

F I M

**FORUM CASE STUDY
PAPERS
2004-2005**

**Experiences and Viewpoints:
Civil Society, Poverty
Eradication and the
Millenium Development
Goals**

Table of Contents

I. Case Studies

Developing Strategies for Effective Civil Society Involvement within the PRSP Processes: Lessons from Ugandan Experience 2

By Warren Nyamugasira

Civil Society Organizations and the PRSP Process in Bangladesh: Lessons Learned 8

By Mahbubul Karim

Social Watch: Lessons for the MDG campaign and options for Global Civil Society Activism 14

By Atila Roque

II. Background Paper

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): Instrument for Advance or Diversion of Energies? 23

By John Foster

III. A Report on the FORUM Research Initiative

30

V. References Suggested By Authors and Other Relevant Links

36

VI. About the Authors

38

VII. About FIM

40

**THE FORUM
PROGRAMME**
*Creating and Sharing
Knowledge on Civil
Society Engaging with
Multilateral Institutions*

This publication (distributed in May 2005) includes the final versions of papers and case studies presented and discussed in a series of international workshops and one mini-forum which FIM hosted late 2003 and in 2004. The FIM Secretariat also prepared a summary report on these discussions and edited the papers for wide circulation on the website and in print form.

Copyright 2005: Published by FIM in Montréal, Québec. All rights Reserved. None of the contents may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise) without the prior permission of the publisher.

**Edited and Published by
the FIM Secretariat**

Despina Sourias &
Mario Lavoie

DEVELOPING STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE CIVIL SOCIETY INVOLVEMENT WITHIN THE PRSP PROCESSES: LESSONS FROM THE UGANDA EXPERIENCE

By Warren Nyamugasira

Abstract

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) are an important space for civil society to influence public policy. The extent to which this participation is effective depends on country contexts and strategies used. By devising clear action strategies that took advantage of a relatively conducive political environment, Ugandan civil society organizations (CSOs) have been highly effective in their engagement. This paper examines the strategies devised and their relevance to future civil society engagement.

Introduction

Civil society organisations have become part of the mainstream in the development process. Because of their proximity to ordinary citizens and their highly developed social analysis and mobilization skills, key players in the development arena, such as the United Nations, Governments and Inter-Governmental organisations and the private sector, now accept the role and importance of the civil society involvement for successful development processes. CSOs represent the realities of the poor and marginalized men and women and amplify the voices of those often excluded. They assist to build local ownership of public policy and improve the accountability of the development process and its outcomes.

This acceptance has translated into formal and informal multi-stakeholder partnerships, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). Despite serious limitations, such as failure to address structural and political aspects of poverty, PRSP, the mechanism used by the World Bank and other development partners to provide support to highly indebted and low income countries, is arguably an important space and another site for development organizations to influence public policy. However, the extent to which CSOs have been effective in utilizing this space varies from country to country. Overall, such organizations deal with many challenges. They must organize coherent civil society input and minimize splits within civil society arising from a highly contentious process. They must also avoid cooption while gaining credibility before government, donors and other partners once at the policy table. To overcome these obstacles, carefully devised, clear and practical strategies are necessary. Ugandan CSOs have been exemplary in their involvement in the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), the country's PRSP.

This article examines four of the strategies devised by Ugandan CSOs – **effective leadership; insider-outsider strategy; prioritizing policies and utilizing informal networks**- to make their participation effective. It also assesses the relevance of their strategies to future civil society engagement.

The Process

Civil society involvement dates back to the process that started in 1995 when the formulation of Uganda's first PEAP was initiated, (culminating into the document that was launched in 1997). Some consider this to have been a result of relentless pressure on government and donors by CSOs to be allowed to participate. Others attribute it to a deliberate decision by the government to open up the policy space to broader participation, because someone within government had come to the conclusion that this would make the contentious reforms government was pursuing more easily accepted. Whatever the case, by 2000 when the PEAP was revised and turned into PRSP, CSOs were long recognized as partners in the policy formulation process¹.

In the 2000 PEAP process, a Taskforce was formed, a lead agency selected and a technical team appointed to facilitate the process. CSOs mobilized their constituencies through workshops at national and sub-national levels, and sectoral meetings and media activities. In addition, they directly consulted people at the grassroots level and special interest groups (such as women, those in conflict areas, persons with disability and environmentalists) to collect views on how to strengthen the PEAP.

Since PEAP is reviewed every three years, during the 2003 review process, CSOs drew on the lessons of the previous two involvements (1997 and 2000) to deepen their input. For example, instead of using primary data generated from consultations with purposefully selected stakeholders, they relied more on existing and specially commissioned CSO studies and poverty monitoring reports. They formed sector-working groups to generate and collate sector-specific material, set up a liaison office for effective coordination and formed a synthesis team comprising top CSO professionals.

As a result of careful implementation of these strategies, CSO input has progressively improved in quality and depth of analysis in the proposal for policy alternatives. For example, CSOs have increasingly confronted such official policies as indiscriminate liberalization (such as the opening up of water to increased private sector participation) and the imposition of funding caps that prevent the allocation of sufficient resources for financing health and agriculture services in order to maintain macroeconomic stability and safeguard private sector growth. For the first time CSOs have put a figure to the economic cost of the war in Northern Uganda and the contribution of pastoralism to the Ugandan economy where policies continue to be crop-centric. With these and other inputs, CSOs have introduced into the policy process a sense of urgency for the government to address structural issues, thereby provoking it into "thinking outside the box" if it is to get the country on to a new and more transformational development path.

Strategies

a) Effective leadership to steer the process

As in many other countries, civil society in Uganda is characterized by great diversity, fragmentation, competition and rivalries. Because of this a number of initiatives that started with gusto quickly ran out of steam only to stall before realizing their intended objectives. CSO strategists observed that undisputed leadership, the success story with HIV/AIDS being a case in point, largely drove policy reforms at the political, technical and local government levels and in the private sector. They concluded that while taskforces or steering committees and lead agencies were necessary to mobilize CSOs, they were not sufficient in leading them to the desired outcomes; there was a need for 'drivers' in the form of individuals to effectively steer the PEAP/PRSP process. Inevitably, the process of negotiating this leadership is a complex one,

¹ Zie Gariyo, "Participatory Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers: The PRSP Process in Uganda," *Uganda Debt Network Discussion Paper No.5*, 2002.

involving a degree of jostling and caucusing. However, a lot has depended on the initiative, vision, commitment, charisma, tenacity and availability of self-selected individuals.

b) Insider-outsider strategy

So far civil society participation in policy processes has been by invitation to selected CSOs. For example, at the initial stages of PEAP formulation, labour unions were effectively sidelined. But this sidelining was so subtle that it was not noted until Lister and Nyamugasira established that the sidelining had indeed been deliberate, systematic and total in one of their studies². They state that while there were serious internal problems within the labour movement, the real reason for not participating was that the views of its representatives on critical reforms such as privatization, retrenchment and labour flexibilization, collective bargaining and minimum wage regulation were considered incompatible with the very essence of the very reforms government was pursuing with the tacit support of the World Bank and the other 'development partners'.

On the other hand, not all who were invited chose to participate. In May 2001, the Uganda-based African Women's Economic Policy Network (AWEAPON) organised an international conference in Kampala that brought together dozens of African CSOs comprising the Jubilee South Coalition of debt-cancellation activists and released a "Pan-African Declaration on PRSPs" which criticized the Papers on "representing nothing other than yet another attempt by the World Bank and the IMF to continue imposing their structural adjustment programmes on the poor of our countries..."³.

Very quickly, it became clear to CSO leaders steering the PEAP/PRSP process that participation had a real potential to split civil society. To keep civil society together, they adopted a strategy that would deliberately maintain strong links between those who chose to participate – the 'insiders' – and the un-invited and the self-excluded – the 'outsiders'. They did this by maintaining constant social and professional links between those inside and the others outside, like attending meetings organized by the latter. They also did this by bending the 'rules of the game' to ensure that those inside, such as the NGO Forum, DENIVA, Uganda Debt Network, Oxfam and Action Aid, also occasionally criticized the very process in which they participated. For example, DENIVA, a member of the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA) Steering Committee, the highest organ of the PMA, the vehicle by which PEAP is delivered, occasionally bought space in the media to publicize views highly critical of the official line of "not going against market principles". One such occasion took place after a meeting where the issue of overproduction of maize, which led to extremely low prices for farmers, had been discussed and Government refused to set price floors that could save farmers from total disaster.

Likewise organizations such as the Food Rights Alliance (a consortium of NGOs working on agriculture, livelihoods and food security), Council for Economic Empowerment of Women in Africa (Uganda chapter), and Action Aid, at one time or another expressed concerns about the policies resulting from a process in which they participated. The most scathing critique of PRSPs to come out of Uganda was co-authored by Warren Nyamugasira and Rick Rowden.⁴ The former has been a key figure in the PEAP process since the process' inception.

By keeping one foot inside and the other outside, participating CSOs reduced the risk of being taken for granted and minimized the potential polarization that could have resulted from

² Sarah Lister and Warren Nyamugasira, *A Study on the Involvement of Civil Society in Policy Dialogue and Advocacy, Lessons Learnt on their Engagement in Policy Advocacy*, April 2001.

³ Warren Nyamugasira and R. Rowden, *Poverty Reduction Strategies and Coherency of Loan Conditions; Do the new World Bank and IMF loans support countries' poverty reduction goals? A Case of Uganda*, April 2002.

⁴ Nyamugasira et al. Ibid.

the involvement of some in and the rejection by others of the PEAP process. They could also justify their participation by highlighting the fact that they were under pressure by the 'outsiders' to abandon the process. This approach can work wonders as most governments and almost all donors are, for various reasons, desperate to work with civil society during development processes.

c) Prioritizing policy engagement

Following the debt relief campaign in which CSOs successfully teamed up with the government to campaign for reductions in external debts, and perhaps influenced by history (where an increasingly militarized state occupies the central position in Uganda's political economy), a number of Ugandan CSOs opted for a non-confrontational approach to policy engagement. They reached the conclusion that where space was available, however small, it was better to invest in exploiting and expanding it; they decided that by being at the policy table talking, listening, analyzing, reflecting and learning, as opposed to being on the streets demonstrating, they stood a better chance of increasing their influence through incremental gains. Without being overly ambitious about what they would achieve and by not taking on the entire super-structure that went beyond government to the more powerful and less open international institutions, interests and processes, they would eventually positively effect Ugandan development.

This decision partly arose out of pragmatism on the part of CSOs. A simple reality check made them realize that capacity deficits meant that they could never match government and the International Financial Institutions on macroeconomic framework issues. They also realized that time for them to out-source the much needed capacity was limited. However, through their long association with service delivery and campaigning for debt relief, they knew they had developed comparative advantage on understanding the social realities of the poor, which they could use to great effect by concentrating on social policy. Therefore, they chose to shelve the macroeconomic issue for handling at a later stage.

Consequently, the 2001 PEAP/PRSP clearly shows that CSOs concentrated more on such pillars as governance (mainly on issues of conflict), increasing incomes (agricultural services and micro-finance) and improving the quality of life of the poor (health and education privileges), which drew their funding from the Poverty Action Fund made up mainly of HIPC Debt Relief savings, and less on policies for macroeconomic stability such as fiscal, monetary or structural policies. However, there was order in these priorities as CSOs went for "biting off what they could chew" and shelving for later that which they could not influence due to limited technical capacity and time constraints.

Later revisions of PEAP and other policy fora (e.g. Sector Working Groups and Consultative Group meetings) demonstrate expanded involvement of CSOs on macroeconomic aspects. For example, during the 2002 Consultative Group meetings, CSOs raised the issue of funding caps, particularly as they constrained the realization of health and agricultural sector goals under the PEAP/PRSP and the Millennium Development Goals. More recently, CSOs have begun to challenge Medium Term Expenditure Framework premises by drawing on the expert advice of such people as Prof. Jeffrey Sachs and the WHO's report on "Macroeconomic and Health" to demonstrate how investing in health, as opposed to the assumption that health automatically improves as a result of economic growth, is critical for economic development to take place in poor countries. During the 2003 CG, CSOs ferociously attacked the government's way of handling deficit financing, illustrating with credible evidence, that policies meant to help the poor were hurting them instead. Some of their arguments were based on data from researchers in quasi-official institutions such as the Economic Policy Research Centre, a fact that policy statements officially de-emphasized. As a result of CSO policy engagement, the funding ceilings for agriculture and health are to be increased.

d) Utilizing informal networks to influence policy

Experience has shown that key policy decisions are not always negotiated in formal spaces. CSOs discovered that the real discussion happened away from the formal spaces, in social gatherings, in caucuses, in corridors and coffee breaks at conferences and in donor technical meetings. By the time CSOs sat at the policy table, consensus had already been built among donors and between donors and government counterparts. It became vital for them to penetrate these informal spaces, to augment their 'know-how' with 'know-who', if they were to have a chance of influencing key policy decisions. They did this by drawing on the large pool of contemporaries in the political and technical arms of government – former schoolmates, drinking buddies, and the like. These informal networks made it easier for CSOs to increase influence on ordinarily contentious issues.

CSOs identified certain officials within the government and worked to turn them into allies. In particular they 'targeted' one middle-level official whom they knew to be highly influential in the Ministry of Finance, and succeeded in winning him over. He then helped to convince the rest of the ministry of the value-adding contribution of CSOs. This made it easier for CSOs to gain acceptance. CSOs reciprocated by increasing their respect for the spaces thus opened up by sending the right representation (in terms of seniority and technical expertise); by being better prepared and using evidence-based research and critical analysis that enhanced the credibility of their technical arguments; and by being more modest (accepting that they did not know all the answers), open-minded and flexible while remaining firm and consistent in some of their positions.

By drawing on the large pool of expatriate staff among international NGOs CSOs have been able to access decision-makers in the donor community and among the large number of Technical Advisors (TAs) employed in key government ministries. For example, CSOs realized that, at any one time, there were upwards of twenty Technical Advisors in the Ministry of Finance alone. Being the powerhouse ministry of government policy-making, these Technical Advisors, put there by lead donors such as DFID, actually make most of the technical policy decisions. Therefore penetrating their informal circles gave CSOs access to the most up-to-date information and thinking in the most important places. Likewise, getting access to the lead consultant drafting the PEAP made it easier to negotiate on some issues and language than did hours of arguing in the official meetings.

Application

There is potential for application of these strategies to future Ugandan and wider civil society engagement, even beyond the context of PRSP. In Uganda, it has been established that effective leadership at whatever level is the number one factor for making things happen. CSOs now apply this strategy whenever they have a new initiative, such as the recent effort to initiate a Social Forum. The unintended risk is that "effective leaders" tend to be strong and self-assured individuals who dominate the process leaving others frustrated. This leads to resentment and diminished commitment on the part of other members. Furthermore, the syndrome of "the same old faces" can develop where partners get tired of seeing the same people. These backlashes have been minimized through a system of 'renew and rotate' that ensures continuity while changing faces.

Insider-outsider strategy perhaps has the greatest potential for application. For any contentious initiative that may split civil society, such as CSO alignment with political parties and participation in World Bank supported programmes, CSO leaders need to employ this strategy to minimize polarization within the sector. In Uganda the women's movement has successfully employed the strategy when participating in partisan politics – those who stay out support those who go in.

Prioritizing policy engagement is an important strategy based on pragmatism. All too often CSOs become overly ambitious about what they can change in a given timeframe and end up frustrated, stretched and overexposed. They need to identify their "comparative advantage", and utilize this to the full, as long as they do not lapse into uncritical acceptance of the dominant ideology underpinning the macro-economic model and worldview of PRSP, and the political nature of poverty.

Informal networking was a belated strategic discovery for Ugandan CSOs even if such an association is quite African in character. By drawing on the large pool of their contemporaries and other networks in the political, technical and legislative arms of government and among donors, CSOs can utilize this African way of doing business to great effectiveness. However, this strategy is one that should be employed with great caution as it borders on questionable ethical conduct and does not enhance the building of transparent and accountable institutions and systems that CSOs work so hard to achieve. Also it can easily lead to being compromised because among 'friends', there is a tendency to be lenient and accommodating.

Bibliography

- Gariyo, Zie. "Participatory Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers: The PRSP Process in Uganda." *Uganda Debt Network Discussion Paper No.5*, 2002.
- Lister, Sarah and Nyamugasira, Warren. *A study on the Involvement of Civil Society in policy Dialogue and Advocacy, Lessons Learnt on their Engagement in Policy Advocacy, and Future*, December 2001.
- Nyamugasira, Warren and Rowden, R. *Poverty Reduction Strategies and Coherency of Loan Conditions; Do the New World Bank and IMF loans Support Countries' Poverty Reduction Goals? A Case of Uganda*, April 2002.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND THE PRSP PROCESS IN BANGLADESH: LESSONS LEARNED

By Mahbubul Karim

Abstract

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process in Bangladesh is yet to be truly participatory and nationally owned. The fragmentation within civil society, the government's lack of interest in wider consultations with civil society and the donors' reluctance to go beyond their three-decade old development paradigm are the major barriers to a meaningful PRSP. However, it is not too late for the stakeholders to come together again to identify what went wrong and concertedly try to overcome the difficulties.

Introduction

The PRSP originated as a precondition to be fulfilled by a heavily indebted poor country (HIPC) in order to qualify for the debt relief initiated by the G-7 countries in the mid-1990s. Since 1999 the formulation of a PRSP has become mandatory for all the low-income countries that receive concessional loans from the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The PRSP has replaced the Policy Framework Paper that the WB, the IMF and a concessional loan recipient country government produced together. The new framework is in line with the updated lending policy that the WB claims as a departure from adjustment lending to development policy support lending.

As outlined in the *PRSP Sourcebook*, a PRSP should have comprehensive poverty diagnostics; clearly presented and budgeted priorities for macroeconomic, structural, and social policies; appropriate targets and indicators for monitoring progress; and a description of the participatory process that was used in its preparation. The Sourcebook also says that a PRSP should be based on the principles of the Comprehensive Development Framework of the WB. Accordingly, the document must be country-driven, result oriented, comprehensive in scope, partnership oriented, long-term in perspective, and participatory.

Bangladesh is a delta of 147,570 square kilometres with a population of 131.2 million. The GDP growth rate in 2002-03 was five point three per cent with a per capita income of US \$350. The World Economic Forum in its *Global Competitiveness Report 2003-2004* has ranked Bangladesh 98th among 120 countries in terms of economic growth. In terms of human development Bangladesh currently ranks 139th among 175 nations and falls in the medium human development category of the United Nations Development Programme. Bangladesh presents one of the most dismal scenarios in the South Asia region. Over 50 per cent of its population lives below the poverty line, which is based on the intake of 2122 kilocalories per capita per day. It has the highest rate of malnutrition in South Asia and one of the lowest adult literacy rates in the world. There is only one doctor for every 4,903 people and one hospital bed for every 3,473 people.

Bangladesh is one of those few countries that adopted the structural adjustment programme (SAP) at its initial stage taking a WB 'structural and sectoral adjustment loan' in 1980. Since then the country's external debt has been on the increase. In 1980 the amount of debt was US \$ 4 billion; by 1998 this number rose to US \$ 16 billion and to US \$ 18 billion in

2003. Today every child in Bangladesh is born with a debt burden of US \$ 128. According to the Jubilee 2000 Country Profile, the amount of debt service paid by Bangladesh in 1998 was US \$ 683 million and the country paid out \$ 1.04 in debt service for every \$ 1 received in aid grants.

However, the WB does not consider Bangladesh as a HIPC and, therefore, it is eligible for debt relief. Instead, it calls Bangladesh a 'moderately indebted low-income country'. At the same time, the government has not been keen to pursuing debt relief. Nevertheless, the government continues its poverty reduction efforts with concessional financing from the donors and has accordingly accepted the PRSP framework.

The objectives of this paper are to measure the extent and quality of civil society participation in the PRSP process, analyse its impact and reveal the lessons learned.

The Evolution of the PRSP Process in Bangladesh

The PRSP formulation process in Bangladesh began in December 2000 with the formation of a Task Force comprising senior government officials from several line ministries and departments. Two national consultants were also hired to draft the document.

The process progressed at a very slow pace and the consultations with different stakeholders could begin only in January 2002. The draft I-PRSP¹ was produced in April 2002 and finalized in December the same year. The I-PRSP would be developed into a full-fledged PRSP by December 2004 as scheduled. The government has started implementing the three-year programme under the I-PRSP since July 2003.

The WB and IMF have approved the I-PRSP and respectively pledged US \$ 530 million and US \$ 490 million in 'soft' loans ceded over a period of three years. By March 2004, the WB and the IMF had presented US \$ 30 million and US \$ 74 million respectively to Bangladesh. It is important to note that these credits are subject to the fulfillment of over one hundred stringent conditional ties on the recipient government. Over the years the international financial institutions (IFIs) have been pressing the government to go all-out with plans for liberalization, privatization and financial sector reforms. But the government has been carrying out the reform measures slowly and quite cautiously, as the political, economic and social costs of such reforms are very high. The last five years have seen the closure of half a million industrial units, particularly medium and small enterprises, and millions of people losing their jobs. But, despite these adverse consequences, the government is pressed to accelerate the pace of the reforms in various sectors in order to continue receiving financing from the donors.

Press reports indicate that, although the WB and the IMF accept the I-PRSP, they have pointed out several weaknesses in the document. A joint assessment made at the WB and IMF headquarters underlined that the document failed to identify the priority sectors and policies of the day and did not include an estimate of the probable cost of implementing the strategies under the mid-term plan. It also lacked the mechanism for implementing and monitoring the poverty alleviation strategies; coordinated measures to ensure equal participation of both the public and private sectors; concrete measures to ensure an enabling environment for investment through the improvement of economic governance and the law and order situation; and the provision for monitoring the consequences of reforms on the poverty situation and society at large. The WB and the IMF emphasized the importance of political reforms and asked the government to include a comprehensive plan for restructuring the electoral system in the PRSP.

¹ The I-PRSP is a document preceding the PRSP, usually by 12 months, which defines the country's process for poverty reductions and its plans for the development of the full PRSP. (Eds.)

To prepare a full-fledged PRSP the government has now formed 12 thematic groups consisting of officials from different government ministries and departments. The themes are:

1. Macroeconomic stability and pro-poor growth;
2. Financial sector reforms;
3. Infrastructural development and reforms including power, energy and communications;
4. Domestic resource mobilization;
5. Reforms in governance including civil service reforms, judicial reforms and law and order;
6. Health including population planning, nutrition and sanitation;
7. Education;
8. Women and children advancement and rights;
9. Rural development including food security, disaster management, safety-net programmes, microcredit and rural non-farming activities;
10. Agriculture;
11. Private sector development including small and medium enterprises (SMEs); and
12. Information and communication technology and technology policy.

A plan to organize six regional "participatory consultations" during March-April 2004 has also been made. The Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF), meant for aid negotiations between the government and the donors, will review the progress of I-PRSP implementation and the status of reforms pledged by the government in its next meeting scheduled in May 2004. Based on the review, the donors will decide whether or not to release the next portion of committed funds.

Civil Society and the PRSP

Prior to the preparation of the I-PRSP there had been two stages of consultation. A series of workshops were held before the preparation of the draft I-PRSP and a number of discussions organized after its preparation to finalize the document.

At the first stage, 21 consultation workshops were held at the *upazila* (district), divisional and national levels. BRAC, a leading NGO of the country, was given the responsibility of organizing 20 workshops. As stated in the *Report on Workshops on Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* prepared by BRAC and in Bangladesh's I-PRSP entitled, *A National Strategy for Economic Growth, Poverty Reduction and Social Development*, the External Resource Division (ERD) of the government and the two national consultants facilitated the workshops.

A total of 13 consultations were conducted at the *upazila* level. Seven of those were with the poor, six with the rural and one with the urban poor. The other six *upazila*-level workshops were with the field-level functionaries of the government ministries and departments, representatives of local government, NGOs and other civil society organizations (CSOs) including women's groups and religious leaders.

Five divisional workshops, attended by government officials and representatives of NGOs, different professional groups, women's groups and other CSOs, were also organized. Of the three national level workshops, one was with government officials, one with representatives of CSOs including NGOs, and the other with Bangladesh's development partners.

At the second stage, as described in the I-PRSP, "twelve mid-term consultations with a wider cross-section of stakeholders were organized to solicit their views, incorporate suggested changes, and validate the proposed strategy."

The I-PRSP preparation process as well as the document has a number of weaknesses. One of the process's biggest faults is that it has been to a large extent exclusive. Some major segments of civil society, for example trade unions and farmers' organizations, have not been involved in the process. As for NGOs, many major actors were left out. Furthermore, the participation of the primary stakeholders, the poor, has been insignificant. Only 189 poor people, both rural and urban, were asked to reflect on some selected issues. The consultations' exclusivity rests on a specific design prepared unilaterally by the policy makers. Inasmuch, the poor were left with little opportunity to articulate their understanding of poverty, what they thought its real causes were and what strategies would work. However, moderators attempted to provide this constituency with a framework for discussion.

As documented in the BRAC report, the participants were asked to express their views and opinions on areas where they might have seen development and improvement and also on areas where there had been deterioration in the light of their experience over the last five to seven years. The workshops held at the first stage were organized in a hurry without adequate preparation. As narrated in the above report, "because of time constraints, BRAC had to face the challenge of organizing 20 workshops in two-weeks time, from 4th-20th January" and it "had exerted a significant amount of pressure on BRAC". Knowing these limitations were present, one can be sceptical about the quality of the participants and their inputs.

The above facts corroborate the criticism directed against the I-PRSP that it is no different in essence from a non-participatory technical document on poverty prepared by experts. One can also conclude that participation in the process was nothing more than a tokenism.

Women's groups and gender activists have questioned the I-PRSP as they find other serious gaps in it. In their view the document and the poverty reduction target set is not adequately gender sensitive.. It has neither considered the elimination of all forms of oppression against women and girls nor has it taken into account the issues of women's rights and freedom. The I-PRSP has not even recommended increased allocations for women's development in the national budget.

The I-PRSP does not show an interest in understanding and overcoming the systemic and structural dimensions of poverty through appropriate strategies. It talks about pro-poor growth without explaining what it actually means and how it can be achieved. It has focussed on growth without suggesting measures for equity. It ignores increasing inequalities in Bangladeshi society and the detrimental impact of the structural adjustment processes (SAPs) over the last two-and-a-half decades.

Outside the official consultations, civil society reflections on the PRSP process and the I-PRSP have been remarkable. These discussions were organized from time to time through seminars, workshops and meetings with the IFIs, and media campaigns by a wide range of organizations, groups and individuals including NGOs, women's groups, professional groups, trade unions, policy activists, researchers and opinion leaders. Considerable amounts of information and data have also been generated and used in their campaigns to increase critical public awareness about the PRSP as both an opportunity and a risk.

Unfortunately, civil society actions to influence the PRSP process in Bangladesh have not been collective and concerted. In most cases an organization or a group acted in its own way and according to its own strategies. For this reason, the efforts made so far have not had a significant impact on the process.

A lost opportunity for all stakeholders

In the wake of globalization it was expected that an effective tripartite engagement of the state, the market and civil society would lead to the creation of a more democratic, humane and egalitarian world. Unfortunately, neither the coming together of the three actors has happened as desired nor has the world come any closer to reaching the above cherished goal. Rather, things have come the other way around. As a result of globalization, poverty and inequality are on the increase. The CSO-led anti-globalization movement has been gaining ground since 1996. The state while liberalizing the market is obviously trying to curb the autonomy of the third sector. And as things stand now, civil society participation in decision-making processes still remains a remote possibility.

The scenario has not been different in Bangladesh too. The space for CSO action is constantly being squeezed. As in many other places, crony CSOs have been created. Adherence to divisive policies by the state has had a disastrous impact on the sector leading to its split. A divided civil society thus failed to act as an effective actor despite the proactive role played by some vibrant institutions, groups and individuals.

Although the PRSP is a donor-driven task it can be transformed into a people's agenda. The government, the donors and civil society have their roles to play in making it possible. But it is the government who has to come forward and take the initiative to get all stakeholders meaningfully involved in the process. This way they can jointly produce something that is owned nationally. Unfortunately, this coming together has not happened. The government has not made any serious effort to integrate civil society and the primary stakeholders, the poor, into the preparation of the crucial policy document. It seems that the donors are also not quite keen on effectively pursuing the participation issue with the government. They are also reluctant to go beyond their three-decade old development paradigm. Consequently, none of the three key actors is in a position to strongly claim that the I-PRSP is fully under national ownership. To the donors, it is a government document; to the government, it is a specific donors' requirement and, to civil society, it is a document owned by the government and the donors. But unfortunately for all of them, it has been a lost opportunity as they have failed to reach a national consensus on the vitally important issue of poverty reduction.

Lessons for the CSOs

The number of NGOs or other CSOs who have been campaigning on the issue of PRSP has not been very significant. It cannot be expected that all types of CSOs will have an interest to work on macro-economic policy issues as the bulk of them are actually involved at the grassroots and engaged in service provision. It is also a fact that only a few of the CSOs have the clout and capacity to influence a national policy-making process. Participation in policy-making exercises is not an entirely new experience for the CSOs in Bangladesh. They were involved in sectoral policy-making initiatives in the past. But PRSP is a much comprehensive and complex process. The civil society in Bangladesh is yet to be adequately prepared and organized to deal with this challenging task.

So far they have not been able to build a broader unity to launch an effective campaign on the issue. The main barriers to this unity are the shrinking of the autonomy and space for civil society actions over the years and the state's divisive policies. In this context the following three major lessons for civil society in Bangladesh can be drawn:

1. There is no alternative to collective and concerted interventions if the CSOs have to influence the national policy process
2. A deeper understanding of the macro-economic policy issues and an enhanced capacity are the most important preconditions for a successful policy advocacy; and
3. Autonomy and adequate space are prerequisites for civil society to play an effective role.

Concluding Remark

The PRSP is yet to be finalized. Moreover, the PRSP is expected to be a dynamic and continuous process to incorporate changes from time to time. So, although the first opportunity is lost it is not yet too late for all the stakeholders to come together to identify what went wrong, recognize the gaps and deficiencies, and jointly try to make it a comprehensive and meaningful document in order to reach a national consensus on the strategies for poverty reduction.

Bibliography

BRAC. *Report on Workshops on Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance. *Bangladesh: A National Strategy for Economic Growth, Poverty Reduction and Social Development*, September 2002.

Klugman, J , ed. *A Sourcebook for Poverty Reduction Strategies*. World Bank, 2001.

Sala-i-Martin, Xavier ed. *Global Competitiveness Report 2003-2004*. World Economic Forum. Oxford University Press: New York, 2004.

UN's Social Conference Process and the Social Watch Experience

By Atila Roque

(Originally translated by Jones de Freitas and edited by James Mulholland. Final revision by Mario Lavoie and Despina Sourias)

Abstract

The experience of Social Watch has been remarkable with respect to the way CS networks around the world have mobilized to monitor the implementation of poverty eradication, gender equity and social development targets. In the new global context, what lessons from the Social Watch experience can be useful to CSOs in their efforts to impact the global policy agenda and contribute to the implementation of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Introduction

The visibility and influence acquired by international civil society networks in the last few years has been quite surprising, a phenomenon that observers of world politics have widely acknowledged over the last decade. Although not an entirely new phenomenon, the circumstances under which this has occurred lead to a reflection on its significance. As promoters of a human rights approach not strictly or exclusively linked to the nation-state, international civil society networks are playing an important role in combating the disintegrating forces built into several aspects of globalization.

To a large extent, these networks are the main spokespersons for a “counter-hegemonic globalization” (Santos, 1998). The international order that arose from the ruins of two world wars is facing intense pressures to implement radical changes in the composition, mandate, and structure of its main institutions. The debate on so-called “global governance” refers mainly to the exhaustion of the post-world wars’ model. In this context, the role of international NGO networks is the object of a stimulating discussion, not always limited to the predominantly virtuous aspects of these organizations.²

Unfolding United Nations processes offer one of the best angles for observing the ongoing changes in the international order. They reveal tensions generated in structures, mainly limited to government actors, when these structures are submitted to increasing pressures from civil society organizations. The active effective presence of NGOs at intergovernmental processes and negotiations in the framework of ECOSOC (UN Economic and Social Council) throughout the 90s remains a landmark in recent UN history.

The social cycle of conferences in the 1990s was extremely innovating in two fundamental aspects. First, the debate on development was re-launched beyond strict economic assumptions. The linkages between themes involving the environment, human rights

² See Micheal Edwards' s *NGO Rights and Responsibilities: A New Deal for Global Governance* (London: The Foreign Policy Center, 2000); and Lisa Jordan's and Peter van Tuijl's "Political Responsibility in Transnational NGO Advocacy," *World Development*, V.28, No. 12 (2000): 2051-2065.

and women (among others), and development, called into question traditional economic-based thinking about development policies. This process evolved while the UNDP consolidated the concept of “human development” and reviewed the progress of countries in this new perspective by publishing the annual Human Development Index (HDI).

Second, it provided the institutional basis for national NGOs to play an increasingly active role in building global agendas and monitoring the commitments made by governments. Within the UN System, NGOs would “politicize” negotiations, introducing local struggles and political processes into the discussions. The role of NGOs in the United Nations became that of conveying ideas and innovations and acting as information sources, funding agents, agreement negotiators, strategy formulators, and conflict mediators.³

Social Watch Is...

An international network informed by national citizens' groups aiming at following up the fulfillment of the internationally agreed commitments on poverty eradication and equality. These national groups report, through the national Social Watch report, on the progress –or regression— towards these commitments and goals.

The Social Watch groups, organized on an ad hoc basis, have a focal point in each country that is responsible for promoting the initiative; submitting a national report for the yearly publication; undertaking lobbying initiatives before the national authorities to hold them accountable for the policies in place regarding the agreed commitments; promoting a dialogue about the national social development priorities and developing an active inclusive strategy to include other groups into the national group.

Source:
<http://www.socialwatch.org/en/acercaDe/index.htm>
(Eds.)

Social Watch was created from and responded to that context. Social Watch resulted from both this process of interaction as well as in reaction to the problems the international system was and still is confronting to this day. The need and possibility of building world-scale democracy and the future role of the UN continue to be at stake, as are the necessary mechanisms of social control and accountability. In the coming years, the place of the UN in the world scene will be crucial in determining the shape of the 21st century's international order. A weak and demoralized UN would not help consolidate international relations based on minimal agreements for the respect of human rights and the promotion of democratic principles. In this regard, the situation further deteriorated during Bush's administration in the United States, particularly since an aggressive defence doctrine based on pre-empting military attacks was put in place as part of the so called “war against terror”.

A simple —but complex— idea

The Social Watch initiative 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) in 1995 as an excellent opportunity for governments to commit

to an agenda for social change that would affect both international and national policies.⁴

³ See Thomas G. Weiss and Leon Gordenker, Eds. *NGOs, the UN & Global Governance*. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers), 1996.

⁴ For a detailed and extremely interesting account of Social Watch's origins, I recommend reading Mirjam van Reizen's *The 'Prehistory' of 'Social Watch': The transforming of NGO Networking in ongoing International Negotiations* (Montevideo: Social Watch), March 2000.

The participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) trying to influence results ensuing from the Social Summit preparatory process (PrepComs) was fundamental in shaping the concept of Social Watch. The Development Caucus set up at the WSSD PrepCom II revealed a common interest among several organizations in clearing a space during the preparatory process for those motivated not just by specific themes – such as the environment or human rights, – which had been the hallmark of meetings prior to Copenhagen. In fact, the WSSD attracted a diverse group and seemed to interest both everybody and nobody.

Dialogue between the Development Caucus and the other networks intervening in the preparatory process, particularly the women's networks, was essential. This exchange of ideas led to identifying the need for a mechanism to keep governments under ongoing vigilance regarding the Copenhagen commitments. Incorporating commitments assumed at the World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995) and those assumed at Copenhagen into Social Watch's monitoring priorities has consolidated an approach built together with women's networks involved in this process, especially the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) and Development Alternatives with women for a New Era (DAWN Networks).

However, monitoring was not the only concern, and perhaps not even the most important of Social Watch's contributions to the exploration of new modes of CS participation in international processes. **The effort to link global processes to the dynamics of national struggles strikes me as the most innovative and challenging aspect of this experience.** 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. The organization achieved these objectives through two strategies. First, it included both Northern and Southern organizations working side-by-side through the networks. Second, it applied a two-pronged "translation" effort to its approach: first, what had been negotiated at the international spheres had to make sense at national levels; and second, national political processes should have an impact on international negotiations. To the extent that it gradually achieved this two-pronged strategy, Social Watch gained political legitimacy.

Monitoring the extent to which wealthy countries implement the pledges made at conferences is a key novelty. Having North and South members (although the vast majority of them are from the latter) has been essential in enabling the rich countries to internalize their commitments. This obviously results in enormous methodological challenges, particularly when it comes to assessing progress and regression in the fulfillment of goals. The Index of Fulfilled Commitments incorporates the starting point to evaluate the advances made by each country in the various monitored commitments.⁵

Thus, Social Watch's working method has sought to break with the traditional unilateral approach in North-South solidarity relations. The impacts and consequences of globalization are felt in both the rich Northern countries and the poor Southern nations – albeit in a most unequal way. One may agree with the concept that social exclusion processes are resulting in the coexistence of a "North in the South" and a "South in the North". Any strategy for social change has to take this into account. The participation of important European nongovernmental cooperation agencies such as Novib has also helped in understanding the role of these organizations as something other than the one they naturally play as fund providers.⁶

⁵ Regarding this issue, see the chapters on methodology in the annual Social Watch reports.

⁶ The ambiguity that results from this double position is discussed by Reisen (op. cit) and also in an internal evaluation document prepared by Novib itself and authored by Peter van Tuijl & Hannah Apell called "Rock Around the Clock: A Self-Evaluation of Novib's Role Regarding Social Watch." July 2000.

Building national coalitions

Mobilizing social actors at the national level is one of the key challenges for Social Watch, insofar as it legitimizes its participation in UN negotiations. Building “national platforms” is crucial to setting up the network’s supporting architecture. The annual publication of a report evaluating the implementation of commitments is both a lobbying tool to pressure governments and a vehicle for national mobilization.

In the framework of preparing the report’s national chapters, the organizations responsible for Social Watch in each country – the “social watchers” – mobilize networks, social movements, NGOs, intellectuals, and other social actors making up the network’s “national platforms”. The key role of these platforms is to act as spaces for dialogue that are open to diversity and controversy. They are also involved in awareness-raising within civil society and in applying pressure on governments. Since 1996, we have seen the consolidation of platforms in Africa, Central America, Mexico, Peru, Brazil, the Philippines, and the Arab world. In addition, Social Watch currently has reference groups that ensure publication of annual reports on a regular basis in about fifty countries.

Poverty eradication strategies and Social Watch in a national context: The example of Brazil

The Brazilian experience is an interesting example of how Social Watch tried to influence national public policies pushing for their link to global interests. Brazilian organizations working with the Network employed different participatory mechanisms. First, they pursued a cooperative process between different social sectors, including NGOs, women’s organizations, trade unions, academic research institutions, environmentalists and various social movements/networks (i.e., the landless movement, human rights coalitions and indigenous people’s organizations). Once a year, Social Watch organized a national seminar inviting these groups to examine whether or not different sets of public policies comply with the goals that were set in Copenhagen and Beijing. These seminars were also important instances of cross-sectoral dialogue between governmental and civil society representatives. One of their main objectives was the fair representation of these two groups.

The annual seminars aside, Social Watch’s Brazilian initiative organized issue-oriented workshops or dialogues whose purpose was the closer evaluation of specific policies. It was also a way to increase the contribution to the Social Watch process from participating groups and individuals concerned with specific aspects of the social agenda. This has been particularly successful in the areas of gender and racial discrimination.

The Brazilian Social Watch initiative has made a permanent effort to reach a high level of cooperation between different organizations and sectors dealing with the social agenda. The experience so far has been extremely rich as it further presents a possibility for overcoming a certain level of fragmentation that still exists amongst those organizations working on social issues and poverty eradication.

A second important mechanism used by the Social Watch initiative in Brazil was the production of a “Brazilian edition” of their international report. The intention behind this special edition was to generate a publication where the chapter on Brazil brought more substance than what is possible within the limited space available in the international edition. The Brazilian edition thus carries a 60-page section fully dedicated to the analysis of different aspects related to the implementation of the conference commitments in Brazil as well as how public policies are responding to them.

The production of this section is a political process in itself, as it demands an effort to identify within the network of organizations related to the Social Watch Platform in Brazil, those holding the expertise and capacity to conduct the analysis. The content covered in this section also includes the discussions and suggestions made during the annual seminar and

workshops. It becomes the main evaluative measure, in terms of the written assessment of policies, produced in the context of this national Social Watch initiative.

A third mechanism was the publication of a series of papers called *Cadernos do Observatório*. These “papers” covered various themes related to the agenda of the UN’s social conferences. However the papers also had an educational purpose. They dealt with issues and problems that were not undertaken as commitments to be monitored by the Social Watch initiative in Brazil. Offering an opportunity to be more focused on particular issues, these *Cadernos* are important instructional materials for the diverse sectors involved with the Network in Brazil.

The seminars, workshops and publications produced in Brazil are essential tools to make the Social Watch initiative a relevant reference point when dealing with how the UN’s social agenda relate to national policies. The mass media’s growing attention to the assessments and proposals issued by Social Watch in Brazil is a sign of the organization’s effectiveness. Social Watch’s public visibility in Brazil played an important role in integrating the pledges made during the UN conferences into the national agenda. This was a crucial step in achieving social progress particularly as Brazil entered a period of great expectations under a government professing a strong commitment to social development.⁷

UN Plus Five Assessments and the Millennium Development Goals

The ability to act as a reliable and consistent voice for civil societies around the world elevated Social Watch’s legitimacy within the UN system. The first round of reviews of the implementation of the commitments made during the social conferences put the network in the positions of reliable informant and analyst based on their efforts through the national platforms. The Copenhagen + 5 process is a good example of how Social Watch managed to play a difficult inside-outside role without de-politicizing its identity as a nationally grounded international network.

By the Copenhagen+5 PrepCom (leading up to the 2000 Geneva Summit), UN circles already knew Social Watch as one of the key and most influential civil society networks participating in the conference process. Its presence at the annual sessions of the Commission on Social Development (CSD) which is responsible for the Social Summit follow-up has decisively enhanced its legitimacy.. Formulating the Index of Fulfilled Commitments has created a reference point that 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 amongst themselves in UN halls and meeting rooms. Above all, it has focused attention on the fact that promises put on paper should have practical consequences on national and international policies.

The presence of Social Watch’s national platform representatives in New York has strengthened the visibility of the initiative, focusing the attention of government delegates and UN-system agencies on demands stemming from national processes. Once again, it was its two-pronged national-to-global/global-to-national strategy at work. In the same fashion that Social Watch tried to translate the Social Summit commitments into national targets, releasing the international reports at the CSD session in New York exposed the contradictions of national government policies to the international public. Social Watch attended the Copenhagen+5 PrepCom II with about twenty national representatives (13 from Southern countries).⁸

⁷ The wide press coverage obtained during the launching of the 2004 Brazilian edition of the Social Watch Report, when a number of civil society leaders criticized the macroeconomic policy of Lula’s government is an example of the impact and legitimacy of this initiative.

⁸ See “Social Watch Progress Report,” June 99-May 2000. (Montevideo: Social Watch, 2000).

One of the first measures adopted by Social Watch was to define a benchmark with points for inclusion in the Social Summit review. The same strategy had been successfully adopted during the Copenhagen Summit preparatory process where the twelve-point document entitled *Quality Benchmark*, written jointly with the Development Caucus and the Women's Caucus, made it possible to mobilize support from a large number of social organizations around the world. In a way, the *Quality Benchmark* was a dress rehearsal of the network's working method, with intense use of communication over the Internet, as an essential tool for the participation of national organizations that later joined the Social Watch.

The document entitled *Geneva Benchmark: 10 NGO Demands for the Geneva Social Summit* was supported by Social Watch member organizations and by many Development Caucus participants; its acceptance was therefore an important point during the UN General Assembly Special Session preparatory work. The document became a useful instrument for lobbying the delegations. It included proposals for mechanisms to control financial flows; outlined the need for well-defined targets to eradicate poverty, as well as deadlines for other reviews of commitments; promotion of development in Africa and "less-developed" countries; gender equality and equity; and promotion of an enabling international environment for social development.

NGO insistence, especially on the part of Social Watch, to maintain the focus on all ten Copenhagen commitments during the UN General Assembly Special Session was fundamental since some countries (particularly the US and Japan) attempted to restrict the agenda item (of the upcoming Summit negotiations) on "further initiatives" to the three original issues: poverty, unemployment, and social integration. This strategy reasserted the role of the UN General Assembly as the appropriate relevant space to discuss macroeconomic issues, and opposed the position of developed countries that would rather deal with those themes exclusively in institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, and the WTO, or even in those institutions from which Southern countries are totally excluded – the OECD and the G-8. Although the documents approved in Geneva in 2000 fell short when compared to the *Geneva Benchmark*, the inclusion of those themes in the Special Session agenda was an important gain for the NGOs.

The ongoing linkages between the national and international levels gave a specific political advantage to Social Watch's lobbying efforts throughout the WSSD+5 process. The social mobilization capacity of some of the national platforms and the dialogue channels opened up with their respective governments reflected positively on the intergovernmental process. For example, in the case of Brazil, the Philippines, Italy, and Canada, the presence of "watchers" in the official delegations to the PrepComs, and the Special Session itself, provided a useful space for dialogue with influential governments in their respective negotiating blocs (Canada, European Union and the G-7).

In some instances, this interaction between civil society and government helped to broaden the debate on Copenhagen commitments and the review of their implementation, with opportunities for controversial viewpoints both among different government levels and among civil society organizations. Several national and regional events were organized by Social Watch to discuss governments' positions and civil-society proposals for the Special Session. Regional gatherings and national seminars were held in Africa, Asia, Central America, Mexico, and Brazil.

Maintaining substantial interaction with several UN agencies, and with some multilateral institutions such as the OECD, is also part of the Social Watch strategy. This interaction was especially intense with UNDP, particularly during the elaboration of World Poverty Reports.

Some aspects of the relationships between Social Watch and other international civil society actors who participated in the Social Summit review process deserve to be highlighted. First, the Copenhagen follow-up attracted a relatively smaller number of civil society organizations. To a certain extent, the conference's very broad agenda did not facilitate the emergence of stakeholders who could clearly identify with the commitments. This characteristic

underscored the relevance of Social Watch participation in the process, but 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 (especially on gender issues) and with the Eurostep and SAPRIN (Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Network) networks deserve special mention.

Another relevant actor with whom Social Watch had some degree of interaction – despite frequent conflicts resulting from divergent positions on some themes – was the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW). The divergence around the Antipoverty Convention defended by Social Watch and the Antipoverty Pact supported by ICSW was one of the main controversies between the two networks. However, there was no public debate. In fact, the UN environment, geared mainly to pressure governments, does not facilitate confrontation of opposing views between civil society organizations. In fact, it was as if the non-written principle of consensual decision-making was also in force among civil society organizations and networks.

One of the most striking signs of the visibility acquired by Social Watch in the Copenhagen review process was the invitation to Roberto Bissio, the Network's International Secretary, to address the official opening of the UN General Assembly Special Session in Geneva, as sole representative of civil society. On that occasion, Bissio expressed Social Watch's sharp criticism of *A Better World for All*, a document jointly signed by the UN, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and released earlier that year by the Secretary-General. The impact was huge, as John Langmore, former Director of the UN Division for Social Policy and Development, later acknowledged. According to him, the immediate and emphatic Social Watch reaction against the report blocked the initiative from prospering.⁹

The way forward: Lessons

The Social Watch experience, particularly during the Copenhagen+5 process, illustrates some of the dilemmas for international civil society networks working within a changing international system whose future institutional framework has yet to be clearly defined. One is the difficulties of participating in official processes without losing the legitimacy built with its national platforms –

NGO networks often act as a kind of “civil diplomacy” blanket– but without any formal mandate to act as such. The legitimacy that they possess stems mainly from their linkages with processes and social struggles unfolding in the local and national spheres. Social Watch experience has been most innovative in relation to this aspect, especially when it seeks to incorporate the perspectives of both Northern and Southern countries.

However, to establish the bridge between the national and the international, and at the same time to monitor and lobby governments regarding their commitments, Social Watch has often had to walk on thin ice, combining pressure and political dialogue. This debate with government representatives on the qualities and shortcomings of national public policies requires new technical skills. Although present at the international level, this dilemma is felt especially strongly within national and local spheres.

Balancing sentiments of frustration and a sense of urgency

As the Copenhagen + 5 process demonstrated, although some of the points of the Geneva Benchmark could be found in the approved documents, the prevailing feeling among many participants at the conclusion of the General Assembly Special Session in Geneva was

⁹ Comment made during the launching of the Social Watch Report 2001 at the UN headquarters, New York, May 4, 2001.

frustration. In fact, lessons learned from the last two decades of UN-focused global advocacy efforts on the environment (from Rio to the World Summit) and women's rights (from Nairobi 85, Vienna 93, Cairo and Beijing) highlight the limited success achieved from increased access, improved content and sharper messages in significantly shifting political debates, paradigms and realities. The sense of frustration is quite overwhelming. Even UNDP reports refer to the 90s as the decade of broken promises, in relation to the lack of progress in fulfillment of the commitments signed by world governments in the so-called social cycle of UN conferences and summits. Though transnational civil society initiatives played a crucial role in linking global processes with local/national struggles, the overall picture is not very bright. One must recognize that the much-celebrated MDGs offer very little consolation after more than a decade of procrastination and systemic failure in addressing the growing global deficit in providing economic, social, cultural, political and environmental rights to most of the people on the planet.

In terms of multilateral processes, the most striking example of failure is seen in CSOs' inability to substantially influence the actual policies of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), particularly the World Bank. If one considers the amount of time, resources and energy dedicated over the last 20 years to open participatory spaces within those organizations, to influence their policies and policy papers, to engage (a new fashionable concept) with World Bank representatives and NGO liaison officers, the progress achieved is not so great after all. The overall structural adjustment framework is more alive than ever, in spite of tons of criticism received from everyone involved in the social development debate. It is definitely time to rethink what we define as "halls of power". And most important, how do we create alternatives avenues to express authentic civil society power?

Perhaps the time has come for NGOs to apply more pressure on the United Nations. However, this should be done with the simultaneous resumption of the debate on UN reform and its strengthening as an agency for global governance. Certainly Social Watch is one of the international networks best positioned to propose and stimulate this discussion, including its national implications. That remains one of the main challenges to be addressed over the next years.

Mobilizing for 2005 and beyond

Looking at these instructive experiences and recognizing how much the global context has changed, we can only conclude that change is not just about getting into the "halls of power" with a clear set of alternative ideas and proposals.¹⁰ It is not just getting a seat at the table with something powerful to say – although this is important – rather, it's a matter of changing the size and shape of the table, and ultimately who sits at the table. So, practically, this is a matter of balancing engagement in existing policy spaces with effective political efforts to reshape and claim new spaces of power. It is about critiquing and proposing policy alternatives while continuously building and communicating an alternative agenda and way of looking at the world. It is about creating enough continuous political pressure to democratize the process and the agenda so that whatever gains are achieved can be sustained and expanded. That is a deeply political task involving:

1. Sharper analysis and alternatives;
2. Broad agendas framing an alternative vision;
3. Compelling communication strategies tailored for different audiences, including the public and mainstream and popular forms;

¹⁰This is part of a ongoing "conversation" between Atila Roque and Lisa VeneKlasen .

-
4. Greater dialogue, openness, and mutual constructive criticism amongst CSOs (networks, campaigns and individual organizations) in order to build a countervailing movement able to incorporate the diversity which exist in the world;
 5. Collective, organized citizen power capable of sustaining pressure on decision makers and powerbrokers to democratize the global economic policy process and agenda;
 6. Effective change strategies that combine and link research, citizen education, organizing, communication and engagement efforts.

The World Social Forum (WSF) process illustrates a clear evolution in terms of international civil activism and networking, offers a rich experience for learning using a model emphasizing through dialogue, mutual criticism and exchange amongst different civil society actors, including NGOs and social movements. However, The challenge of keeping the momentum of civil society engagement in international affairs and its connections with national policies, without losing its basic commitments to social change and human rights, is greater than ever. Maintaining a broader conversation about this is a challenge to everyone committed to democratic values at the national and global levels.

Bibliography

Edwards, Michael. *NGO Rights and Responsibilities: A New Deal for Global Governance*. London: The Foreign Policy Center, 2000.

Jordan, Lisa & Tuijl, Peter van. "Political Responsibility in Transnational NGO Advocacy." *World Development*, V. 28, N. 12 (2000): 2051-2065.

Reisen, Mirjam van. "The 'Prehistory' of 'Social Watch': the transforming of NGO Networking in Ongoing International Negotiations." *Montevideo: Social Watch*, March 2000.

Santos, Boaventura. *A Reinvenção Solidária e Participativa do Estado*. The International Seminar, *Sociedade e a Reforma do Estado*, Ministry of Administration and State Reform São Paulo, March 26-28, 1998.

Social Watch. *Social Watch Progress Report June 99-May 2000*. Montevideo: Social Watch, 2000.

Tuijl, Peter van & Apell, Hannah. *Rock Around the Clock: A Self-Evaluation of Novib's Role Regarding Social Watch*. The Hague: Novib, July 2000.

Weiss, Thomas G. and Gordenker, Leon, eds. *NGOs, the UN & Global Governance*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): Useful Instrument or Distraction

By John W. Foster

MDGs: A Debatable Initiative ¹

The Millennium Development Goals originated in the Millennium Declaration Resolution by heads of State and Government at the 2000 UN General Assembly and subsequent events. Although they embody a commitment to reduce global ills such as poverty, they seem a pale embodiment of the hopes of the UN global conferences of the 1990s, like those of Copenhagen and Beijing. From the point of view of civil society organizations (CSOs) specifically, they are too limited, general, modest and lacking in specific accountability for the northern wealthy countries in aligning their own national interests with international priorities.

By 2015, all 189 United Nations Member States pledged to:

- 1) Reduce by half extreme poverty and hunger
- 2) Achieve universal primary education
- 3) Promote gender equality and empower women
- 4) Reduce child mortality
- 5) Improve maternal health
- 6) Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- 7) Ensure environmental sustainability
- 8) Develop a global partnership for development

Simultaneously, the UN set up indicators, very broad but somewhat concrete tools, to measure the progress of each these goals, although goal 8 lacks the specific times and targets of the others. For example, the second goal to achieve universal primary education, includes three indicators: net enrolment ratio in primary education, proportion of pupils starting grade one who reach grade five, and literacy rate of 15-24 year olds.

However, the MDGs Resolution lacks a more specific understanding of who will be held accountable for the goals completion. As noted, the last of these goals does not state clear targets and timelines, nor does it mention the commitments of developed countries to a more equitable international system and to increased resource flows for development. This assessment is essential in particular regarding northern, wealthy governments and their implication in the process of development.

Civil society's positioning vis-à-vis these MDGs and the UN's campaign for their accomplishment are critical components because they can be used to provoke development debate, enhance and flesh out the goals themselves, and go far beyond,

¹ **Note:** *This paper is a brief and preliminary contribution to discussion. For more thorough and up to date treatment of these issues see We the peoples...2005. The UN Millennium Declaration and Beyond, Mobilizing for Change: Messages from Civil Society (NSI/WFUNA, 2005)*

whether by pressing for MDGs +, or regionally or sectorally appropriate goals and targets. But can they be “owned”, can they be appropriated and modified by democratic means?. “Democratic” in this case means that all actors affected by the goals, and not just the rich and few who set them will have a say in the approaches used to achieve them and how they are prioritized. As the West African Civil Society Forum on the MDGs stated in February 2003 “the role of civil society organisations in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals will be a role of questioning, monitoring, criticism, alternative seeking and advocacy”. The role of civil society is thus to develop and propose alternatives and to demonstrate that other economic and social options are possible at both national and sub-regional levels.

A review of the present position of key actors working towards the Goals’ attainment will help bring forth the specific limitations and potential involvement of CSOs and the UN in this process of implementation.

Reporting on the North’s Inaction

In reality, only a few northern governments such as Denmark and Sweden have begun to restate their development programmes and to evaluate their contribution in terms of the MDGs. The Washington-based Center for Global Development (CDG), examined the behaviour of OECD nations in its 2003 report Ranking the Rich. The disparity between wealth and the provision of development assistance was notable for some countries. Two of the largest aid providers, the United States and Japan, were at the bottom of the scale; the Netherlands at No. 1. Other works on the MDGs present similar disparities. The 2004 meeting of the World Economic Forum (Davos, Switzerland) received a report from its Global Governance Initiative, which sounded a horn of alarm about failures (and a few success stories) in achieving progress toward the MDGs. Noting that governments cannot do it alone, but that neither civil society nor the corporate sector can take up all the slack it lamented:

Too often the governments are scarcely trying. Across the board the world is failing to put forward even half the effort needed to meet the world’s basic goals. The time has come to demand better.

Essentially, these reports make clear that knowing the MDGs will not thwart national governments towards eradicating the world’s stated ills.

On the same note, UN’s MDGs provide enough of a framework for other actors, such as corporate leaders and CSOs, to take initiatives and help achieve these goals. There needs to be specific methods of communication, accountability and UN development-related mechanisms in place to ensure all actors play their role effectively. Furthermore, the lack of precision and accountability means the goals may remain a bit intangible and be overwhelmed by other priorities. This deficiency creates a distance between the actors involved and their resolve to eradicating them through global cooperation.

The Mechanisms

The UN system, with leadership not only from the Secretary-General but also by UNDP head Mark Malloch Brown, is committed to pressing implementation. Since 2000, there have been opportunities for reviewing and implementing the goals in the General Assembly and through the organization of other bodies. At the same time, the Secretary-General reports on progress. However, most of this process is monitored through a rather paternalistic relationship between northern and southern partners, where the latter play child to the former. This relationship is especially evident where

the bulk of report, through the UNDP process is by developing countries on a pre-arranged framework, but developed donor countries may or may not offer reports of their own design. In some cases, civil society has been consulted in the preparation of country reports. In an increasing number of cases civil society is undertaking “shadow” reports on its own initiative.

The UNDP is in charge of obtaining reports submitted by developing countries on the implementation of given MDGs. The reports themselves are created to varying degrees with the participation of civil society organizations. Evelyn Herfkens, former Dutch Development Minister and head of the Millennium Development Goals Campaign, has attempted to energize national and international popular campaigns for the accomplishment of the goals. So far, many CSOs at the national level and international CSO networks are engaged with the MDGs. Some agencies are even re-phrasing their work and measuring their progress by applying the framework of the MDGs. In Sweden, for example, they are actively engaged with government in the national campaign to educate the public and to press forward government policy. In the Philippines CSOs have applied the framework right down to the municipal level, evaluating government budgets and priorities in the light of the MDGs.

Yet, while developing country governments are reporting through the UNDP system, only some northern government – principally Nordic authorities – have moved to reframe their development work in MDG terms and to develop national reports on progress. Dr. Jeffery Sachs heads Columbia University’s Millennium Project, through which a series of teams of experts examine and develop approaches to policies necessary to accomplish the MDGs. He believes that the attainment of the goals can come through a yearly investment of \$75 billion. He further comments that, “the amount of money needed is small enough to be barely visible in the world political economy, while its impact could be enormous.”

Inasmuch, the mechanisms may be in place but there is no clear priority setting when it comes to how the mechanisms could function more efficiently through, partly, more conscious budget allocation coming from the North to combat “real” international problems.

An Example: Goal 6: Modesty or Tragic Inadequacy?

One of the real problems facing the world today is the spread of infectious diseases such as AIDS. This is of course a monumental challenge, as the “arc” of infection moves through Africa, confronting India, China, S.E. Asia, the countries in transition, etc.

In terms of the HIV/Aids virus, there are more than 40 million infected, and 20 million dead. The fact that current efforts are insufficient and the goals far too limited can be seen as failing to stop a contemporary holocaust.

The goal itself is quite modest in relation to the fact that it says nothing about the living, the 40 million whose lives are under severe threat and the many more who will join them. The truth is that many of these lives can be extended or saved if it were more of a priority. The indicators outlined by the UN Secretary-General in his most recent MDG progress report are extremely limited. Although to be fair, the Secretary-General in his progress report on the Goals indicates the importance of treatment, looking at the rate of condom use and the number of orphans left behind due to HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases does not fully bring us closer to aborting the spread of viruses.

Even the WHO's ambitious target of 3 by 5 people, i.e. 3 million people in treatment by 2005, is pretty modest if you are one of the 37 million not on the list. These numbers are especially monumental knowing that thus far only around 300,000 people are in treatment (2004).

The main challenge to overcome in order to achieve Goal 6 is financial. The Global Fund on AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis has yet to acquire the required US\$3 billion, and is nowhere near reaching the \$4.5 billion target for 2005. Self-imposed responsibility and the cooperation of wealthy nations towards this goal are limited due to the conflict in aligning global and national interests. For example, the USA projects a defence budget of just over \$400 billion for the next fiscal year, and the \$81-150 billion being spent on Iraq is supplemental to that.

On the other hand, the Canadian government agreed, after two years of negotiations with the WTO, to facilitate the export of cheap generic drugs for AIDS and other public health needs in developing countries. This is an important step but also demonstrates why every delay in moving forward and funding is so regrettable.

To put more emphasis on the necessity of fighting these diseases, there needs to be more concerted efforts in understanding the causes of the diseases' spread, the different contexts within which they exist and in allocating enough resources to combat them before they kill and infect more people. Furthermore, there need to be specific frameworks within which the UN and its international partners at the government and non-government levels work in attaining not just this goal but all MDGs. The framework must be evaluative in nature and effective in influencing players to be more responsible in following through with their promises, and even pushing some to be more vigilant in their concern for international problems.

Measuring Accountability: Strategic Options and Approaches

Monitoring and Evaluation: The Use of Goal Eight

There has been a good deal of ink and air time spent on the fact that while the Goals set targets which must largely be met in developing countries, and detailed reporting frameworks are being administered by the UNDP and other agencies to document progress, the wealthy countries have no specific standards they must meet, no equivalent accountability mechanism.

One approach can be to take the MDGs as they are, to take up the indicators outlined in the Secretary-General's Annual Progress Reports, and to rate the progress being made by governments. CSOs can offer help, press for greater energy and resource application or offer proposals for alternate means of achieving goals.

CSOs are demanding greater monitoring and evaluating of the process. The World Federation of United Nations report entitled *We the peoples...2003, reports*:

"A large number of respondents believe that governments should report on progress towards MDGs in a manner directly related to each of the goals. There is an appreciation that government reports should include comparisons with other countries and that the reports should be sent to the United Nations. Civil society groups, including United Nations Association are organizing conferences and inviting

responsible representatives from government to report publicly on progress in achieving the MDGs. Although the focus of the survey question was on accountability, many respondents talk about CSOs pressing for government transparency.”

Transparency is an essential foundation for measurable accountability. There are a number of initiatives on the part of multilateral bodies and NGOs to establish frameworks for monitoring and evaluating the progress of the governments of wealthy countries with regard to the MDGs. A few governments are developing their own internal indicators.

One international NGO network, Social Watch, will develop a report for 2005 in which the performance of a number of developed as well as many developing countries will be examined. The Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) has been very interested in enhancing the indicators applied to those goals, particularly ones affecting women, and in monitoring and reporting their evaluation of progress.

On the same note, the North-South Institute is currently planning to focus its major annual examination of Canadian development performance, the Canadian Development Report, on the MDGs, and may include some evaluation of where Canada stands vis-à-vis the MDG markers.

Changing the Economic Context

There is another approach, which was raised at an MDG forum during last year’s High-level Session of the General Assembly. The Third World Network’s Martin Khor recently published a short booklet entitled *Bridging the Global Economic Divide: Proposals for Millennium Development Goal 8 on Global Partnership for Development*.

In this booklet, Khor notes that wealthy countries, which have greater decision-making power in the Bank and the Fund, and although challenged quite effectively at Cancun, still dominate the WTO. Inasmuch they have a key role in defining the external economic environment that can considerably determine the ability of developing countries to meet the MDGs and other development objectives.

Khor cites five examples embodying this point:

- The continuous fall in commodity prices of export commodities has caused tremendous income and foreign exchange losses to many developing countries and persistent poverty at the community level.
- Financial instability and sharp currency fluctuations caused by large inflows and outflows of external funds have led many countries into financial and economic crisis.
- Inappropriate import liberalization policies, often encouraged or forced by conditions imposed on recipient countries by international financial institutions have often led to the impoverishment of farmers or loss of industrial jobs.
- Cutbacks in social sector expenditure and the introduction of a “user-pay” principle, in structural adjustment policies have contributed to the deterioration of social well being of vulnerable and poor groups.
- The continuation of the debt crisis in many countries.

Khor also remarks that getting policies right is essential to achieving the MDGs and that Goal 8 on global partnership should therefore focus on getting international economic structures, policies and rules right. He goes on to discuss reforms of the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF that would assist in this regard.

At the same High-Level Session of the General Assembly, a group of NGOs and social movements – including the ICFTU, WEDO, Social Watch, CIDSE, etc – put forward a paper on the reform of global governance, which could contribute to getting the policies and the decision-making about the policies “right”. This policy paper is entitled *A Political Agenda for the Reform of Global Governance*.

Opportunities for Engagement

a) Multilateral Opportunities

- **MDG Review**

The year 2005 is an opportunity for a comprehensive review of progress. The UN Secretary-General each fall reports on the state of achievement and the challenges (the 2005 report will be published in late May). In 2005 a whole series of official bodies, governments and CSOs are considering reports and events that will provide not only an assessment but also advice and resolve for the next stage of work.

- **Financing for Development: Opportunity for Systemic Engagement**

The results of the 2002 Monterrey World Conference on Financing for Development, the so-called Monterrey “Consensus”, showed an ongoing process of follow-up which overlaps considerably with the MDGs and particularly with the macroeconomic policies which condition the potential for achievement of the Goals. The Monterrey “Consensus” includes:

- Many of the key constituents of economic policy related to development as well as governance.
- A Civil Society critique of the consensus signalling key issues that need to be engaged.
- A tentative process but one involving key multilateral economic institutions, civil society and the private sector. NGOs already are developing a practice through the International Facilitating Group on Financing for Development (IFG), etc.
- Reviews offering the opportunity to look at how the whole system is working, utilizing the objectives set in Monterrey but with linkage to the MDGs.
- 2005 as a key year in the evaluation of progress in both overlapping streams

b) National opportunities

There have already been significant initiatives regarding MDGs and national engagement with civil society.

The UNDP has developed approaches to partnerships, and in the preparation of national reports in a number of countries is seeking the involvement of CSOs. More than 50 of these reports are now available on line and more are in preparation. Some additional work has been done on relating the MDGs to PRSP initiatives in general and in specific situations.

UNDP has, during 2003, held regional forums, for example, in West Africa (February, 2003) and Southern Africa (July, 2003), in which civil society participants and perspectives have been integrated. Reports of these meetings, including discussion of such themes as the “customization” of the MDGs to particular national settings are available.

Final Thoughts

“If we pass up this chance, what are we saying about the value of human life?” - Jeffrey Sachs

Less than 11 years are left before the target date for achieving the MDGs. As an international cooperation tool, these goals can unite the UN, national governments, CSOs and other actors in their work for a better future, where sustaining human life is central and resource allocation is equitable. All actors involved in the implementation of the MDGs must recognize and work to redress the structural disparities in governance institutions.

References:

1. *The Center for Global Development, Ranking the Rich, 2003*
2. *World Economic Forum, Global Initiative Report 2004*
3. Khor, Martin. Bridging the Global Economic Divide: Proposals for Millennium Development Goal 8 on Global Partnership for Development.

Some Links:

UN FFD: www.un.org/esa/ffd

UNDP MDGs: www.undp.org/mdg/

WFUNA: www.wfuna.org; Third World Network: www.twinside.org

Report on the Research Initiative

By FIM Secretariat (Mario Lavoie and Despina Sourias)

Introduction

FIM's research initiative *Creating and Sharing Knowledge on Civil Society Engaging with Multilateral Institutions* culminated with a mini-forum in Gaborone, Botswana in March 2004. Selected authors presented their draft papers on lessons learned and possible strategies that may be applied by civil society organizations (CSOs) in poverty eradication and in the implementation of the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The lessons from national case studies related to the current debate on civil society strategies and responses towards the implementation of MDGs. Since many MDGs deal with poverty eradication, and a successful implementations of MDGs requires strong civil society (CS) participation, valuable insights can be gained from examining past participation experiences.

CS involvement in poverty eradication and MDG implementation is central to achieving lasting international development. Case studies, viewpoints and exchanges at the mini-forum, however, demonstrated how achieving meaningful participation could still be challenging. The report reveals some of the obstacles participants felt civil society (CS) faced in attempting to effectively participate in, both, multilateral poverty eradication strategies and MDG implementation processes in recent years. However, civil society actors and their partners in government and multilateral agencies can learn from past experiences, try to emulate successful engagement and, draw from proven models of participation and mobilisation. The end of the report discusses strategies to that effect, not only around issues of how civil society can effectively engage in the process of MDG and policy implementation, but also, how CSOs confront the larger context of strengthening the evolution of UN multilateralism and urgency for the increased legitimacy of and compliance with UN defined norms and targets within the global governance system.

Summary of key points

The papers revealed civil society impressions on the MDGs, the effectiveness of NGO international networking methods and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Participants highlighted that there are diverse human realities in living with poverty. Inasmuch, practical processes to eradicate poverty must follow an understanding of domestic and greater global context in which it exists.

PRSPs, nationally owned and participatory poverty reduction strategies to be approved by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, exemplify the increased attention international financial institutions (IFIs) give to CSO involvement in carrying out poverty reduction plans. They give non-governmental actors a chance to collaborate with domestic, bilateral and multilateral partners in the creation of these plans at the national level. Yet, CS influence is still not significant enough and the approach not exhaustive enough to address and overcome the macro level causes of poverty through national initiatives.

On another note, the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) mainly centre on attaining greater social equity, health security, economic viability, and poverty reduction. Because of this socially-conscious elaboration in the discourse of development, and through the escalating influence of civil society organizations (CSOs) on UN policies, a more concerted effort can take place between domestic governments and civil society in implementing means to achieving these Goals.

However, the UN itself must gain authority as a political body whose declarations, signed by 191 member-nations, actually affect international and domestic public policies.

Civil society effectively engaging in policy creation, implementation & monitoring

a) Some Prerequisites for effective engagement

There are three significant obstacles to overcome for valuable CS participation. First, there must be an **opportunity for CS to participate**. Papers illustrate the importance of domestic political culture as an external determinant for successful participation. Political culture shapes governance practices within different local, national, regional and international contexts. As a result, the degree of CS participation in developing the poverty reduction papers and monitoring any policy implementation will vary widely. Even if informed, well organized, perceptive of opportunities and united in its mission, CS cannot work alone and must be allowed to participate by other actors who at present have more standing in the decision-making process.

Secondly, CSOs must have **minimal policy-making capacity** and understanding; if not, they must build it in order to effectively join the decision-making table. Their understanding of the power relationships existing within the international system is a necessary element for their internal capacity-building which will thus bring greater CS influence on policies. Also, looking at development from a more holistic, multidimensional perspective is essential; this means taking into account that the uneven power relationships that underlie governance structures are fundamental causes of poverty. There is an unequal balance of power between donor countries, IFIs and receiving nations in negotiating processes. For example, PRSP funding comes from the World Bank and the IMF. The IFIs cater to their main stakeholders and funders—the most developed countries—when it comes to loan negotiations. Receiving countries, at times hesitantly, create poverty eradication plans targeting areas that IFIs define as important to develop in order to alleviate poverty. This conditional approach not only prevents PRSPs from being nationally owned but it also hinders efforts to successfully end poverty. PRSPs do not always capture and, hence, cannot remedy the macroeconomic causes of poverty that are rooted in say international trade policies. This effort would require a commitment by all parties involved to break down the foundations on which international political and economic relations stand. Civil society groups must extend their interest-based understanding of poverty to include the many other factors that influence this situation. Once on the table, CS can thus use their expertise on the issue of unequal negotiating practices to bring greater policy coherence and effectiveness.

Thirdly, a commitment to **solidarity between CSOs** is quintessential to practical advancement in achieving any goal at hand. They must strategise together when allowed to sit on the policy making table while respecting each organization's commitment to other causes and varying approaches to the participation in multilateral decision-making processes. This 'internal' factor has been critical in two case studies observed at the meeting in Gaborone. Bangladesh's example showed that a civil society in dissonance leads to little impact on policy-making. However, Warren Nyamugasira's Ugandan example proves that concerted efforts, even in the presence of divergent opinions, can lead to important civil society participation in the process.

b) Roles: CS Finding its Place

There are two important roles that seem viable for civil societies given these prerequisites are met. First, CSOs can play critical roles in channeling and representing the viewpoints of 'intended beneficiaries'. Second, complementarily or simultaneously with the first one, CSOs can act as catalyst to mobilize public opinion and support to ensure successful policy implementation. Case studies, for instance, illustrate how CSOs in Bangladesh and Uganda have provided the best **link between the constituencies targeted by policies and programmes and decision-makers in governments and multilateral agencies**. Meeting the hearty ambitions of the MDGs and poverty eradication papers requires **mass mobilization and citizen education on the relevance of these policies**. There is a considerable gap between how little people, that is citizens and CSOs, know about and can do to fulfill the MDGs, and how much must be known and done to achieve them. Inasmuch, CS can educate its members on international policies, building techniques to fight for their domestic implementation and lobby governments to respect their commitment to UN ideals.

In the example of Social Watch, the organization mobilized civil society groups and networks across the globe in dialoguing with each other and with government representatives. Social Watch's experience is unique because the organization has been trying to mend the divide between local and global priorities by monitoring the process towards poverty eradication and equality. Its organizational structure provides a link between policy implementation and result-oriented action, between CSOs and government representatives. This practice can connect national policies to global ones as well as international decisions to national interests.

In terms of the MDGs and other multilateral goals, this role played by CSO actors translate into creating ways for them to be dealt with and monitored locally and nationally through 'real' relationships and agreements with government representatives. The added ultimate benefit of that function can lead to "real" CSO influence and positive impact on **structural changes in terms of power relations** (defined politically and through ownership of resources) and ensure the achievement of multilateral goals, not just by a symbolic, but constant, meaningful civil society participation in decision-making and monitoring processes.

c) Action strategies

The papers and discussions dealt with various action strategies. Proper mobilizing and lobbying strategies must ensue so that multilateral institutions and governments, in response, create and put in place civil society-friendly policies.

Effective leadership is necessary for the attainment of any goal and for the unity in efforts at every level of decision-making processes and governance. The Ugandan example illustrated that strong, undisputed, assertive and visionary leaders played an enormous part in PRSP success. Respected leadership can also help in priority setting, the second strategy.

After understanding the real context within which they exist, **CSOs must prioritize** which goals they want to reach. The present limitations on their overall low level of influence and legitimacy must lead them to smaller, realistic goal setting and constant evaluations

It is important to note that, although many civil society groups want to sit on these official tables there are just as many not interested or uninvited to these processes. To close this gap and maintain solidarity, there has to be what Nyamugasira coins as the **"insider-outsider strategy"**. Like the back and forth that exists between government and CS once working together, there needs to be a reassurance of the commitment between CS members to achieving a giving goal. For those who choose or

must stay out, they can implicate themselves by organizing meetings with those inside the process; and, in turn, those inside must ensure they express the concerns of their fellow organizations that are on the sidelines. This is how they keep unity in the face of diversity.

At times it is difficult, even in open political cultures, for CS representatives to have a say in policy matters. **Networking outside the official meeting spaces** can be conducive to building bonds at the domestic level between CS and government. When these two groups exchange ideas and goals, the strict sectoral barriers can be broken down and there can be an opening for CS on official tables. If CSOs come equipped with proof of their expertise, they are more likely to be valued as partners in policy making and implementing.

At the core of all these strategies and in order to sustain multi-layered relationships, there needs to be strong communication between and respect of all actors taking part in decision-making processes. This means that civil society must see itself as a legitimate force for change and they must be seen as such by others.

Legitimacy: Bridging the credibility gap

Legitimacy is recognized as a requirement for increased civil society engagement with government, private sector representatives and multilateral institutions. However, legitimacy must be acquired before and while civil society groups attend decision-making processes. Also, looking at the positive side of the UN as a key multilateral player while constructively criticizing its actions can bridge the UN's credibility gap and that of CSOs.

a) Within Civil Society

For a long-term collaboration between CS and decision-makers, CS has to build its legitimacy from within. CSOs have to believe their participation is a necessity for effective policy-making; they must garner enough representation on the table for leverage and must prove their expertise on the problems discussed through specific examples of their efforts. Basically, the willingness of CSOs to collaborate and build their credibility, as viable representatives of their constituencies, is essential. In this manner, they can bridge the credibility gap between CS expertise and action in order to influence policies.

b) Legitimacy with UN/multilateral institutions

The UN's credibility as an international institution is based on the significance of its policy and goal setting outside the corridors of its headquarters. In terms of civil society attitudes vis-à-vis the legitimacy of multilateral institutions, many research participants felt that, in order for civil society to participate in poverty eradication and to work with the UN, it has to overcome one huge barrier: its frustration with the ineffectiveness of past multilateral agreements/commitments and severe shortcomings in terms of policy implementation. Again, understanding the complexity of the context within which CSOs and multilateral institutions exist is crucial. The UN, although a good democratic model for international governance, is not a lone player in decision-making and implementation processes. The results of its efforts are limited and even overshadowed by the interests of IFIs and wealthy nations in maintaining economic dominance, as many participants noted. Policies that require the support of these last two stakeholders inevitably hurt the credibility of the UN and the possibility of amassing support from CSOs. Seeing that there have been incremental strides towards

achieving development goals can allow for CS to be more proactive in consolidating their relationship with the UN.

The UN and CS working together: Challenges and suggestions

The UN's mandate to improve human conditions cannot be met without material resources. In a way, the UN and civil society face similar challenges. Because they both lack economic authority and independence, their interests are often superseded by those of more powerful players in global governance.

In terms of the MDGs, there has not been full collaboration until recently between CS and the UN because the MDGs have not provide to many CS constituencies clear enough points of reference for strategy development and action. Some civil society members feel that the MDGs are too general and, although the UN and its agencies have worked out targets and measurements for evaluating results, the UN must also have a comprehensible proposition on how it can implement them. Others felt that the timeframe within which the MDGs were to be achieved was not acceptable or too short, considering the gravity of the problems such as unemployment, hunger, the spread of HIV/AIDS and debt. Also, limited resources and the challenging relationship between civil society, multilateral institutions and the main political and economic global powers, still make the MDGs appear more like a "vision" than a genuine "action plan". Inasmuch, many civil society practitioners, for any effective advancement on the MDGs, saw the need a renewed and strengthen UN in order to :

- a) Garner more wealthy nation support for policies that extend beyond these nations' own economic interests; and,
- b) Assure that all stakeholders, especially those affected and directly concerned in developing nations, have a say on how strategies are implemented. This means, greater cooperation between CSOs and the UN at all levels, particularly at the national level.

A share vision and analysis emerged from the papers and discussions. Civil society can help the UN clarify the inherent confusion surrounding the purpose of the MDGs. Even though the MDGs address issues that have existed prior to the UN Millennium Summit of September 2000, by re-examining the Goals today, doors to dismantling some of their 'root' causes can be opened. Because addressing the root causes, in the end, is unavoidable. In order to reach the Goals, not only must they be reframed to capture the urgency of today's developmental problems but they also need to be internalized by CSOs as "core values", as goals around which civil society actions and interventions are centered. MDGs can thus be reframed to address the structural root causes of poverty and social inequity at the micro and macro levels. The MDGs can be new lenses through which the uneven power relations between North and South, within the North, within the South, can be viewed in a new light and transformed.

Final Remarks

Participants of this research initiative had a very positive response to the exchange of opinions and their personal experiences. The evaluation at the mini-forum in Gabarone, for instance, was particularly glowing and rich in suggestions for future FORUM research topics. The small-group format of the event and focused deliberation on MDGs and poverty eradication strategies were highly praised. These features fulfilled the mini-forum's ambition. They allowed CSO practitioners to step back and review past actions while providing them with a basis to learn new methods in the establishment, implementation and monitoring of goals and strategies. Forums of this sort could be used also, as many suggested, at the regional level for civil society to reorganize itself and connect international processes to national ones.

Interestingly, some participants felt they need to complement their analysis with an examination of the growing role and impact of fundamentalism and of unilateralism in international relations and global governance institutions today. The challenges to achieving poverty reduction and the MDGs rest on relating and adapting the complexities of world issues to different domestic contexts, assuring these complexities are discussed and considered when establishing viable policies and actions plans. And for civil society, pursuing efforts to build its capacities, knowledge and networks is the only real strategy to further its legitimacy and effectiveness at the decision-making table.

References Suggested by Authors and Other Relevant Links

Non-governmental websites

ActionAid: This organization's mission is to help eradicate poverty. Its head office is in Johannesburg, South Africa with national offices worldwide. For details, please go to <http://www.actionaid.org>.

Wanyeki African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET): This organization strives to help build the capacity of African NGOs focusing 'on women's development, equality and other human rights'. For articles on the PRSPs and gender-related issues, visit their website at <http://www.femnet.or.ke>.

Conference of NGOs in consultative relationship with the UN (CONGO): This is an organization, which assists and represents NGOs that were granted the consultative status with the UN. Learn more by going on their website at <http://www.ngocongo.org/>.

International Council on Social Welfare: A non-profit organization established in 1928 in Paris, France, it consists of a network of organisations providing help for a wide range of people who are poor, ill, disabled, unemployed, frail or oppressed. See details and pertinent works at <http://www.icsw.org/>.

The Center for Global Development: To learn more about the Ranking the Rich Initiative, go to <http://www.cgdev.org/rankingtherich/home.html>

Global Policy Forum (GPF): This organization monitors policy-making and NGO influence on the UN. Papers and links to works on globalization as well as social, economic and security policies may be found on their website at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/>.

NGO Working Group on the World Bank: This is an autonomous grouping of NGOs, which identifies priorities before the annual meetings with World Bank staff in the World Bank NGO Committee. It also holds meetings and organizes research and information exchanges to strengthen NGO inputs to policy dialogue with the World Bank. For pertinent articles, go to <http://www.staff.city.ac.uk/p.willetts/NGOWG/INDEX.HTM>.

North-South Institute: The only research institute in Canada focusing on international development, they produce works on Canadian foreign policy and global development related issues. To view their publications, go to <http://www.nsi-ins.ca>.

PROSHIKA: A Centre for Human Development: This is a Bangladeshi organization and one of the largest NGOs worldwide. Proshika focuses the reduction of poverty and on empowering the poor. More information about their work can be found at <http://www.proshika.org>.

Structural Adjustment Participatory Review International Network (SAPRIN): This is a global network attempting to expand and lobotomize the role of civil society in economic policymaking and to strengthen the organized challenge to structural

adjustment programs by citizens around the globe. For more details on its progress visit <http://www.saprin.org/>.

Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN): This network consists of women scholars and activists from the economic South who engage in feminist research and analysis of the global environment and are committed to working for economic justice, gender justice and democracy. For more information, go to <http://www.dawn.org.fj/>.

Secours-Catholique-CARITAS France: This is an international Catholic humanitarian organization seeking to provide emergency relief and to fight poverty and underdevelopment through cooperation with local communities around the world. Articles on poverty reduction and other pressing social issues can be found on their website at <http://www.secours-catholique.asso.fr/v3/une/index.htm>.

Social Watch: To learn more about Social Watch, its commitments and network and to access its publications, see <http://www.socialwatch.org/en/portada.htm>.

Third World Network: This is an independent non-profit international network of organizations and individuals involved in issues relating to development, the Third World and North- South issues. They have vast communication and information network. For their publications, go to <http://www.twinside.org.sg>.

World Economic Forum: This a Swiss international non-profit group promoting the idea that sustainable economic and social development go hand in hand with emphasis on initiatives based cross-sectoral relations. To learn more about their strategies and initiatives, go to <http://www.weforum.org>.

World Federation of United Nations Association (WFUNA): This is an international people's movement for the UN promoting its values through and activities, a publications and research material with information on issues pertaining to the the UN and civil society. <http://www.wfuna.org>.

The Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO): This is an international advocacy network working to gain equal participation with men in decision-making from grassroots to global arenas. To view Women's *Empowerment, Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals* and other relevant works, go to <http://www.wedo.org>.

Governmental websites

UN: Official Site www.un.org

- **UN FFD:** Financing for Development program. www.un.org/esa/ffd
- **UNDP MDGs:** <http://www.undp.org/mdg/>
- **UN MDGs :** <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>
- **UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN NGLS):** This group focuses on building the relationship between CS and the Un to achieve the MDGs. See <http://www.un-ngls.org/mdg>

IMF: For general information on the IMF and their involvement in the PRS process, visit <http://www.imf.org>.

World Bank: For general information, go to www.worldbank.org. For details on the PRSPs, visit <http://poverty.worldbank.org/prsp>.

About the Authors

John Foster, PhD.
Principal Researcher
The North-South Institute
55 Murray Street, Suite 200
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada
K1N 5M3
Telephone: +1-613-241-3535
Fax: +1-613-241-7435
E-mail: jfoster@nsi-ins.ca

Dr. Foster holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of Toronto. He has done post-graduate work as a visiting scholar at the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at the University of California in San Diego. He brings extensive experience in the voluntary sector at the national and international level, in economic policy, human rights and international development. He has also worked as an E.D. for OXFAM Canada. Presently at the North-South Institute, he is a principal researcher and the co-editor and author of *Whose World Is It Anyway? Civil Society, the United Nations and the Multilateral Future* (Ottawa, UNAC, 1999 560 pp), *Un monde pour tout le monde: La société civile, les Nations Unies et l'avenir du multilatéralisme* (Ottawa, ACNU, 1999. 600 pp).

Mahbubul Karim
Senior Vice-President
PROSHIKA: A Centre for Human Development
I/1-Ga, Section-2, Mirpur
Dhaka-1216, Bangladesh
Tel: +1- 88028057684/ 8015945/8013398
Fax: 880-2-8015811
E-mail: mkarim@proshika.bdonline.com

Mahbubul Karim is a development activist having long and extensive experience in human development training, institutional development, development management and policy advocacy. He regularly writes articles about poverty, civil society and sustainable development. Not only is Mr. Karim senior vice-president of Proshika but he is also the editor of 'Discourse: A Journal of Policy Studies' that the organisation publishes semi-annually.

Warren Nyamugasira
Executive Director,
Uganda National NGO Forum
25 Kabalagala P.O. Box 4636, Kampala
Tel: +1 256 41 510272/501674 / Fax: 256 31 260372
E-mail: ngoforum@infocom.co.ug

Warren Nyamugasira is the executive director of Uganda National NGO Forum. He is also part of the *Reality of Aid* project, an independent review of Poverty Reduction and Development Assistance, which involves organizations from the North and South in the assessment of poverty eradication efforts. Mr. Nyamugasira also has previous experience working with World Vision (a US PVO) in both Uganda and Rwanda.

Atila Roque

Executive Director

ActionAid USA

Action Aid USA

1112 16th street NW, Suite 540,

Washington DC 20036

Telephone: +1-202-835-1240

Fax: +1-202-835-1244

E-mail: atilar@actionaidusa.org

Atila Roque, a historian and political scientist, joined ActionAid USA on May 7, 2003 and has over 15 years' experience working in the NGO sector in Brazil. Most recently, he served as coordinator of the program on Public Policies and Globalization for IBASE (Brazilian Institute of Economic and Social Analyses), one of the most well known Brazilian NGOs. Prior to working with IBASE, he worked with a variety of NGOs in Brazil, including serving as the Coordinator for the Brazilian Association of NGOs, and the Coordination Board of the Brazilian Network on Trade and Regional Integration (Rebrip). For the last three years, he has been deeply involved with the World Social Forum process as a member of the Brazilian Organizing Committee. He is also a member of the International Coordinator Committee of the Social Watch Initiative

About FIM

The Montreal International Forum (FIM) was established in 1998 as an international NGO think tank with the goal of improving the influence of international civil society on the United Nations and the multilateral system. FIM believes that that through strengthening the interaction between civil society and multilateral institutions, it will be possible to better address the worst global problems like extreme poverty, wars, human rights violations and environment degradation.

FIM provides a neutral and impartial setting for holding meetings that favour dialogue, reflection and active learning about the interaction between civil society and the multilateral system. In so doing, these meetings enable practitioners from the civil society to draw lessons from NGO experiences that can strengthen the voice and participation of civil society actors in all multilateral institutions.

FIM's meetings generate cross-fertilization learning from different experiences and 'strategizing' amongst actors working in different sectors or multilateral settings. These NGO practitioners would not normally be able or have an opportunity to share experiences with one another.

Board of Directors	
Mr. Rajesh Tandon (Chair, FIM Board) Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) New Delhi, INDIA	Ms. Maria Khan ASPBAE Mumbai, INDIA
Mr. Nigel Martin (President, FIM) Montréal International Forum Montréal (Québec), CANADA	Mr. Ezra Limiri Mbogori Reflection and Development Centre For NGOs in Eastern and Southern Africa (MWENGO) Harare, ZIMBABWE
Ms Victoria Elias (Vice-Chair, FIM Board) Center for Environment and Sustainable Development "ECO- ACCORD" Moscow, RUSSIAN FEDERATION	Ms. Norma Sanchis Articulaci Feminista Mercosur / International Gender and trade network Buenos Aires, ARGENTINA
Mr. Roberto Bissio Instituto del Tercer Mundo (IeTEM) Montevideo, URUGUAY	Ms. Nkoyo Toyo Gender and Development Action (GADA) Lagos, NIGERIA
Mr. Michel Chaurette Centre canadien d'étude et de coopération internationale (CECI) Montréal (Québec), CANADA	Ms Lynn Muthoni Wanyeki Wanyeki African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET) Nairobi, KENYA
Mr. Manuel Chiriboga Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural RIMISP Quito, ECUADOR	
Mr. Felix Dodds Stakeholder Forum For Our Common Future London, UNITED KINGDOM	
Mr. Jean-Pol Evrard Secours catholique - Caritas France Paris, FRANCE	
Mrs. Hira P. Jhamtani Konphalindo Bali, INDONESIA	
	Secretariat
	Nigel Martin, President Mario Lavoie, Director, Programmes and Administration Aude Lecoite, Project Officer Despina Sourias, Project Officer

SPECIAL THANKS FOR THIS INITIATIVE TO :

The Commonwealth Foundation, United Kingdom

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

The Government of Quebec: Ministère des Relations Internationales (MRI)

The International Development Research Center (IDRC), Canada

NOVIB - Oxfam Netherlands

The World Social Forum (India), CIVICUS as well as contributing NGOs

FIM

**407 McGill Street , suite 800
Montréal, Quebec H2Y 2G3
Canada**

Telephone: +1-514-499-9468

Fax: +1-514-987-1567

Info@fimcivilsociety.org

www.fimcivilsociety.org