



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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Introduction

by Justin Kilcullen, president of CONCORD

Good afternoon everybody!

First of all I would like to say, that I am privileged to represent the board of CONCORD at this fantastic event. It was very interesting for me to take a list of participants this morning and to see how very different names are there; I can see many new faces here and have a very positive feeling. I very much welcome this conference to enable this new energy, new ideas to come into NGO effort in Europe.

I remember when I, for the first time, was involved in this work I participated in the early nineties in three or four meetings of the old Liaison Committee in Brussels and I did not understand what they were talking about – trade, aid... with this Euro language. I can detect a similar feeling with people from the new EU member states in some of the meetings of CONCORD. I think it is important for us in the development sector to speak about issues, about our daily work, in a language that everybody can understand.

This conference is very important to bring us together – those involved in development work for years and those who are new; to bring together NGOs from Europe and from the South. I want to congratulate those who initiated and prepared this event. The fact that there was no space for everybody who wanted to join is an indicator of the success of this idea.

We want to look at the development paradigms we have and to question them provocatively.

So, to begin what has been the main paradigm in the 21st century in development? The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). So my first point is this: **It is time to challenge the tyranny of MDGs.**

When they were introduced in 2000 – derived from the Millennium Declaration – we all embraced them with enthusiasm – governments, donors, NGOs, UN organizations, other multinational agencies. We all even started to adjust our programmes to adopt them. It was also because we wanted to retain financing from organizations which had adopted them. Where are we now? We are failing on every level to fulfill MDGs. In fact, a whole industry was built up around the MDGs. We have many consultants writing programmes, monitoring programmes, evaluating programmes. But it is an industry which has served itself instead of the people for whom it was designed. We do not even provide the basic needs for survival.

The MDGs have taken politics out of development and replaced it by numbers and targets. It is time to challenge this model of development, to look at the underlying causes of poverty. 800

million of people go to bed hungry everyday. Has anyone lost their job because of that? No, because there is no political responsibility for hunger in today's world. The MDGs say that women should have the right to own land, to have a property. But they are disempowered, not allowed to participate in political processes, even in their villages – that is the root cause of their poverty... These are the kind of issues which we need to challenge, and which the MDGs do not address – the underlying political and social causes of exclusion. It is time to forget about the numbers game that the MDGs have become and to put the politics back in.

The next issue I would look at is summarized in the slogan: **“Without Women We cannot Win.”**

We talk about the battle against poverty. It is 30 years since the conference about women in development (Beijing 1975). Yet we only recently started to deal with this issue of gender equality. This is a man's world – this is the paradigm we are looking at. The way the world is designed – work, politics, family life... – by men, for men, for the benefit of men. Despite all the feminist movement has accomplished we have failed to embrace this issue in our development work. In CONCORD we started to take this question seriously only two years ago. We really have to take the issue of gender equality very seriously; otherwise we will fail in the battle against poverty.

The next point I will raise just to provoke some thinking: **“Do humanitarian agencies do it better?”**

There is a division in the NGO world between humanitarian and development agencies, and in a growing way now also among those and human rights agencies and perhaps environmental agencies. Why is our civil society world, with insufficient resources, divided into these blocks where we do not even talk to each other? Look at the media, what are the problems people are now talking mostly about? Burma, Zimbabwe and others. In all those places humanitarian and human rights organizations are taking action. Why are development NGOs not there? How do we remain relevant if we fail to address the issues of the day? Sometimes we get so caught up in what we consider so important in our work that we fail to address what are the issues that our supporters feel are important. There is a challenge here we could look at during this conference.

Another issue we are all concerned about is **China in Africa**.

Chinese people are taking land in Africa, sending workers to Africa, opening shops there. And we say: “This is terrible.” And perhaps it is. But we should ask a question: Is this much worse than what Western countries did there for more than 150 years during the last two centuries? It is clear that for many African people Chinese presence is damaging their villages, their life. But at the same time they are building infrastructure that Europeans do not build, they are linking up African countries to trade, bringing investments there. And even if this model is not the best and we are still critical of it, what lessons can we take from it? What does this do to our development model? What do our partners think of it? How are we reacting to this? This is a major development issue of this time and we should address it. I am very interested to hear the views of our Southern partners on this growing issue.

Those were four ideas I wanted to bring to you to begin the process of addressing the question we have posed for ourselves in this conference: Are we on the right track? I wish you all the best during your deliberations. Thank you very much.

Minutes: Jana Krajčířiková, Ecumenical Academy Prague