

## **Expert Seminar on the Future of Civil Society Development Organisations – November 10 – 11, 2009 Vienna**

### **Outcomes, Remarks, Questions and Invitation of Comments for Further Planning**

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#### **1. Background**

Due to the relatively long participatory process in preparation of the Managua Conference only a small group of actors remained the same from the very beginning. As apparently it was not made sufficiently clear to the participants of the Expert Seminar that the event was closely linked with some “milestones” set in 2008 in Prague the year before, the TRIALOG Advisory Group suggested to recall the process at some length.

Between 14-16th May, 2008 140 participants from 50 countries of Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America attended the **conference in Prague, entitled *Are we on the Right Track? Paradigm Review by CSOs as Development Actors***. The conference was organised by [TRIALOG](#), [CONCORD](#), [FoRS](#) (Czech NGDO platform) and [Ecumenical academy Prague](#). The aim was to **start a dialogue between CSOs in the South, West/North and East about the basic concepts of development** not only from a European perspective, but starting by the needs and expectations from the South. The common message from the Southern speakers, supported by many Western participants was a criticism of globalisation, driven by neo-liberal capitalism, causing poverty, ecological disasters and violating human rights. This created special dynamics during the conference because participants from **the East had come with different experiences and expectations**. In this setting it was the first conference asking basic questions about development and hardly more than some kind of review and start of in depth exchange were possible.

However, there were some basic ideas about the changing paradigm of development which were widely shared by participants:

- emphasis on human rights and especially economic, social, cultural rights as a base to overcome poverty and exclusion;
- to provide everybody a possibility of life in dignity and happiness; to change the perspective, to look at the poor, marginalized people as genuine actors of development and to overcome the disproportion, the asymmetry of power and wealth;
- to challenge a possible tyranny of Millennium Development Goals (MDG's);

- popular democratic participation (people's participation principle) should be safeguarded in whatever the dominant development paradigms, or governance practices may be. Justice is a pre-condition of democracy;
- to distinguish between development and economic growth, because they apparently follow completely different logics. The logic of development is really growing of humanization. Cooperation replaces competition, richness is meant in non-monetary terms, equality, real democracy, human needs are above profit, nature is respected, and power is used to serve not to dominate. Better to speak about "change".

Some possible solutions to achieve change were mentioned frequently:

- to overcome the division of civil society into various segregated blocks (all of them with insufficient resources): humanitarian and development agencies, human rights agencies and environmentalist groups;
- to support the empowerment of southern civil society and at the same time engage in strong advocacy and lobby work in the North

[\(Full documentation is available](#) on the website of TRIALOG)

**A second big conference was planned from the very beginning, for the following year, to deal with the question of CSOs as critical change agents, challenging national and multilateral donors** (such as the EU). Due to various reasons it was finally not possible to organise the second conference in 2009. It was postponed till 2010. Not to lose the initial drive and impetus between 2008 and 2010 and at the same time substantiate inputs, **the Expert Seminar was planned in November 2009.**

Towards the end of the Expert Seminar and even more so during the feedback round of the TRIALOG Advisory Group on November 11, 2009 it became obvious that **it may be helpful to invite more comments and ideas from participants to be taken into consideration when drafting a document to be finally tabled in Managua in November 2010 (24-26).** The text in hand was prepared on behalf of the TRIALOG Advisory Group, trying to recapitulate some highlights, important contributions and last but not least, some controversial points.

As there was obviously not enough time during the Expert Seminar to sort out everything that would have deserved more attention **we want to invite participants to share opinions on the points listed below** and if felt necessary add points which they feel need to be put in focus. The deadline for contributions is **Friday, January 22, 2010.**

Based on the feedback received, TRIALOG Advisory Group members will – possibly with some external support - prepare a first draft paper for the conference. Feedback on this will be integrated in a second draft which will be subject of debate in Managua / Nicaragua.

## **2. Feedbacks from the Expert Seminar to be considered in the ongoing planning process**

The Seminar produced a wide variety of materials which need to be taken into account in the preparation of the document mentioned above. As at this stage lengthy analyses and interpretations are not called for subjects, questions etc are listed under a number of headlines.

### **2.1 On Format and general objectives**

- Summing up, there was apparently a good deal of differences regarding the perception on what was the purpose of the seminar. Questions (recommendations in the form of questions?) were raised such as:
- What is the actual expected outcome of the conference?
- Some participants were not clear what the real purpose of the conference was. Is it defined as an opportunity to develop an advocacy message addressed to the EU institutions or is it more generally meant to put together a global declaration that includes the views of CSOs from the North, East, South?
- Can various objectives be attempted at the same time?
- Parallel to this, the “level” of discussion needs to be defined: is it to be academic – recollecting theories of development, research findings, etc.?
- Is it to be directly political with clear cut advocacy purposes?
- If the conference is to be global – and since it is in the American continent, should the North-American CSOs also be present (as part of the “North”)?

Inevitably a number of basic or key questions were brought up

- Who are we? Ongoing discussion on self-understanding as integral part of CSOs “culture”?
- What is development? Political discussion on development paradigms and the consequent shift to sustainable and just approaches / projects?
- What is our role in development? Analysis of the recent challenges and the different answers of CSOs depending on different contexts South, North and East?

There were remarks from a number of participants as to how extensively these questions needed to be dealt with as this may lead to unfocused debates.

TRIALOG suggested to formulate and agree on a document which could sum up the common commitment and strategy of Development CSOs from around the world vis a vis donors, governments and other actors. Whether this was desirable/welcome, worthwhile attempting at all, possible (taking into account the diversity of CSOs) and how it was to be called (declaration or manifesto) triggered off a number of questions:

- Is a “declaration” or “manifesto” an appropriate format to communicate fresh ideas or generally further CSO objectives?.
- A conference is not a representative body like a parliament. Doesn’t that create a legitimacy problem?
- Who is to be attracted and who is to be addressed particularly?
- Can it be taken for granted that those who are looking for change in development policies and who understand their role as that of change agents will use the opportunity to discuss and develop synergies?

It appeared that a majority of participants were in favour of:

- keeping the conference geographically open (e.g. inviting US, Canadian, and Australian CSOs)
- see to it that all kinds of actors will be present – NGDOs, environmental NGOs, social movements, trade unions, churches, indigenous peoples...

## **2.2 Considerations on various Topics**

In this connection series of questions were raised – contents quite often overlapping. In discussions some scepticism was voiced occasionally / here and there but not substantiated. For the purpose of

- a) detailed conference planning and
  - b) developing an appropriate layout / conference design (e.g. planning of workshops etc.) and last not least
  - c) regarding selection of eventual contents of a conference document
- subjects are reproduced in the form of questions.

Recommendations are quoted but were few.

At some points later considerations of the TRIALOG Advisory Group are introduced but always specifically marked.

### **2.2.1 Identity and Role of CSOs –reconsidering who we are and why we do what we do.**

- Can CSOs take a critical position regarding government to government and multi-lateral assistance while at the same time receiving fund support from public sources?
- How can CSOs receiving Government/EU funding claim to be independent?
- Do CSOs have a right to be funded with public resources / tax payer’s money?
- Have CSOs a political role to play?
- Is it true that this role gets more and more lost due to growing dependency?
- How can CSOs regain lost ground in the political arena?
- How can we serve as genuine change agents rather than being puppets on political strings pulled by those on control of state/international funding mechanisms?
- Does becoming institutionalized mean becoming part of an “unjust system” ourselves? If so, how can we then give voice to the poor, South, East and North?
- Citizen’s participation: Are northern CSO about to loose sight of this formerly popular demand and practice?

- Did many CSOs give up or about to do so because of constant frustration of efforts to positively influence political decision making?
- How can we honestly state people's participation was a key issue in the South while many organisations have dropped the idea of influencing politics at our end in such a way that negative impacts in the South are avoided or corrected?
- Are CSOs ready to dissolve operations deliberately in future, once their job is done? Are we able to accept division of labour (for instance in the framework of decentralised funding) or do we fear that loss of a funding role, means loss of power and disregard of accumulated experience?
- How do aid funding mechanisms affect and / or define relationships between different players?
- There is much talk about increasing of aid effectiveness and advocacy – how good are we in both these fields? Is there a need to evaluate our own successes?
- How do we deal with the differences between the differently orientated CSOs?
- How can the differences (and sometimes tensions) between “grassroots”-movements and more or less professional NGOs operating on government contracts be reconciled.

The latter problem was discussed to some extent in the Advisory Group. It was found that differences do maybe not lie as much in formal (movements vs. professional NGOs etc.) aspects but rather in the ways of engagement / involvement: Status quo vs. change orientated.

When preparing the present document it was found the impetus of the whole process starting in Prague is “**change**” (paradigm shift). This spirit of inevitable change is the crucial element, likely to turn the Managua conference into an important event.

(Additional and encouraging reference on top of the material clustered in the seminar “reader”: **Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann, president of the United Nations General Assembly in his address to the civil society event of People's Voices on the Crisis (New York City 20 June 2009):**

”In Doha, I was grateful for the presence and support of so many NGOs and welcomed their parallel Declaration, which is a lucid and far-reaching appeal for action on the issues that Members States continue to grapple with. You are way ahead of us. I share the vision outlined in that Declaration and requested that it be posted on our conference website as a valuable benchmark for the intergovernmental negotiations on the conference outcome document that continue as I speak..”)

### **2.2.2 Accountability and legitimacy of CSOs both North and South**

These subjects were discussed in the most controversial manner. Yet the arguments “Pro” and “Con” could not be satisfactorily clarified. The list below represents a selection of questions raised:

- How to deal with the increasing loss of credibility of CSOs in parts of the political and scientific public in many countries?
- Can singular cases of CSO criticism be generalised?
- If the reputation of CSOs was really at stake how then could “Codes of Conduct” and other measures of “Self Regulation” serve “rehabilitation”?

- Why deal with obviously difficult issues like “Codes” while there are other instruments to prove accountability and enhance legitimacy of CSOs?
- Even if the development of “Codes of Conduct” was considered a worthwhile exercise for individual CSOs what would be the use of and chances to agree on a Code with global binding force?
- Why should the Managua Conference be burdened with subjects which will hardly find a majority?

The TRIALOG Advisory Group found it pretty difficult to understand and analyse why the question of Codes of Conduct got such an undue prominence. Perhaps this was so because the majority of the Advisory Group members represent organisations in which questions on the “raison d’être” an appropriate approaches are not an exception but a rule.

For the further planning and preparatory process the following list of considerations deems essential:

- What reasons are there for the growing CSO-scepticism voiced in various political and scientific contexts and even by social movements? Some participants doubted that this was an accurate description of reality. Wishful thinking? Did the special Reader which contains some strong hints come too late or have we failed to point at the right empirical material? What can be done to prove better that it is an undeniable fact that CSO influence is fading not the least because their superior performance is doubted.
- Certainly the Managua Conference will not be the appropriate place to sort out questions whether the criticism of CSO's was properly described and justified on sound empirical footing. Anyway we are well advised to demonstrate that we take criticism serious (Demonstrate self-critical faculties). A question of debate remained, whether it may be worthwhile to invite a qualified (academic?) critic? Politicians are as a rule not very helpful as they tend to praise CSOs on Sundays and curtail them on Mondays.
- Hard to say how many participants shared the view that strictly applied Codes of Conduct: provided an appropriate response to public criticism of all sorts and kinds
- There was understanding to be observed on the importance of the process and it's justification for strengthening internal cohesion of CSOs.
- It was quite evident however that some participants had lots of reservations whether it is our role to develop a global Code of Conduct for development CSOs.
- Some questioned our legitimacy (who are we to initiate such a thing). If we mention Codes of Conducts, we need to specify WHY we do it and HOW it could become part of a future process.
- On the other hand –if found useful by the organizers- why should they profess self-censorship for fear of (potential) opposition?
- Apparently the question of Codes has taken unintended prominence during the expert-meeting. In the further planning / preparatory process it is be made clear that the planned "Managua Declaration" or "Manifesto" (alternative titles are invited!) is not identical with a world wide Code of Conduct. Yet we have come to a point where we clearly need to say for what we stand and on what we can be taken up for. Particularly now, formulating demands to Governments, Parliaments

the EU etc. lacks credibility as long as qualifying our performance as genuine CSOs is not in focus.

- The question cannot be sidestepped so easily why there is empirical evidence that Codes of Conduct to which organizations stick and other instruments of Civil Society Self Regulation seem to (re-)strengthen their reputation as CSOs<sup>1</sup>
- Further debate (not necessarily in the context of the Managua conference but in the framework of the regular TRIALOG programme) seems to be required on what is the purpose of Codes of Conduct. During the Expert Seminar strong reservations among -an apparently smaller number of participants -regarding the subject in general could be sensed. Unfortunately reasons were not fully disclosed.
- The problem seems to be, that some CSO representatives do not want at all to deal with the matter and unfortunately do not disclose reasons and some others doubt the ability to achieve binding agreements worldwide. (Basic opposition versus practical scepticism?)
- Why is transparent and reliable self-regulation a prerequisite to subsidiarity? The impression prevails that organizers have not been able to explain the link between the two concepts. Some observers fear that there is a prior need to close the dramatic gap of theoretical knowledge on social change processes between CSOs that became apparent during the expert meeting?
- If it is correct that the legitimacy of Development-CSOs is questioned, why then should they not be entitled to strengthen their profile and improve their legitimacy by adequate measures of Self Regulation?
- The subject of corruption was thought as a drastic example on what a genuine CSO would or should do in case of such a "worst case scenario". Better example on how the integrity of a CSO can be put to test? In preparation of the Managua conference document the subject of corruption should probably not play a big role. However organizers need to be prepared to deal with subject should it arise during the conference.
- There was little doubt (if at all) raised that the legitimacy of whatever content participant of the conference will subscribe to will be as strong as the strength of participating organisations and as the value of outcomes of the process – like the declaration, the common commitments, the strategy, the networking and other follow up activities.
- Last not least the question of Codes of Conduct may reappear as accepting them as an ethical basis may substantially contribute to the legitimacy of signatories.

### **2.2.3. On Forms of Paradigm Shift in Development Policy?**

The paradigmatic changes which took place in the recent past and are about to impact on CSOs were not discussed in depth, but more as institution connected “pointers” which will probably catch a high degree of attention in future.

- After the ratification of the Lisbon-Treaty, European development policy is likely to be reinterpreted as part of the External Action Service. What will be the actual consequences?
- Will reorganisation bring about aid harmonization and more policy coherence?

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<sup>1</sup> Reader pp 7-10 1.2 A Wave of Change. How Irish NGOs Will Sink or Swim

- Will the - so far relatively independently organised – development efforts of the EU be dominated by defence oriented diplomacy in future?
- How real are fears that development logics are in future ranking more obviously after military logics?
- How will this likely shift affect CSO partner dialogue in the field (in the South)?
- What changes are needed after the present economic crisis is overcome to avoid that greed of managers can cause unprecedented harm to the poor people in the South again?
- Are we in a position to discuss socio-economic matters as long as there is no consensus about the effects of neo-liberal policies on poor countries among CSOs from old and new EU member states? Taming of capitalism?
- What exactly is meant when the need for new systems in economy, democratisation, and realisation of human rights is claimed?
- How best to revitalize the development organisations of the UN-family and how to bring out / enhance its potential?

(Regarding the last bullet point the authors traced another quotation which may serve as an encouragement to strengthen UN-CSO – dialogue. **Miguel D’Escoto Brockmann** once more: “...*but I remain convinced this Organization deserves your support. You must aggressively press the process of restoring the central role of the UN as a genuine arbiter for ‘We the peoples’.* It is a process that you must monitor and influence in every way possible as representatives of civil society.”)

How to organise the many subjects, to prioritise and decide what to incorporate in the document for Managua obviously requires careful weighing of Pros and Cons. As of now the drafting group will probably organise themes as follows:

- Critical points analysis: What doesn’t work satisfactorily in specific fields of development policy (e.g. international trade, international finance system, northern development co-operation programmes)?
- Why is that so and which theoretical assumptions and their corresponding practices are misleading?
- Which alternative concepts of development can confidently be presented? What has proved or is likely to work and what is the theoretical base for it. (e.g. regional development programmes, food sovereignty concepts , microfinance, etc..)
- How to encourage visions, new directions and promising ideas for alternative solutions?

#### **2.2.4 Southern NGO relationship with Northern NGOs and Northern Governments**

In the course of dramatically changing funding policies – decentralisation in the first rank – “coordinates” of a large number of northern CSOs have got lost. Surprisingly this was not emphasised as being particularly problematic during the Expert Seminar. Instead focus was on the following questions:

- A key question is how to react appropriately and based on solid analyses on processes like Paris (2005) and Accra (2008)?
- Is the outcome as little promising for CSOs as is commonly concluded?

- Southern NGOs being converted into watchdogs controlling their Northern partners (both government and NGOs)?
- Is partnership a model of a naive ideological concept long overcome?
- Why has there been so little discussion about the relationship between Southern CSOs and the others (e.g. donors, governments, northern CSOs – this question came up when insufficient southern participation was criticised)
- What evidence (if any) supports the insinuation that there are vested interests of Southern NGOs to act as “legitimate partners” for any intervention?

The material, the Expert Seminar produced regarding this particular chapter remained very vague or cloudy. Drafters will depend to a large extent on additional ideas, particularly from people who are able to filter out the essence of the various “processes” the EU-Commission has set in motion in recent years.

### **2.2.5. Among Northern NGOs: is there still a divide between Old Member States (OMS) and New Member States (NMS)? Along what lines?**

- Values: Many CSO representatives from NMS are very happy with the “capitalist and neo-liberal model of economy and development” and find it hard to understand the sharp criticism formulated by numerous OMS-CSOs.
- CSOs in NMS seem to be more charity oriented, OMS-CSOs are apparently more advocacy and structural change oriented.
- In OMS more purely development oriented CSOs, whereas in NMS, CSOs often work also in own countries.
- NMS - CSOs are often critical about Government / EU development donor practices; apparently their reservations have grown over time at the recipient end.
- OMS - CSOs have sometimes “cultivate” a sense of guilt (colonial past); which doesn’t exist in NMS.
- OMS have more citizens with ties to the Global South and more (culturally) diverse cities in their own countries
- OMS – CSOs have a history of solidarity movements – e.g. for Latin America, South Africa, Vietnam etc..
- Funding structures differ greatly; in NMS, CSOs are highly dependent on government funding.
- OMS are home of large, multinational CSOs.
- There is lacking cooperation and an insufficient number of joint projects between OMS and NMS – CSOs.
- In NMS there is less private and public support for development.

In what way the above observations, gathered during the Expert Seminar can or need to be integrated in the planning for Managua remains open for the time being.

In addition it has to be considered, that the situation is presently changing from bad to worse very speedily: Some among the NMS are - due to the economic crisis - relapsing into dependency on foreign loans and become unable to fulfil their development cooperation commitments. On this base the discussion of paradigm shift becomes vital as well for them and a new understanding of development and solidarity could emerge.

### 2.2.6. Funding CSOs

- What kind of consequences does the appearance of new players in the "development industry" have (the BRICS -states = Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) for funding structures?
- Does evidence support that new development paths are followed by the new players: from aid to trade and loans without strings attached?
- As climate change will impact on all spheres of international politics what conclusions to be drawn for development funding?
- Will grants be replaced by tenders? Do we want a complete commercialisation of development cooperation?
- If donors move from grants to tenders can CSO simply follow, without losing their status as benevolent agencies and the trust of their constituencies?
- Is developing skills for bidding the need of the hour?
- Are there appropriate forms of "income generation" which would not compromise the benevolent CSO status?
- Do CSOs need to explore and develop alternative and innovative sources of income such as "social enterprise" - develop creativity and innovation in the sector?
- What are the Pros and Cons of project financing in comparison with direct budget support?
- What could be the future role of CSOs in influencing budget financing and monitoring delivery?
- Some participants questioned whether it makes sense to talk about funding without funders. Others answered that CSOs must set up their own priorities and establish a coalition, before sitting down with donors.

The authors of this analysis feel that a session on financing civil society to be able to take actively part in society might be rushed in a conference which first wants to discuss the role of civil society in society. Conclusion: let's postpone these discussions for a later date.

## 3. Speakers Suggested

### 3.1 During the meeting the following people/organisations were suggested:

- Chico Whitaker, Brazil
- Kumi Naidu, South Africa, CIVICUS
- CDRA
- Slum Dwellers International: they stand for cooperation from the bottom. They determine the condition for cooperation with them.
- CIVICUS
- Try to ensure youth participation
- UN involvement on issues of participation, legislation

### **3.2 Further suggestions:**

- Roberto Bissio, Uruguay (Social Watch)
- Joseph Stiglitz
- David Ian Shaman (author of The World Bank Unveiled: Inside the Revolutionary Struggle for Transparency)
- Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann (Nicaraguan diplomat, politician and Catholic priest. He was the President of the United Nations General Assembly from September 2008 to September 2009.)
- Gioconda Belli, nicaraguan author
- Rigoberta Menchú, Guatemala, social activist, Nobel price laureate
- Action Aid (relationship between climate change issues and development, social implications of climate change)
- Greenpeace (to make the link between green and development issues)
- Ashoka Foundation and Schwab (social enterprise in the US)

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