Conference
ARE WE ON THE RIGHT TRACK?
PARADIGM REVIEW BY CSOs AS
DEVELOPMENT ACTORS
Prague, Czech Republic, 14th – 16th May 2008

Friday 16th May 2008

Open the floor to the plenary:
New development paradigms?
Which way forward?
What steps should be taken before the Prague Conference II?

Chair: Mike Mathias (Luxemburg, Cercle de Cooperation des ONG)

Introduction

Mike Mathias presented the paradigms that had been discussed during the conference already, and suggested some key points to focus on. These were:

- Working for change by dealing with power and influencing it by engaging in processes like the 2009 EU elections
- Reallocating the cake, by working on climate justice
- Overcoming the problems associated with the MDGs by adopting a rights-based approach to development and respecting gender issues
- Recognising that achieving global equity involves awareness raising and stronger global education to promote well-being over material wealth
- Recognising that global coalitions benefit from diversity, so understanding and promoting this diversity when building coalitions across borders.

Participants in the plenary were given 50 minutes to work in small groups and focus on one or all of the key points, returning with concrete commitments individuals could take after the conference, bearing in mind Concord commitments and the Czech Presidency priorities.

Discussion

In the discussion, feedback from the participants of different working groups looked at the various issues Mike had highlighted. Some central points included:

- Information about the Spanish national declaration against poverty (Eduard Soler Cuyas, Catalonia Platform)
- The idea that development NGOs should be pushed to recognise the broader context of development and include energy, climate change and agriculture in the discussion (Luis Morago, Oxfam)
The experience of the Dutch platform, which organised debates last time to prepare for the European elections and identify points that might influence EU election programmes and EU politicians. Debates were held in March this year but it was too early. The EU is not really alive in the hearts of citizens and EU politicians are much more interested in Brussels than in being accountable at home. NGOs must put pressure on national politicians to push development issues in the agenda. (Marie-Trees Meereboer, Partos)

Instead of reallocating the cake, why don’t we bake bread, look into new recipes involving energy, basic needs and food. CONCORD members need to develop new models and decide what we want the EU to be in the future global context (Karin Ulmer, Aprodev).

The issues have to be looked at at all levels – local, national and European, and information has to flow from countries to CONCORD and back. We need to catch the attention of actors and voters, including civil society. The three main points to concentrate on might be the militarisation of development aid, the food crisis and immigration. These points and how they interlink must be fully understood (Alfred Horn, HELP).

The idea to invite an expert from China to enrich the debate and move the discussion forward (Petra Kreinecker, TRIALOG).

How we need to look at the EU footprint and send a strong message to parliamentarians that we need to change things, by reducing our dependency on oil for example (John Carstensen, INTRAC).

The importance of awareness raising and using the EU Consensus on Development Education, which was adopted at European level last November, on a national level to influence global education in our societies (Tobias Troll, DEEEP)

The fact that we have our own understanding of matters and spend little time managing knowledge, which leads to missing analytical processes and research throughout institutions (John Carstensen, INTRAC).

The importance of networking and building coalitions was mentioned a couple of times, and the TRIALOG Partnership Fair was noted as one memorable occasion on which this was promoted. Although there are no funds for a repeat of the fair, partnerships can be formed through posting information on the TRIALOG website (Christine Bedoya, TRIALOG)

Conferences like this are perfect for creating partnerships and networking, and it is true that the TRIALOG Partnership Fair was very useful for a lot of organisations, but it does not mean that this stopped directly afterwards. There are many channels through which organisations can search for partners (Monika Matus, KARAT)

One Estonian organisation that joined the Partnership Fair found many partners and submitted a project that was rejected. Despite being rejected, other sources of funding were looked for, the communication between them is continuous and the links are great
for capacity building even without a financed project (Ruta Pels, People to People Estonia)

- The weaknesses of the MDGs must be put into context, and used to push forward a rights-based approach to development. (Andra Tanase, PATRIR)

- The idea to produce a manifesto about human rights for the next European elections and create language goals on the human rights based approach to development (Salvatore Parata, Terre des Hommes International Federation)

- Gender should not be just in one box, it should bear overarching consideration. Gender should be considered in many more contexts as a matter of course (Filomenita Hoegsholm, Philippines, WIDE)

- Giving enough attention to gender is also about empowering women in our own organisations. A commitment within TRIALOG is to develop a position on gender and organise capacity building events that also include men (Petra Kreinecker, TRIALOG)

- The importance of the three es - exposure, exchange, encounter. There are specific values that are shared between Eastern Europe and the South. Cannot emphasise enough the importance of exchanging information and experience, linking websites, conferences, study trips – all these ways of collaborating together, both long term and in the short-term. Everyone needs space in which to learn from one another and the exposure of policy makers to the experience of activists in the South is vital. Research can also be conducted as a way to deepen these reflections. (Jan Mihalik, PDCS)

- Events like the conference are invaluable, and we would like more opportunities like this to exchange expertise, through study visits, and between NMS and OMS as well as those involving the South (Jens Rohland, AGEH)

- CSOs can do a lot to educate the public about the benefits of diversity as this is not taught in school or in universities. The issue of diversity needs to be looked at on a national level before the international level. There are good manuals from the Open Society Institute that help to teach about the importance of diversity (Lucia Ilieva, Bulgaria)

- CONCORD is doing a lot to support gender as a theme that affects all development work, so is in full support of comments made already. It is calling to its members and others to form a global coalition. CONCORD has coalitions already at two levels: on the EU level – with trade unions, the European youth forum, and the civil society contact group; and at international level with the international movement of national platforms, which brings together 82 national platforms from different parts of the world (a conference within the French Presidency will bring the platforms together). It is interesting to see how the discussion on paradigms, global CSO effectiveness will continue. CONCORD would like to engage the South much more in a very open process. Members should ensure that this is integrated in the strategic plan, which will be discussed at the June 4-5 general assembly. (Olivier Consolo, CONCORD Secretariat)
Conclusions

Mike Mathias pointed out that the conclusions are very broad and wide-ranging but that some points are vital. These are that:

- The EU election process is something that needs to be engaged with.
- Climate justice and the food crisis are central topics.
- Building coalitions and ensuring they have diverse membership is important, as is looking at how to deal with the newer actors in the field.
- Capacity building is needed to deal effectively with global education (the DE summer school will look at how to engage in the election process).

We need to think about what kind of situation we want after the eradication of poverty. Is our aim to have more or to be happier? We need more solidarity, leading to living in one world.

Minutes: Zuzana Sladkova, FoRS and Rebecca Steel, TRIALOG