

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

Prague, Czech Republic, 14th – 16th May 2008
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Responses from European NGOs to the challenges pointed out by CSOs from the South and the East

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Comparison to her general doctor who used to describe drugs for treating allergies, but not even once posed the question of the causes of these allergy problems. In this respect, there are some similarities with the ‘development business’.

We have to shed some light on the real causes of poverty.

The present development model does not work – we face climate change, we destroyed environment, extreme poverty is growing and we create even more differences than there were ever before, we see more and more wars and conflicts and insecurities in the world.

What are the causes of this? In brief:

- The cause of climate change is ruthless development. The real causes of climate change come from the so-called Northern/Western countries; the so-called Southern countries have the lowest environmental footprint.
- The causes of economic poverty are poor education, corruption, poor infrastructure, but mostly neo-liberal economy and unfair trade relation – again they originate mostly in the so-called Northern countries.
- The causes of wars and conflicts are xenophobia, intolerance, fear of otherness, struggle for power and resources – we can see all this both in the Northern and the Southern countries.

Therefore, are we addressing the causes or the symptoms? Development NGOs do work in the Southern countries on the symptoms, but if we want to address the causes, we will have to do more in the Northern countries!

So what are we using as recipes? Why are we not using the best recipes that we can see in the world? Very many different cultures in the so-called Southern countries know how to live sustainable. Why do we not have development projects in which these societies will educate us how to live sustainable?

The Southern speakers in this conference said that they need support in capacity building, advocacy, policy and sharing of experiences. In one of the workshops we heard that the African leaders are often not aware what they are signing, eg. with the EPAs (Economic Partnership Agreements). It was also mentioned yesterday that the EU challenge is how to involve more the developing countries in development.

We still have the arrogant old attitude of “developing the underdeveloped”, together with the notion of the “world’s periphery” and the “third world”. “Underdevelopment” is perhaps a form of consciousness, while at the moment we are facing the challenge of living sustainably. And we have to address that everywhere and all of us.

In this context, the real challenge is the global partnership and where to find the best models, where to use them and who to teach whom?

How do Europeans answer these challenges? I do not see many differences between old and new EU member states – apart from doing probably the same mistakes and still learning. But what the new member states do have is experience how to turn over night from “the underdeveloped communists” into “accepted and developed Westerners”. This was an experience of lifetime.

I propose as a challenge to abandon the paradigm of dividing this world into ‘North’ and ‘South’ and start living in one world!

Minutes: Anita Bister, TRIALOG