis gave them an overall perspective, which many individual delegations lacked.

The plus-5 strategies: some problems identified

I would like to mention problems linked to conflict resolution within the NGO and CSO community, problems linked to NGO primary stakeholder relations and those linked to accountability and legitimacy. There are probably others, but these appear more prominent from the analyzed documents.

Conflicts between NGO coalitions are relatively common. One way these conflicts manifest themselves is through presenting similar yet competing agendas as is the case of Social Watch (Antipoverty Convention) and ICSW (Anti-poverty Pact). Both groups interacted for advocacy purposes

and to secure access, but not for harmonizing policy differences. As Roque noted, “there was no public debate. In fact, the UN environment, geared mainly to pressure governments, does not facilitate confrontation between opposing views between civil society organizations, as if the non-written principle of consensual decision making was also in force among CSOs and networks” (Roque). In this case a more conscious effort to discuss these views should probably have been encouraged, as was the case between the feminist NGOs at the Cairo and Beijing processes (Sen and Madunagu).

Conflicts seem to have been more acute in the case of the CSD NGO Steering Committee as shown in internal documents and by Tauli Corpuz. In this case the conflict between the two co-chairs, and probably between other members, arose from differences regarding procedures and application of internal rules. These are presented as a “relationship that was strained. Claims and counterclaims of lack of accountability and transparency were made”

Formulating the Index of Fulfilled Commitments has created a reference point which did not exist in any previous follow-up processes for other conferences in the social cycle. This has reminded governments that they are no longer meeting just among themselves in the UN halls and meeting rooms. Above all, it has focused attention on the fact that promises put to paper should have practical consequences in national and international policies.

From “The Copenhagen+5 Process and the Social Watch Experience: Notes for a debate” (Atila Roque), a draft case study presented for discussion at FORUM 2001

(Tauli Corpuz). These claims were felt by many of the caucuses, groups, and regional gatherings as having an impact on the efficacy of NGOs regarding the negotiation process. As a result, discussion took place to evaluate the functioning of the Steering Committee and the search for a less rigid mechanism, where caucuses could reinvigorate and reinvent themselves. Constructive autonomy seems the path forward. In this case, serious differences among the co-chairs could not be solved through the existing structured mechanism (the steering committee), and as a result, a solution is being sought through an alternative mechanism. Again there seems to be no built-in channel where such differences can be aired, confronted, and resolved.

Conflicts are bound to exist among civil society organizations. They come from alternative and competing agendas, from differences between leadership, but also from differences in power and access, as Sen and Madunagu describe in their paper on the Cairo and Beijing plus-5 reviews. In these cases differences in agenda were linked to north-south agenda priorities: individual rights or engendered development. "These tensions were gradually resolved, through sustained efforts at building alliances, and the agenda for gender justice was articulated and legitimized at the global level. This...consensus was anchored in the indivisibility, integral character, and the universality of human rights...and the notion that an enabling environment is a prerequisite for fulfilling women's rights." This path of substantive discussion was not explored in the other cases.

While NGOs and CSOs present at the plus-5 reviews were able to discuss issues with their constituencies and produced an agenda consensus, this was done mostly in relation to intermediary organizations such as NGOs or people's organizations. It did not involve community organizations and primary stakeholders in a significant way. As Kachingwe notes "workshops and seminars did not take place at the grassroots/community level and were mainly urban based." While electronic communications favor intense exchanges between parties located in very diverse geographical locations, it still limits itself to those who have telephone and internet connections. Primary stakeholders are particularly excluded. Additionally the kind of language and jargon used at international gatherings increases such exclusion.

Organizations dealt with this through the establishment of national platforms (Roque), regional and sub-regional workshops (ICSW, Kachingwe), and information bulletins and publications (Dodds, ICSW), but there seems to be no sustained effort to do awareness building and strengthen capacities at the local level.

Finally there are problems linked to accountability of NGOs and CSOs working at the UN plus-5 reviews. Regarding downward accountability *par rapport* to their membership, groups working in the UN system are diverse with respect to their membership status, financial or information power, strength of their ideas, and their life span. Looking at the main actors portrayed, this diversity is shown in membership. In the case of the CSD NGO Steering Committee, its constituency is the caucus, the special groups, and the regional gatherings. For Social Watch, it is their national platforms; for ICSW it is its

membership and its regional and sub-regional seminars and workshops. For the Cairo and Beijing processes, it is the women's and feminist movement, including organizations and individuals; for the ACP civil society forum, it is a mix of NGO support organizations and networks and also its multi-stakeholder seminars and workshops. And for the Kyoto processes, it is a group of mostly environmental organizations. As for Social Watch and ICSW, both have accountability mechanisms regarding their membership and their constituencies (Roque, ICSW).

NGO and CSO accountability cannot be reduced to membership and constituencies. It also involves horizontal accountability to peers, and more structural accountability to the broader population. As Mwangi suggests, a lack of continued effort on civic education undermines the capacity of achieving results at the multilateral negotiation table. This goes beyond efforts done to publicize activities through publications and web pages. It involves working with the media, and also mobilizing at the grassroots. It has to do with transparency and accountability to other NGO and CSO organizations, with whom they sit at the table to plan advocacy campaigns. It also involves working with, and in some cases strengthening, the capacities of developing country negotiators, as Kachingwe shows. It involves the increasing acceptance by UN assemblies to have NGO representatives address them.

The legitimacy of NGOs and CSOs does not come from accountability and transparency practices alone. It is also linked to universal values and human rights, as best stated

One significant development of the process was the engagement of CSOs beyond a national level. A particularly important activity was the 1997 formation of an ACP civil society forum, involving sub-regional organisations from the ACP regions, which created a framework for continued discussion and collaboration with different actors. By contrast, workshops and seminars did not take place at the grassroots/community level and were mainly urban-based. Partnerships between regional organisations, which have exposure to global issues, and social movements, which have a popular base/constituency, are critical to bring issues to community level in the future.

From "The Lomé IV Trade Renegotiations: Assessment of African civil society interventions" (Nancy Kachingwe), a draft case study presented for discussion at FORUM 2001.

in the international covenants on human rights and the capacity to struggle for their universality. Ultimately, this also creates a necessary link between legitimacy on the one hand, and values and mission on the other hand.

The plus-5 strategies: some general lessons

Are there some general lessons to be extracted from the NGO and CSO involvement at the plus-5 review processes for NGO advocacy at the global level?

Global structures or loose alliances?

There seems to be a strong argument for what we have called alliances built on constructive autonomy as the best organizational and governance structure for NGOs and CSOs involved in international advocacy. Bringing together networks, caucuses, regional alliances, and special groups, when interacting with intergovernmental institutions, requires creative organizational solutions, which should at least accomplish two purposes: becoming a forum for sharing agendas and producing overall consensus action points through discussion of diverse perspectives; and strengthening the overall negotiation capacity vis-à-vis international institutions, to open spaces for CSOs at the negotiation table. This type of creative autonomy alliance gives each group the chance to develop its advocacy efforts and bring and share their innovations and creativity, while at the same time creating space for consensus building. Global structures have the risk of outliving their functionality or strengthening non-accountable leaderships. The absence of a global forum, steering committee or similar structures, where competing groups meet, would weaken overall NGO and CSO efficacy.

Legitimacy or accountability?

Legitimacy and accountability questions are critical for NGOs and CSOs involved in international advocacy. This relates to critical ethical questions that they have to face; questions on transparency, efficacy in achieving goals, devolution of its membership and constituencies, and also to primary stakeholders on whose behalf they speak, development of partnerships and horizontal accountability mechanisms to their peers, and independent evaluation. While most accountability efforts are organized around obligations to memberships and constituencies, insufficient effort is given to broader legitimacy and accountability questions such as the ones mentioned.

Dealing with conflict

Conflict is inherent to NGO and CSO advocacy experiences. Undeniable realities exist: competing agendas, strong leaderships, differences in access to the negotiation tables, and power differences with respect to access to

government negotiators, information, and resources. There are also structural conflicts regarding the north-south divide. Recognizing these realities should be the first step in finding creative ways to handle them. A second critical step is the will to discuss differences in a more open way. The women's movement experience shows how this will was essential in achieving results at the Cairo and Beijing processes. A third step is to build arenas within NGO and CSO processes where differences can be recognized and confronted. This will not necessarily help solve differences, but hopefully it can help find common ground.

Collaboration or conflict: dealing with governments

Every experience discussed shows that working with governments and their delegates is a critical element in achieving results. While most NGOs and CSOs have complex political relations with governments at home – NGOs and CSOs are normally part of the democratic opposition – working with governments at international negotiations needs to be done. This includes a wide range of areas of collaboration: strengthening capacities, training delegations in technical and political areas, helping to establish country groups around specific agenda items, or influencing drafting. Sometimes this is done through insider politics, and being part of government delegations; sometimes it is done through outside pressure. Collaborating with governments does not preclude conflict and street pressure. In most cases an adequate combination of both is needed to achieve results.

Exchanging experiences

A final lesson is linked to one of FIM's mandates: the need to have a more systematic exchange regarding experiences on international advocacy. While influencing international negotiations is still a relatively new area of NGO and CSO activity, there has been an intensive learning process and an increasing body of literature around it. Unfortunately, there are still limited spaces for cross-fertilization between groups working in different international scenarios. There is also a need to develop better instruments to monitor activities done by NGOs and CSOs to eventually signal problems. This can only come from drawing more general lessons from our work.

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- 1 A separate paper (A Report on the Brisbane 2001 Forum) synthesizes the broader discussions that took place.
- 2 This was presented as a direct consequence of the protests that had taken place around international summits, starting with Seattle and aggravated by the September 11 attacks. However, this seems not to be the only reason.
- 3 An ECOSOC document, (E/2000/57) mentions 14,000 individuals representing major groups participating at the 19th session of the General Assembly. Regarding the World Conference on Human Rights, it mentions the Global NGO forum presenting a final document, after a significant consultation. On the conference on population, it lists 153 NGOs participating in the 5-year review. On the Women and Gender review, it lists 3,106 representatives participating in the assembly.
- 4 Roque mentions "the Copenhagen follow-up attracted a relatively smaller number of Civil Society Organizations, (which) constrained the range of alliances and cooperation with other civil society actors. Among the closest partnerships with Social Watch, the partnerships with the Dawn network and with the Eurostep and SAPRIN networks deserve special mention... However there was no public debate (with ICSW)."
- 5 The history behind this is synthesized by Tauli Corpuz in the following way: As a result of an initiative of the Centre for Our Common Future, a United-Kingdom-based NGO, a meeting was organized, where it was decided to create the International Facilitating Committee to help NGO participation at the UNCED conference, though it was not mandated to be an NGO political body. The International Non Governmental Organizations Forum, INGOF, established later, sought to become such a body, although other groups continued to prepare alternative declarations. At the conference itself, various groups, especially along the north-south and the development-environment divides, held very intense discussions, which helped bridge and develop common position points. See also, Felix Dodds, *From the Corridors of Power to the Global Negotiation Table: The NGO Steering Committee of the Commission on Sustainable Development*, in M. Edwards and J. Gaventa, *Global Citizen Action*, Rienner, 2001.
- 6 UNED Forum, Volume II, issues V and VII.
- 7 She goes on to say that these did not completely strengthen the African governments' capacity at the negotiation table, where the EU not only used arguments, but also tactics.



A Report on the Brisbane 2001 Forum

by Manuel Chiriboga

Introduction

The Montreal International Forum (FIM) organized its third annual meeting, FORUM 2001, on October 2-4, 2001, in Brisbane, Australia. The topic of the forum was “Civil Society – The UN+5s and beyond – The participation of civil society actors in the review and implementation of major UN summit agreements: lessons and opportunities.” The purpose of the forum was clear: learn from the experiences of civil society organizations (CSO) and non-government organizations (NGO) with respect to their involvement in the UN plus-5 reviews, and identify opportunities for civil society to monitor and contribute to implementing the formal process beyond the UN. Like many international events, FIM’s FORUM 2001 was impacted by the September 11 terrorist attacks, which had happened just three weeks prior. This modified the original focus of the debates and permeated every discussion we had. In fact, at the opening session, participants chose to make an assessment of the impact of the terrorist attacks on international civil society advocacy as one of its main topics. Other topics and work groups included issues on working with other civil society groups, trade unions, the private sector and governments; the requirements of capacity building when dealing with international advocacy on analysis of structures and organizations that intervene in international advocacy; and the experience of the UN plus-5 reviews.

The September 11 terrorist attacks and their implications for international civil society

The Brisbane meeting happened less than a month after the suicide attacks on New York and Washington, and in the midst of the United States establishing an international coalition to wage war against terrorism. It also happened shortly after the UN Conference on Racism ended without resolution and the US and Israeli delegations pulled out. In many ways, these dramatic events shaped FORUM 2001. In fact, the Brisbane Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) that was to happen immediately after the FORUM was cancelled. Moreover, a number of people

who were supposed to attend the FORUM could not come because of increased international travel security, which affected both flights and visas. It was only logical that the implications of September 11 became a central piece of our discussions. Participants discussed the possible implications for multilateralism and international civil society, the risks and opportunities that they implied, and how they would affect some of the coming international summits, such as the WTO meeting at Doha, the Mexico Summit on Finance for Development, and the Johannesburg WSSD (Rio+10) conference.

As participants in FORUM 2001 we condemned the acts of violence against civilians, acts which took many thousands of lives from very different parts of the world, using civilian airplanes as suicide instruments. These acts are despicable from the perspective of the values we defend as civil society activists, since we condemn every single violation of human rights.

The September 11 dramatic events happened just a few days after the Durban UN Conference on Racism ended. Although Durban was almost immediately forgotten, there is still a need for an analysis of the causes linked to the failure of this important UN conference. This was the most recent in a series of steps against multilateralism taken by the new US government. Immediately after the Bush government inauguration, the US started a systematic defiance of most international negotiations: dropping out of the Kyoto protocol negotiations, refusing to commit itself to the International Criminal Court agreement, and refusing to negotiate, in a serious way, treaties such as those banning or curbing the use of anti-personnel mines, small arms and chemical and biological arms. Also, its backing of the belligerent Sharon government of Israel and its repression of the Palestinian people contributed to a sense of a US government acting out of its own electoral concerns, without consideration for international public opinion and, in this case, for Arab countries.

The September 11 terrorist acts could have become an opportunity to move away from such practices and embrace multilateralism as a way to prosecute terrorists. The International Criminal Court seems the natural venue

where these groups should be judged in an impartial way, without the danger of creating a sense of conditioned justice. It could also have been an opportunity to go beyond the repression of terrorist groups to a much broader perspective on human security that seeks to uproot its deep causes: poverty, exclusion, increasing concentration of wealth, cultural homogenization, and discrimination. Moving to identify and freeze the financing of terrorism could open venues for more controls on short-term speculative capital flows where such funds are hidden.

These US practices have also undermined and affected the credibility of the United Nations as the main forum to discuss and act on the main problems of humanity. It has also weakened the UN in its impartial role in dealing with terrorism and peacekeeping, and in reconstruction and development. There is the danger of transforming the UN into the relief arm of an international system, based on the power of one country. The crisis of the UN and its agencies should be seen as an opportunity to think about ways that it can be reformed to be more representative of the peoples and citizens of the world and to have a more transparent decision-making system. This implies moving from a concept of multilateralism as a nation-state-based system, to one “grounded” in societies, with a “bottom-up” legitimacy.

In this context we were seriously concerned with the US President’s statement about making the struggle against terrorism a new way of aligning countries: being with the US on the battle against terrorism, or being on the side of terrorism and against the US. While there is a group of US officials committed to the UN system and multilateralism, who have tried and succeeded in establishing a military coalition against terrorism, they have not been able or willing to use this opportunity to further strengthen the UN system. International civil society has to reaffirm its commitment to a critical perspective on globalization and its shortcomings, and to the defense of a pluralistic multilateralism and human rights. We cannot be immobilized by

the fear of being targeted as being against a US-led international system. In fact, we should champion a people-based, value-oriented, pluralistic, multilateral system.

In this context we face a complex dilemma: should we center our advocacy efforts on the US and its public opinion and political system, or should we continue to work on a more multilateral perspective, without a particular focus in that country? While there was a consensus on continuing to work with a multilateral perspective, we need to work more in depth with US civil society, and involve them in defending the values of pluralistic multilateralism.

We stated our concerns about the impact of the terrorist attacks on civil rights. As a consequence of the attacks, a number of countries are discussing and passing new legislation that raises important concerns from human rights and liberties perspectives. Expansion of arrest time before trial, possible use of military juries, e-mail and expanded telephone tapping, and increased migration controls and procedures are some of the more worrisome developments. These are fostering a cycle of fear, which is being accelerated with the support of a terrified public. In some cases conservative commentators have insinuated an association between anti-globalization protests and terror attacks.

These acts of terrorism have happened at a time when a new generation of civil society activists is coming of age. The active participation of young people at the protests in Seattle, Quebec City, and Genoa are signs for optimism regarding a more people-centered international system. Their critical voices were heard on issues such as the homogenization of global culture on the basis of one cultural output by finance-led, multinational-corporation-based, entertainment industry players; their commitment to a clean and sustainable planet; and their struggle for citizen control of an increasingly estranged political decision system.

Their voices have been integral parts of the renewal of international civil society. Working with such groups on issues such as pluralistic multilateralism and the need for international law to deal with criminality and its financing should be actively sought. This would also

On Building Coalitions:

Social Watch’s main contribution was to facilitate building reliable bridges between negotiation processes, lobbying and monitoring initiatives in the UN and struggles and priorities defined in accordance with national political processes. This was achieved by incorporating both Northern and Southern organizations side by side into its network, and required a two-pronged “translation” effort: what had been negotiated at the international spheres had to make sense at national levels; and national political processes should have an impact on international negotiations. To the extent that it achieved this twofold objective, Social Watch gained political density.

From “The Copenhagen+5 Process and the Social Watch Experience: Notes for a debate” (Atila Roque), a draft case study presented for discussion at FORUM 2001.

Other ways of organizing civil society within the CSD process should be explored and done. The reinvigoration of the caucuses and more active participation in the national, sub-regional, regional, thematic and expert group processes is important.

From “Civil Society Participation in the Post-UNCED Process: Lessons learned” (Victoria Tauli Corpuz), a draft case study presented for discussion at FORUM 2001.

In the 1970s and 1980s, tensions were at play within the feminist field itself, particularly in regard to the differences between Northern and Southern women’s agendas. In the 1990s, these tensions were gradually resolved through sustained efforts at building alliances, and the agenda for gender justice was articulated and legitimized at the global policy level. This global feminist consensus was anchored in the indivisibility, integral character, and universality of human rights, as adopted in Vienna, and the notion that an enabling political and economic environment is a prerequisite for fulfilling women’s rights.”

From “Between Globalization and Fundamentalism: Gender justice in the Cairo+5 and Beijing+5 Reviews” (Gita Sen and Bene Madunagu), a draft case study presented for discussion at FORUM 2001.

limit a possible negative impact of September 11 on their mobilization. The idea of breaking with a cycle of fear and speaking out on these critical issues should be encouraged.

International civil society also needs to look at itself in the aftermath of September 11. We need to engage with civil society in Arab and Islamic countries, of which we do not know enough. Pluralism and cultural diversity in the context of respect for the International Covenants and Charters on Human Rights should become essential parts of international civil society. International civil society also has to voice its concerns on the subject of racism and cultural stereotyping regarding Arab and Islamic populations, and migrants in general, who today are part of most plural societies. In that context every one of our meetings and networks should make a special effort to involve organizations coming from these countries.

International civil society has to look at issues such as human and personal security. While this is a cornerstone of the birth of international civil society, the struggle against nuclear warfare and for international peace – with the end of the Cold War – resulted in these issues being put aside. Although we recognize the incredible effort made by a number of NGOs to bring relief and save lives under the most difficult situations, such as those in Afghanistan, we need to work more on the relation between emergency, conflict resolution, and development. This could help us identify the root causes of violence or at least its appeal to sectors of the population under specific conditions. Human and personal security should deal with removing those structural causes of violence. In this area there are ample possibilities to strengthen the role of the multilateral system and for a stronger relationship between the UN and NGOs.

International civil society should use both its domestic and its international networks to discuss these concerns and issues. NGOs should engage at the national level with trade unions, peasant groups, and indigenous peoples organizations to discuss these issues systematically and explore new paths of action. This will help counteract the possible negative impact of September 11. The World Social Forum provides an opportunity to explore these issues in depth and find consensus on the ways forward.

Lastly, international civil society should prepare for the next international negotiation events such as the WTO meeting in Qatar, the Finance for Development Summit in Mexico, and the Johannesburg UNCED+10 conference. These are critical events that require our active presence. They will also show how the international negotiation system will adapt to the new international context. They can also provide the opportunity to engage with representatives of Arab and Islamic civil society, whose members should be encouraged to participate actively. In that direction the Beirut civil society conference in preparation for the Qatar WTO meetings was a move in the right direction.

Building international coalitions from the ground up

- International advocacy has meant, in many cases, putting aside advocacy at the regional, national, and local levels. The attraction of “going international” in response to invitations from intergovernmental organizations and international NGOs and networks, and the comparative ease of accessing negotiators and international bureaucrats and being heard by them, has meant that global advocacy is not grounded enough for some countries and groups. This is in turn facilitated by the behavior of governments, willing to be “progressive” at the international level and with UN discourse, but keeping civil society under control at the national level. As a result of this, many of the agreements signed internationally have no real bearing at the national level. In some cases this is a result of harsh political conditions in some countries, where no political space is given to civil society. Under these circumstances, NGOs and CSOs use what is known as a boomerang strategy, where work at the international level is done to pressure repressive governments and open space for civil society. This strategy, however, has shown its limitations in most circumstances, as governments do not always respond to international pressure or react to it with “lip service”.
- Political conditions are a critical element when doing advocacy work. While in some countries there are ample opportunities for negotiating government positions to be brought to international forums, establishing national platforms of action, and “domesticating” and “nationalizing” international agreements, this is not the case everywhere. In some countries, repressive governments limit NGO activity to channeling emergency aid. Nonetheless, even in those countries, there are possibilities of expanding such limits. National civil society is best qualified to understand the political culture and context of a country and to operate within it, expanding the limits for democratic rule.
- Working nationally requires efforts to advance democracy in domestic politics. This implies working with, and advocating for, more democratic institutions at all levels: the executive, the parliament, the political parties, the regional, state, provincial, and local governments and parliaments, the legal system and so on. In the case of international agreements, it means having them known and ratified; including them in national legislation, having parliaments informed about them; doing domestic follow-up in the form of national platforms of action; having regional or local action plans and monitoring efforts, and so on. Only when a sense of ownership is developed regarding international

agreements will negotiated positions mean something ultimately. In some cases this will imply conflicts with organizations and institutions within the political system, when there is disagreement on fundamental issues such as trade. In those circumstances more work has to be done with public opinion.

- Doing advocacy work has its risks. Intermediary organizations can work with governments and the political system without involving grassroots and people's organizations. Involving the latter means extra work but informing them is a requirement. It requires working with them, discussing implications of such agreements, and knowing what "take" they have on a specific issue. Working with grassroots organizations must be complemented with more technical work, for which serious research is necessary. To that end, resources must be assigned for working directly or through alliances with research institutions. Such research can take an academic approach to an issue or use a case study approach from which implications can be learned. This second alternative has the merit of exposing a specific problem to local conditions, but it is also friendlier for working with community organizations.
- Advocacy requires work at the local, provincial, national, regional, and international levels. For each level, a specific coalition should be established, where all those that work on an issue should come together. At the same time, adequate information-flow systems should be designed to ensure that positions and proposals are grounded at the grassroots level, while at the same time information on strategies and results are channeled back from the negotiating groups. A critical element of advocacy work is NGO and CSO coordination, since the dispersion of activities of different groups pursuing similar purposes, through simultaneous but not well-connected activities, weakens the end results. A matrix of who does what, workshops to get to know each other, and hopefully, joint strategizing has to be pursued.

- Experience has shown that national coordination can be helped by "regionalization". Even though regionalization is a political process, as shown by the MERCOSUR or the SADEC experience, it is built around relationships based on proximity, history, or culture. It can also be a process undertaken by civil society itself, creating bottom-up regionalization. Such dialogue

involving civil society with their government or other actors has to be done out of national concerns and should be geared towards finding common interests, both regarding internal processes and in relation to external forces or institutions. Regionalization does not substitute for national activity, but it complements it better than international activities. Finding those common interests or proposals requires time to help build trust and a common experience. Variations regarding political systems and culture, and diversity regarding capacity and legitimacy of civil society organizations must also be recognized. Working regionally has other benefits: it can bring together different CSO and NGO capacities and expertise, which can complement each other, and it can also harness an interactive learning process, though which an organization in one country can learn from its neighbor. It can also help to construct a regional perspective and find alternatives, coming from variations in country policies. To that end adequate CSO and NGO structures should be constructed, in the form of networks, as national NGO and CSO associations and umbrella organizations, support centers, or specialized research structures. Regional structures can also help to construct multi-sector dialogues and alliances, bringing together trade unions, NGOs, indigenous peoples organizations and so on, which can

broaden and enrich perspectives through diversity. Working regionally helps to soften political differences, which have a stronger impact at the national level.

Constructing alliances with other social actors

Trade unions

NGOs should look beyond themselves for advocacy purposes, as other civil society actors are not only active

On Learning from Others:

Sharing between the CSD NGO Steering Committee and the various NGO coordinating mechanisms of UN processes like the Social Summit, Habitat, Women, etc. could have been undertaken so lessons learned could be used by any of these bodies. A matrix could be done to compare the various civil society formations and mechanisms adopted and used at the different UN processes.

From "Civil Society Participation in the Post-UNCED Process: Lessons learned" (Victoria Tauli Corpuz), a draft case study presented for discussion at FORUM 2001.

Even though organisations' planned activities were within their internal frameworks, there was a great deal of cooperation and interaction between the groups. The ACP civil society forum provided a framework both at the Africa level, but also at the ACP level. At the level of individual organisations, however, work was often done on an ad hoc basis, rather than within a programmed framework. Action was driven very much by organisations' individual vision of development. There is now an opportunity to discuss working in the framework of a common strategic plan.

From "The Lomé IV Trade Renegotiations: Assessment of African civil society interventions" (Nancy Kachingwe), a draft case study presented for discussion at FORUM 2001.

internationally, but have significant historical experience. Alliances with trade unions, co-ops, indigenous peoples organizations and other organizations must be pursued in order to strengthen negotiation possibilities on international fora, both on “soft” UN issues, as well as “hard” issues, such as those related to trade or international finance. In fact, such alliances are growing as demonstrated by the Philippines and Brazil experiences, and on a more regional experience, the Anti-Americas Free Trade Agreements movement, or the more positive participation on MERCOSUR negotiations. Building multi-sectoral alliances also strengthens cross-fertilization and interactive learning, as well as bringing together different expertise.

Constructing alliances with other actors such as labor implies recognizing differences in identity, focus, political perspective, and context. In some cases such alliances can be built as they were in the Seattle mobilization, where environmentalists, labor unions, anti-globalization groups, consumer groups, and NGOs came together. In other instances, these are harder to achieve because of differences regarding the political process. In the post-Seattle process, differences regarding the US political campaign pushed trade unions to distance themselves from CSOs. In some cases, support from labor coalitions within the alliance decreases when workers obtain their own specific demands. Other alliance members can have more long-term purposes regarding development. The fragility of the alliance was also evident in Seattle in the case of advocacy work around the WTO. Although demands from labor, small farmers, and environmentalists came under one umbrella, the alliances seemed fragmented because the inter-linkages between specific issues had not been specifically addressed. For example, on the Global Compact issue, international trade unions supported it, while most NGOs had recognizable differences. In some cases, no negotiation took place.

By working together, while recognizing differences in goals and strategies, all groups stand to gain.

Indigenous peoples organizations

Working with indigenous peoples organizations poses a number of challenges for civil society organizations

working at the international level. It requires a long-term commitment and support to strengthen their engagement capacities in such endeavors. In most cases this requires the strengthening of umbrella organizations to ensure sustainability of ideas, energy, leadership, etc. Such umbrella organizations should not be considered only as mechanisms of representation, but also as enablers of local and community capacities. To that end work in a decentralized organizational form should be encouraged, to ensure that members get involved and umbrella organizations do not separate themselves from the grassroots level. There are also significant cultural issues in fostering alliances with such groups, which require a sustained intercultural dialogue.

On Bridging the Domestic/International Divide:

The Social Watch originated from a quite simple idea: commitments assumed by governments must be fulfilled. Thus, civil society needed an effective instrument to monitor governments and demand that they comply with what they had pledged. This was called the “strategy of shame”. This concept was shared by a group of NGOs who saw the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) as an excellent opportunity for governments to assume commitments with an agenda of social change, with consequences for both international and national policies.

From “The Copenhagen+5 Process and the Social Watch Experience: Notes for a debate” (Atila Roque), a draft case study presented for discussion at FORUM 2001.

A related issue for consideration is how CSOs can mobilize public support and pressure on a US administration [in order to salvage a global agreement such as the Kyoto Protocol]. As NGOs are unlikely to marshal the amount of resources industry can mobilize in a relatively short time, an important consideration is novel ways by which CSOs can mobilize public action in the US and similarly structured governments. Noting that there are always industry winners and losers in multilateral actions... NGOs should identify the “good” industry and ally with it.

From “Climate Change: What lessons for NGOs?” (Wagaki Mwangi), a draft case study presented for discussion at FORUM 2001.

Relations with corporations: is it possible and what does it take?

Working with the corporate sector is still a new experience in developing countries. While many governments are encouraging foreign direct investment, there is no consideration for the conditions of it, which in turn leads to a “lowest common denominator” regarding labor, social, environmental and cultural standards, as countries compete to attract foreign investment. In this context NGOs and CSOs have to work on ethical, environmental, and social codes that regulate such investments. While governments should be targeted to produce a regulatory framework – at least similar to those applied by developed countries regarding investments in their own countries – this does not preclude engaging with corporations directly. Corporations, while guided by profit, are not a homogenous group. There are transnational corporations and domestic businesses, huge transnational firms, big national businesses, and medium and small enterprises,

including co-ops, production corporations, and marketing, finance and service corporations. They differ regarding their countries of origin – the US, Europe, Japan and those transnational corporations with headquarters in developing countries (East and South Asia, Latin America); regarding different regulations and corporate culture; and they are diverse regarding exposure to CSO and trade union pressure. They also differ because of characteristics of the

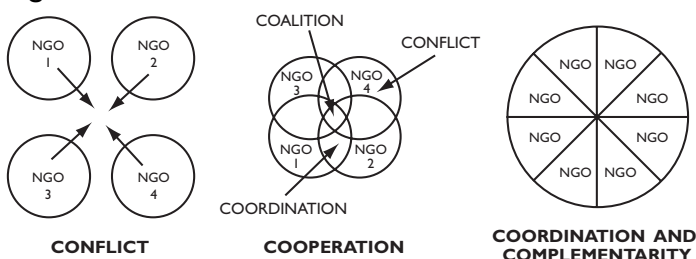
markets in which they operate – highly concentrated or competitive, regulated or not, etc. To engage with the private sector, more studies and documented experiences of engagement with the private and corporate sector, and critical analysis on ethical, labor, environmental, and social codes are required as tools to foster capacity building of NGOs and CSOs.

International advocacy: networks, coalitions and conflicts

A key question asked by participants was how to deal with conflicts within civil society. These are not exceptional situations – in fact, they tend to happen more frequently than is recognized. Conflicts in many cases are hidden, so that they do not affect the advocacy efficacy. Conflicts arise from differences of power, focus, ideology, culture, leadership, and access to the negotiating floor in situations where such groups compete to impact international negotiations and have their respective agendas put through. In some cases conflicts also arise because of differences in strategy and tactics: groups willing to negotiate vs. groups willing to use street pressure or even “brick tactics”. In other cases, conflicts arise out of particular behavior of uncompromising leaders vis-à-vis their peers. NGOs should look carefully at such situations and try to find good practices to deal with them. Fig. 1 below tries to capture a possible path in dealing with conflicts, where the figure on the right describes a situation where differing NGOs clash, while the one on the left describes a situation where consensus and complementary solutions have been reached. The figure in the middle describes an intermediate situation.

Going from a conflict situation to a complementary situation requires starting from an in-depth values discussion, and then evolving towards a discussion on agenda, advocacy targets, strategy and tactics, resource availability, definition of responsibilities, transparency and

Fig. 1



accountability, and information dissemination. Such discussion should take place before conflict escalates and personal conflicts and differences become predominant, and should help to make explicit the recognizable differences and their roots. These discussions have to be given enough time to ensure that differences are recognized and consensus is built. Achieving this requires a specific

process, where in many cases professional facilitation is needed. Normally the goal is to have collective forms of leadership, a clear division of labor and responsibilities, and accepted rules regarding reporting back.

A key feature in achieving this is ensuring that the leaders involved develop personal relationships and that they form bonds. To achieve this, specific issues should be dealt with including a clear idea of the type of leadership needed. Consensus and democratic representation are key, as well as a detailed definition of which leadership skills are necessary. Also, rules regarding invitations, where representation is fundamental, and timing in organizing activities are also very important to ensure that adequate lead time is given to ensure maximum presence.

Civil society organizations: capacity building for international advocacy

Capacity building for international advocacy can be defined as building the capacities and skills of civil society to negotiate within itself and come up with positions and proposals which take into account their diverse values and different perspectives, with the purpose of establishing a united front when negotiating with third parties from more than one country. To achieve this a number of capacities were identified such as:

- negotiation skills adapted to the different levels and actors of specific international negotiations;
- facilitation skills to help forge alliances and coalitions with consensual values and strategies;
- lobbying and advocacy capabilities that understand the power structure and negotiation process at the UN or similar intergovernmental organizations;
- text negotiation capacities that support the use of institutional language without losing content.

Capacities can also include:

- understanding skills on implications of alternative text for different social levels;
- training capacities for civil society activists in international participation;
- capabilities regarding building national/local platforms for international advocacy and lobbying; working with the media;
- using information technology (IT) and communications technology for international campaigns;
- street mobilization and protest capacities;
- skills to do follow-up of a negotiation process and influence it;
- and follow-up/monitoring capabilities.

For a comprehensive approach to capacity building for international advocacy, a matrix was developed at FORUM

A matrix for capacity building on international advocacy

(developed by the Working Group on “capacity building” at FORUM 2001, Brisbane, Oct. 2-4, 2001)

Local National Global	Preparation	Participation	Follow-up
Research (monitoring)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “demystify” training Understand structure Understand issue Understand process Understand people Package for wide use Understand country positions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evolution of positions Briefing delegations Finding links with other research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring Dissemination/engagement Demystifying of organizations Take decisions down to local level Assess lessons learned Peer review
Perspective/Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define objective & targets Who & why we want to influence including soft targets Documents & position papers Values discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote/distribute Adjust Convert to alternative text for negotiations Sign-on from NGOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure gov'ts & others implement/refine strategy to address barriers
Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear ownership & proceedings Mobilize people Agree how to proceed Acquire legitimacy Build relationships & alliances (eg. Academic) (“Insiderness”) (Local-global) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Caucusing” + networking Link NGOs on delegations to other NGOs Sharing info with NGOs at conf. & at home Participation elsewhere, connected to events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local monitoring capacity Make links across processes Contact with funders Implementers Media & publicity
Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timing: when is most effective ‘Schmooze’ + personal relationships Where decisions are made Who to target (& when) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued induction (role playing) Meet delegations “Text training”: Understanding UN language / bracketed text Not just talking to other NGOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use parliaments Leader in business Media Relevant ministries Local authorities
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find money Guide on funders & fundraising Identify skills + lead persons Train people how to participate (formal + informal processes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteers Assign roles Support e.g. Document Library, computers Space to work together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Packages of tools & info
Assemble existing capacity resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Criteria for participation - accreditation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenge of changing context: national & local

2001 that addresses different requirements for research, defining positions and agendas, networking, influencing, mobilizing resources and assembling capacities at different points in the advocacy process: preparation, participation, and follow-up.

We have included the matrix for illustrative purposes.

Capacity building for international advocacy is still a learning process, where much of the development is done by a “learning by doing” approach. There are still just a few case studies that have been analyzed systematically, and practitioners keep much of the knowledge about it to themselves or within their groups. Donors are moving very slowly to support specialized centres, and special training

methodologies, and to disseminate best practices. It is worth mentioning the role of the International Forum on Capacity Building (IFCB) as a pioneering initiative in supporting southern NGOs to synthesize best practices, share and discuss experiences, and analyze implications for donor policies.

Some concluding remarks from the author

The UN conferences of the 1990s were a systematic discussion on the international system regarding its resources, its population, its social development, its gender relations, the state of human rights, its habitat, and its food systems, which brought together governments, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society representatives.

Each one of these conferences, while thematically specific, developed the discussion with an integral, multi-sector and multi-level approach. The unique multilateral experience put critical international issues on the table, including international economic justice, proposals for a pluralistic and democratic governance system, and an inclusive and sustainable development perspective, away from the orthodox neo-classical thinking that had been pushed by conservative governments from developed countries. Civil society discovered itself as a global actor in this context bringing to the discussion values and voice from the excluded. The 2000s have started with a simultaneous conservative and fundamentalist counter-attack based on different concerns that have put into question the multilateral system, based on the above premises. In this context, NGOs and international civil society, whose strength and voice have increased, face a number of challenges, including preserving the basic values associated with international justice, pluralistic and democratic governance, and inclusive and sustainable development.

International civil society has at least two constitutive challenges: expanding its constituency to civil societies from other cultures, including those of Arab and Islamic countries and societies, and linking in a more systematic way local, national, regional and international struggles. The World Social Forum in Porto Alegre is a unique possibility to look at these challenges and develop processes and discussions to respond to them internationally. This requires going beyond a discussion on civil society structure to one based on legitimacy, which can only be based in the capacity to connect struggles at different levels, represent values as best synthesized in the International Covenants on Human Rights, and influence decision making at all levels. To expand its multicultural constituency, civil society has to develop an inter-cultural dialogue, in order to enrich itself and its proposals with diversity.

To strengthen its voice and influence capabilities, civil society should strengthen its own capacities and skills. While the last 15 years have been rich in social creativity and innovation, not much has been done to learn from these experiences, cross-fertilize its struggles, or help train

and bring forward new and culturally diverse generations of activists. Capacity building for international civil society advocacy has to be one of our main priorities in the near future as we move to defend what has been achieved, and expand our proposals.

It's likely that our major challenge will be expanding the perspectives for a pluralistic and democratic multilateralism, based on international justice and an inclusive and sustainable development, in the context of an international system that has one military superpower willing to influence international negotiations out of its own hegemonic concerns.

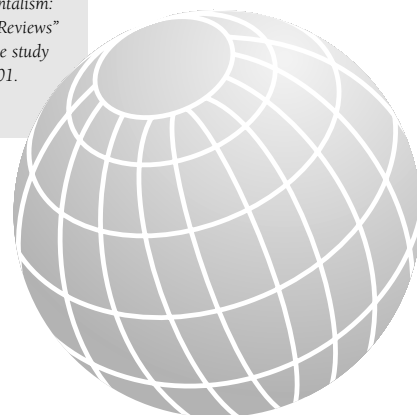
On Facing Challenges Ahead:

Participating fully in such processes [intergovernmental negotiations] demands time and resources that CSOs often do not have. Not only does this process demand that CSOs command facts, information and analysis readily (requiring a large research effort), but they also need to make themselves available when there are meetings, etc. These problems can be overcome in the short term by efficient pooling of human and financial resources and planning, but at the same time, there is a need for expanding the capacity of the groups, in the sense that more human resources need to be deployed overall.

From "The Lomé IV Trade Renegotiations: Assessment of African civil society interventions" (Nancy Kachingwe), a draft case study presented for discussion at FORUM 2001.

The tendency among even the more progressive development NGOs is to leave gender equality to be struggled over by women's organizations alone. It is high time they recognized that women's struggles for gender justice, economic justice and participatory democracy are central and may be key to the energy, strategic thinking and innovative wisdom this era of globalization and fundamentalism demand.

From "Between Globalization and Fundamentalism: Gender justice in the Cairo+5 and Beijing+5 Reviews" (Gita Sen and Bene Madunagu), a draft case study presented for discussion at FORUM 2001.



FORUM 2001

October 2-4, 2001

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