

THE ACTUAL ROLE OF SOUTHERN CSOs IN DEVELOPMENT

By Ivan Garcia Marengo (Vienna, 09/11/2009)

There are two issues I am going to develop in this talk as selected outlooks of the civil society in Latin America, and, specifically, in Nicaragua, my own country: the right to development and the right to citizens participation. Then, I will be touching the issue of the role of Southern civil society among all the actors of development

1. THE RIGHT TO HUMAN, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. A Vision of Citizens and Equality

Vis a vis society, every citizen has the right to demand such equality in the distribution of opportunities and public resources that avoids disparities in the fulfilments of human rights everywhere. Consequently, Governments have the obligation (responsibility) of eliminating any discrimination in the allowance of opportunities and the use of public resources, and assure equality in their distribution among citizens. Consequently, citizens have the right to demand equality in their own society at all geographical levels.

Then, we can say that a minimal human degree of equality among average citizens of different countries of the world, of different geographical regions inside of countries and among social or cultural sectors both of the world and of countries, is a human right. Therefore, we can also state that there is a right to distribute the richness of the world equitably among human beings.

Being development the process to fulfil the instauration of human rights, then, **human, sustainable and equal development is a public good**. Every citizen has a right to demand cooperation for his/her own development and the development of his/her community (family, tribe, neighbourhood, town, province, region, country, international region, the whole world). Governments (local, national, global) have the responsibility to provide, in their best possible way, for the development of the citizens put under their governance.

That is why international cooperation to end odious inequalities in development, is a right of those who are victims of such inequalities and an obligation of local and global society and governments.

Then, Civil Society, meaning the effective organization of citizens outside the ruling systems, appears as the proper institution for promoting, demanding and supervising the full respect in the world for the right to development.

2. THE ROLE OF SOUTHERN CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND COOPERATION SCHEMES : Concretizing Citizens participation

Citizens, or rather any human being in this world are the subject of development. It is commonly held that the organized actors of development cooperation are: donors, governments and civil society. Donors can be real governments or other social institutions, normally located in the North of the world, where the abundance of resources and/or wealth exists, although in some cases they can be in the South, or the insufficiently developed world. Governments can be of the North of the South, of developed or developing countries. Civil Society can also be of the North and of the South. Whenever you are dealing with an CSO which happens also to be an independent donor, we categorize it as a donor rather than civil society.

So, let us distinguish 5 different actors in the cooperation to the development of the needed population in the world, of both Northern and Southern countries: 1-Northern Civil Society, 2-Southern Civil Society, 3-Northern Governments (which are normally also donors), 4-Southern Governments (which are normally intermediate recipients of cooperation), and 5-Donors.

Obvious and historical relationships exist among each of these 5 actors and the rest of them. Ten different binary relationships arise from that situation (1—2, 1—3, 1—4, 1—5, 2—3, 2—4, 2—5, 3—4, 3—5, 4—5).

Since the first two rounds of the High Level Forum, held in Rome and Paris, there has been a development of ideas about the relationships between Northern and Southern governments. In Accra, the issue of the relationships of CSOs in general and governments and donors was raised and subsequently developed. Outside of the HLFs, the discussion of the relationships between Northern CSOs with both donors and Northern governments has been stated, and also of the relationships among the two types of CSOs. But still there has not been an explicit talk about Southern CSOs and the other actors. Little things have been said specifically about the relationships between Southern CSOs and governments both of the North and the South (relationships 2—3 and 2—4).

I venture a thesis about the role Southern organizations of Civil Society (SCSO) should play in the cooperation to development:

SOUTHERN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD BE SEEN AS PRIMARY INTERMEDIARIES BETWEEN ALL OTHER ACTORS OF DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, AND THE CITIZENS OF THEIR OWN POPULATIONS; WHICH ARE THE SUBJECTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS:

Toward all other actors of development, Southern CSOs are the obvious interpreters of the need and of demands of the impoverished sectors of the populations of the Third World. No other actor has the right to interpret the need of Southern civil society. Southern CSOs also can be considered the best allies to appropriate canalize the provision of the financial and economic cooperation. They are, finally, the primary responsible on the issue of watch dogging and advocacy, specially with respects to our own governments (or, as we, in Latin America, prefer to say, *political incidence*, or *participation on the decision making process of our development*). Finally, they have also the responsibility of presenting development proposals to their governments and to the international cooperation. On my view, auditing their own governments or their associated Northern CSOs and also exercising citizens participation in cooperation but also with independency from their own governments are both a necessity and a right of Southern CSOs.

Of course, for the Southern CSOs to be trusted in their roles of social auditing and political incidence, they also have to be reliable and present proofs of reliability and accountability with respect to their own governments, the donors, and the intermediary Northern CSOs.

But that role of the Southern CSOs is now being strongly opposed not only in Nicaragua by our own government but also in the rest of the world by many governments of the North and the South, and even by some Northern CSOs. The idea that representation through elected citizens fulfil all the demands of democracy, and that there is not a need and right for completing democracy with active citizens participation is still very alive and stubborn in our world. In my country, specifically, there is now a conflict between a citizens participation organized from the government and the ruling party, where civil society is politically depending from them and is denied the right to criticize and autonomously present proposals (which is called *organization of citizens power*), and an autonomous and critical participation organized by the civil society itself, which is the one authorized and designed in our Constitution, which also existed before the advent of the present government.

I hope that the idea of such a role of the Southern CSOs is going to be understood and accepted by the organizations of Civil Society both in the North and the South and that we can ally in a strategy for winning the minds and wills of donors and governments for accepting it.