

Conference
ARE WE ON THE RIGHT TRACK?
PARADIGM REVIEW BY CSOs AS
DEVELOPMENT ACTORS

Prague, Czech Republic, 14th – 16th May 2008
Thursday 15th May 2008

Responses from European NGOs to the challenges pointed out by CSOs from the South and the East

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Economics:

- I liked that development is much more than growth! But I do not share the blanket rejection of capitalism as such. There are many different kinds of capitalisms and there are some interesting progressive capitalisms.
- I liked Rajamoorthy's point that foreign investment is something to be controlled and regulated by an effective state. It is a tool for development if you have a state to regulate – as it worked e.g. in Malaysia.

Politics:

- I particularly liked the role of the state as pointed out by Rebecca Tanui. NGOs are often anti-state, but an effective state is the most important driver of development, driver of industrialisation and progress. We need to understand and think much more about the role of the state. I also liked the second point about the role of the state: The role of the state is not just to be a regulator of the economy, but there is a duty to respect rights and to ensure the respect of rights.
- Power: do we like or dislike power? This is a real problem for NGOs- we want power until we get it and then we start feeling bad. Either we want power or we want to remain permanently in opposition. Personally I want power! This is how you change things. It is hard to change things from opposition. Despite compromises you can make much more and have real impact if you have power. We have to be much more engaged with power and be less accusatory.
- I would like to focus on national politics. We have to think much more about national politics - how national change happens, governance issues, how civil society and state interact.

NGOs:

- Northern NGOs: Are Northern NGOs guilty? Are we too scared to say anything? There are these issues: We have nothing to tell people in the South. We have this colonial baggage especially in the West of Europe. Between shame and pride we

should be thinking what can we - as the least unequal region (Europe/Scandinavia) - deliver – e.g. how to create welfare states, how to create the combination between state and citizen etc. We have to get over the guilt problem, although it is deeply rooted.

- There was a great phrase from Rajamoorthy: It would be a disaster if NGOs replaced the state. I cannot agree more. We have to realize that NGOs will always be a small player in a much bigger play. We have to be clearer what we can do and what we cannot do.
- NGOs should be catalysts. What NGOs are good at is bringing together people who would not talk to each other otherwise. The best campaigns are those which do not involve only NGOs, but also others - trade unions, political parties, journalists, parliamentarians etc. That's how you can get a change.

Gaps:

- Migration: A lot of the NGOs are too scared to talk about migration because it is politically unpopular. We can learn a lot from the Eastern NGOs and countries who are both sender and receiver countries. Choosing whether to leave or to stay, is one of the key decisions for someone living in poverty. And we need to make sure if people choose to move to ensure that they have rights and dignity and that they can do it with humanity. NGOs have to talk about this!
- Climate change: I am totally terrified about climate change because it is having lots of impact now already on many countries. Actually, in a longer term climate change could make carbon inaccessible. If nothing is put in its place, then actually it will be a kind of “dark age” for poor countries. It will make a gap. Not climate change, but the way we respond to climate change – with putting a high price on carbon- is very worrying. What does that do to the countries where people can't afford it?

Minutes: Anita Bister, TRIALOG