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# Impacting Multilateralism: Civil Society's Engagement with the Political Process



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## **A Message from FIM President Nigel Martin**

This year the FIM Board elected to convene a Forum on the issue of *Civil Society Engagement with the Political Process*.

The Board's choice of theme turned out to be a challenge for Forum organizers. While there are plenty of exciting examples of CSOs working directly in the political process at the national level, FIM's mandate is to look at relations between civil society and the multilateral system and /or global governance. Clearly, at the level of global governance, the democratic deficit includes an absence of citizen suffrage. Without this fundamental political engagement, there are, in fact, few activities within multilateralism that can be defined as being part of the political process.

The question we faced was: How and where is civil society engaging with the political process of the multilateral system? In determining the criteria for selection of case examples that addressed this question, we excluded engagement by civil society which could be construed as partisan politics. We also excluded civil society activities directly or indirectly sanctioned by political parties. Given FIM's mandate, we had to ask ourselves: What are the proper limitations of CSO engagement that are political in nature and, that, at the same time, presume political non-partisanship by civil society actors? As we searched for possible case studies to examine, it quickly became obvious that examples that adhered to the above criteria were not abundant. Nor was the issue of engagement in the political process at the multilateral level instantly understood by all those we contacted. Eventually, two interesting case studies were selected and prepared for presentation to the Forum.

*Reforming the World Bank: NGOs and the Wolfowitz Resignation* by Beatrice Edwards reflects a larger pattern of civil society engaging in the very political process of selecting the heads of multilateral bodies. This case study is doubly interesting because, not only is the selection process politicized, it also led, in this instance, to a politically partisan agenda for the World Bank, several elements of which went clearly contrary to their own operational policies.

The second case: *A Study of Nepal's Constituent Assembly Election: The Influence of Civil Society and the Multilateral System* by Rohit Kumar Nepali and Uddhab P. Pyakurel is a fascinating example of the new diplomacy in action. This study describes an electoral process at the national level that included a deliberate multi-stakeholder exercise involving joint action by national CSOs, international CSOs, and multilateral bodies. This very unique example of global collaboration is worth understanding as a possible model for facilitating electoral processes within volatile national situations.

Forum discussion also included two issues raised in the previous year and subsequently identified by the FIM Board as of priority interest. A working paper drafted by Kumi Naidoo: *Civil Society Engagement with the Multilateral System: General Principles for Good Practice* was discussed and debated at length. As well, the participants reviewed an updated assessment, presented by Ezra Mbogori, of the need for a pan-African CSO movement to influence the discussions around the creation of a United African Parliament.

As we wrapped up the Forum, there were intense deliberations on the priority issues facing global civil society over the next 12- 15 months. It was clearly agreed that CSOs must be fully engaged in the current 'financial and economic crisis'. However, it was agreed that this situation is, in reality, a convergence of several crises, notably those of food, climate, migration, security, finance, energy, employment, and water. Concern was expressed on two fronts: one that the efforts by G20 governments and others to deal with the crisis by defining it solely as a financial crisis would lead to oversimplified 'solutions', and two, that CSOs must find ways to emerge from their traditional issue-oriented silos and converge expertises and strategies.

I would like to thank Siddharth Bannerjee for assuming the demanding task of Forum rapporteur. FIM is committed to encouraging a greater number of youth delegates to participate in our fora and we were very happy that Sidd was interested and available to assume this important function. Finally, thank you to Forum facilitator Corazon Juliano-Soliman (Dinky), for the warmth and professionalism that set the climate for a truly enjoyable learning experience.

Nigel Martin  
President and CEO  
FIM

April 30, 2009

## BACKGROUND

Now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year of operations, the Forum International de Montréal (FIM) has gone from strength to strength in promoting a unique, civil-society driven, democratization agenda. FIM has accomplished this by focusing on the relations between civil society, the multilateral system, and global governance. With its focus on multiple levels of engagement, FIM strives to secure the input of all relevant stakeholders, from the level of grassroots practitioners, to policy and macro-governance levels. Thus, FIM's reputation as a center for knowledge transfer and dissemination makes it an ideal candidate to relate with the multilateral system by engendering civil society engagement with the appropriate political processes. In doing so, FIM is acutely aware of the regional and local dimensions of this political engagement by civil society, implicating as they do marginalized voices, power relationships, and language issues and cultural delineations, among other critical issues.

Forum objectives for *Impacting Multilateralism: Civil Society Engagement with the Political Process* were as follows:

- (1) Increase knowledge of the role of civil society in impacting political processes, the multilateral system, and global governance.
- (2) Share experiences and lessons learned regarding civil society's engagement with political processes, the multilateral system, and global governance.
- (3) Identify upcoming issues, challenges, and opportunities for civil society impacting global governance including the multilateral system.

Objectives were addressed through case study and paper analyses coupled with plenary discussions and participant dialogue. There were two case study presentations on Day 1 and two presentations on Day 2 relating to civil society engagement with the political process.

## DAY 1

FIM Forum New Delhi began with introductory remarks and a description of the Forum's objectives; following this, the Forum facilitator made a round of introductions to survey the expectations of attendees. The Forum theme was then launched, followed by a warm-up discussion. There were two case study presentations in the pre-lunch session and a plenary discussion on the case studies, and workshops on consolidating civil society experiences and lessons learned, in the post-lunch gathering. The evening was dedicated to a book launch and rounded off with a welcome dinner hosted by the Canadian High Commissioner to India, Hon. Joseph Caron, at his official residence in New Delhi.

## OPENING REMARKS AND FORUM OBJECTIVES

FIM Board Chair Dr. Rajesh Tandon thanked the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), for serving as the host organization in India. Following this, Mr. Nigel Martin, President-CEO of FIM, expanded on the Forum objectives (listed above) and stressed the importance of practitioner-oriented case studies for highlighting the issues facing current day civil society. Forum facilitator, Corazon Juliano-Soliman (Dinky) from the Philippines, then surveyed participant expectations using an interactive, 1-word-only, briefing exercise.

The next item on the schedule was an introduction and discussion of Forum themes, namely civil society, political processes and global governance. Mr. Martin began by noting that there appears to be a growing tendency for CSOs to become engaged in political processes at local, national, and global levels. This type of engagement is not rooted in partisanship, but in a growing commitment to

strengthening participatory democracy. His view was that civil society usually has two positions: either independent of political society, or merging into political processes. But, given that civil society actors impact policy and legislation, they therefore possess transformative power and are indeed political players. As a consequence, Martin noted that the last decade has witnessed a higher level of engagement between politicians/bureaucrats and civil society actors.

For example in India, civil society has been active in two types of processes, firstly striking at the root of the political establishment (at the local village or *panchayat* level) by advocating to involve greater numbers of women and scheduled caste and tribal candidates, while also focusing the election on substantive issues; and secondly, by pushing for democratic reform at the national level in terms of transparency and accountability. In an era of rapid globalization, local CSOs are finding that even issues that appear to be local in nature often require political action at the national or global level. This emphasizes the need to scale up formal engagement, from these local, national, and regional levels of activity, to the multilateral and global governance arenas.

## **MORNING PLENARY**

The need for civil society engagement at the multilateral level is typified by the present global economic crisis. Policies regarding bailouts, stimulus measures, and sectoral protection are being discussed behind closed doors at summits such as the G20 where there is virtually no citizen input. But, in truth, financial and development issues are basically multilateral in nature, and global politics is not the same as national politics represented at the global level. Thus, in the absence of global frameworks (such as a global parliament or world political parties) to address citizen concerns, the thrust for civil society to bring the 'missing voices' to this political level and to influence the global agenda becomes all the more important.

As a counter example, one participant put forth the necessity for civil society to engage with non-political processes, such as social movements, as well. His experience with fisher folk and tribals on issues of water management and right to information led him to believe in the efficacy of issue linkage and advocacy strategies. Yet, he also recognized the importance of shining a light on transparency and accountability issues at multilaterals such as the IMF, which, until last year, was facing a deficit and had to sell its gold reserves to pay salaries amid massive layoffs. The present global economic crisis has brought the IMF back into the picture, and yet civil society groups and social movements have not mobilized to ascertain whether the IMF is best placed to handle a crisis which is often painted as a financial crisis, but which is, in fact, a convergence of several crises.

One contributor reminded participants that there were measures in place at some multilateral institutions to address the lack of transparency, especially in terms of the selection of heads of those organizations. The participant cited the example of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) which made public the names of potential directors, published detailed questionnaires regarding their suitability, and consulted with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), including the International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), to solicit comments on candidates. A participant also observed that, in the case of the restructuring of some inter-governmental institutions, multilateral organizations had taken some steps to be inclusive. Examples cited were the Monterrey Process at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the Accra and Paris aid effectiveness and development cooperation fora. However, in his view, questions arise as to what is desirable, what is possible, and what governments could actually get away with.

Another participant pointed out that there is an emerging movement within multilaterals for more proactive disclosure policies and for greater access to information, because they have realized that there are important collaborative links between the globally active multilateral organizations and locally grounded civil society groups. Some felt that, instead of focusing on global political processes, CSOs

might be better served by turning their attention to debating salient political issues. As an example (relevant to a Forum case study on the World Bank) one attendee raised the issue of whistleblowers and their protection and vetting. She also raised the question of how national political processes affect the multilateral system. Specifically, how can issues such as donor effectiveness be scaled up from the national donor agenda to a global level and, in the course, move the process from a donor driven to a recipient motivated one?

The facilitator wrapped up this session by emphasizing the importance of “the capital P” politics (i.e. informal/non-traditional and non-political-party based) and how civil society actors might go about influencing multilaterals at the “capital P” level.

## **CASE STUDY I**

### *Reforming the World Bank: NGOs and the Wolfowitz Resignation*

Dr. Beatrice Edwards (USA)

**Abstract:** This case study outlined the evolution of a civil society engagement strategy that resulted in the resignation of five senior World Bank (WB) officials who had attempted to dismantle oversight mechanisms at the institution. It describes a process for addressing this governance crisis which included: the development of an ad hoc coalition of civil society organizations with a history of formal engagement at the Bank, the de-emphasis of formal civil society engagement in favor of informal contact, public criticism of the Bank’s management, and the re-engagement of the coalition with the new World Bank management once reforms to whistleblower protection policy were partially achieved.

### **Case Study Discussion**

Participants raised several relevant critical points on the presentation, namely: To what extent did corruption issues get sidetracked by management issues? Was the success of this campaign ideologically localized, i.e. would CSOs and the media mobilize in a similar way against an Obama appointee? Was the information verified and how were sources protected? Are subterfuge and guerrilla tactics the best way to affect change? Is there an entrenched bias against the United Nations and World Bank within the United States media? Were there any unintended consequences, such as blow back and resistance to civil society from within the multilaterals’ bureaucracies, hence making them even more opposed to change?

One attendee decried the proclivity of many CSOs to engage in populist attacks on the World Bank and urged CSOs not to besmirch the names of top managers until they had been proven guilty. She also mentioned that the exemption from national jurisdictions that multilaterals enjoy (via the Vienna Convention) was not a reason in and of itself to suspect them. One insider (at the time) shared that Mr. Wolfowitz’s appointment was not well received by staff members, but their displeasure was not taken into account. Further, in his opinion, the politics of the issue became more about the nepotism shown to Mr. Wolfowitz’s girlfriend, rather than about rooting out corruption at the World Bank. Many participants agreed with this assessment and termed the incident as the media engaging in “thrilling information” and wondered what would have happened if there was no one to provide the leaked information.

The bigger picture emerged that civil society was setting new global norms and was thus questioning what standards global institutions were held to. This paucity of standards extended to ignoring the necessity of engagement, lack of transparency and evaluation, and finally, a disconnection between complaints made by internal whistle blowers and a meaningful and protective response from the

pertinent authorities. Some even questioned what really had changed in terms of management structures at the World Bank and wondered if perhaps a coordinated joint strategy to address mismanagement in the IMF, World Bank and United Nations may be the best way forward.

In response to these queries, the presenter claimed that in terms of tactics, civil society actors did not get a free pass from the press and had to work extra hard at keeping this issue in the spotlight because they are held to a different standard than the World Bank. But unfortunately, she argued, the 'girlfriend angle' was the only one the mainstream media picked up. This focus on the more sensationalistic element was seen to be at the expense of reporting more substantive actions, such as the illegal changes in WB policies on climate change and family planning. In terms of verification, there was an alliance that formed between the whistle blowing WB staff members and the Government Accountability Project (GAP) which was based on mutual trust and substantiation. The lack of civil and labour rights within multilateral institutions was also criticized because there were no mechanisms to address issues such as staff discrimination and whistleblower protection. This lack thwarted any internal structural change (in keeping with changing global norms); achieving long term internal justice was compromised and the investigation unnecessarily politicized.

## **CASE STUDY II**

### *A Study of Nepal's Constituent Assembly Election: The Influence of Civil Society and the Multilateral System*

Dr. Rohit Kumar Nepali (NEPAL) and Mr. Uddhab P. Pyakurel (NEPAL)

**Abstract:** The much-awaited election of the Constituent Assembly in Nepal was held on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008. The Nepalese see the Constituent Assembly as a process of transforming Nepalese society and polity from a traditional monarchy to a modern democracy. This transformative process has been directly impacted by local civil society organizations and by the international multilateral system. In fact, local and international organizations have been keys to strengthening the new Nepali democracy and have been instrumental in making the Jana Andolan II ("People's Movement") a success. This case study documents the People's Movement in Nepal within the context of the influence of civil society and the multilateral system on the political and electoral processes. Lessons and strategies for civil society engagement with electoral processes are explored.

### **Case Study Discussion**

The successful efforts of Nepali civil society in engaging with multilateral agencies to conduct a free and fair election were highly praised. Noted was the lack of such an accreditation for Indian civil society counterparts to engage in the Indian election process at the national and state level. The participants commented on the very interesting process of how civil society in Nepal was able to play the role that they did and wanted to know if there were additional positive outcomes in terms of capacity development and a longer term sustainable relationship in the post-election landscape. A contributor put forward the names of the Organization for Security and Co-operation's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Council of Europe as potential centers for global civil society to be trained in election-monitoring techniques to implement in their spheres of influence.

One participant raised the issue of political agenda setting and whether the Maoists and/or civil society had incorporated either of their agendas into the electoral process. He also wished to know how the status of marginalized constituencies (such as Dalit or lower-caste and women) had been handled in both the pre- and post-election period. Another participant picked up on this thread and shared the example of Bangladesh where, after an "engineered" election, civil society allied with multilaterals to develop a list of most vulnerable and threatened constituencies to protect and support in the following election. Bangladeshi civil society and their coalition partners then sat face to face

with the election commission and made 62 specific suggestions to guard against potential election fraud and made it a point to remain engaged in the process until all results had been authenticated. A human rights advocate made two

Observations: one regarding a potential for aid dependency from multilaterals to develop and the other relating to the aspirations and struggles of excluded communities. He asked whether successes such as those in Nepal and Bangladesh had in fact caused any transformation in the social justice agenda.

The presenters responded to these queries and comments by first noting that Nepal had never been formally colonized by any European power. Nepal is thus somewhat unique within the developing world in terms of not having to carry colonial baggage through to the present day, and being far more open and accepting of multilateral input. This pre-condition has facilitated development of a cordial relationship between civil society and their multilateral partners, who therefore stayed for the long haul as observers and ensured the veracity of the election process and outcome. In terms of the role that Dalits (who were the backbone of the Maoist revolutionaries) and other marginalized constituencies played in the election, the presenters claimed that they participated in the key pre-election process of educating civil society at large regarding issues close to their heart. Unfortunately, in the post election period, most of their suggestions were ignored as evidenced by the lack of even a single Dalit in a cabinet power position.

## **AFTERNOON PLENARY**

Forum participants formed three working groups to discuss the proceedings of the day and to come back to the larger assembly with their reflections on three questions prepared by the facilitator:

- (1) What are the basic problems, in terms of gaps and challenges, faced by present days CSOs?
- (2) What are some of the gains made by CSOs, in the face of these challenges?
- (3) What are the various lessons learned by CSOs in the process?

The main points from each group are summarized below:

- (1) Geographic specificity of certain problems, such as caste- and social group- based discrimination in the Indian subcontinent, make it hard for civil society based therein to be globally inclusive. In addition, some participants felt that the top (management) strata of CSOs in the region were entrenched and that leadership did not change enough on a periodic basis. On a strategic level, one group felt that there were inadequate levels of information gathering and sharing, which if coordinated, could lead to coalition building and a sense of joint solidarity. Thus a pitch was made for citizens to engage with the political process by adopting a statement of principles or code of conduct, which would hold it to the highest standards.
- (2) In a similar vein, the second group pressed for active engagement to foster electoral and legislative reform, citing the examples of South Korea, where a drive by civil society resulted in the publishing of candidate lists with the names of those who were accused of corruption highlighted. This group also raised the challenges associated with engaging multilaterals' agenda and whether a mainstream agenda was sufficient to deepen democracy and foster active participation.
- (3) The third group lamented the lost opportunities made by indulging in short-term gains and wondered if working on a regional (as opposed to national or sub-national) level would eventually lead to a stronger linkage with the multilaterals' agenda.

## **Democratizing Global Governance: Ten Years of Case Studies and Reflections by Civil Society Activists (Edited by Heather MacKenzie)**

### **FIM RECEPTION AND BOOK LAUNCH**

**Book Abstract:** This book is a compilation of thirteen civil society practitioner case studies and papers spanning ten years of activism from 1998 to 2008. All papers focus on democratization of global governance through civil society engagement with the multilateral system and the majority offer perspectives from civil society from the South. This book offers to civil society activists, academics, policy makers, citizens, and students a plethora of strategies and lessons learned by practitioners working through campaigns, movements, steering committees, and international conferences and fora. It also critiques civil society methodologies and strategies for advancing the democratization of global governance and offers a new, more inclusive and profound vision for the future of civil society activism.

This event marked the 10-year anniversary of FIM and was graced by the former Under Secretary General of the United Nations, Shri Nitin Desai, who launched the book with comments on its theme and the emerging context of globalization and democratization. Mr. Desai began by noting that NGO participation in the multilateral process was nothing new, in fact, even a hundred years ago, CSOs were participating in disarmament conferences and in children's and indigenous peoples' rights advocacy. But since the 1990s, Mr. Desai noted, there has been a sea-change in global civil society's role and scope. First, there has been a change in the role played by civil society at the national level, which now includes exposing the limits of representative democracy for the articulation of citizen views, concerns and interests. The second change is with regards to the increasingly interconnected nature of global civil society, brought on by the technological revolution, as well as fostered by certain regional bodies such as the European and African Unions. Mr. Desai argued that these changes have led to the democratization of political processes worldwide and hence civil society could now bring up their concerns on both the national and the global levels.

Civil society's engagement at this high level made it possible to work on agenda setting, the results of which can be seen in the anti-landmine treaty. The various benefits of this seismic shift include taking on a strategic role (in said agenda setting, negotiating processes as well as outcomes); gaining national credibility via international exposure (for example on women and children's rights issues); and finally with regards to fostering Southern development cooperation in the face of conditionalities imposed by major donors. Mr. Desai envisaged gradual inroads for civil society into areas hitherto precluded by state sovereignty measures, namely security, trade, and finance. The evidence for this was to be found in the current global economic crisis, which in his estimation, would force governments to recognize the limits of their powers and hence show a willingness to enlist the help of civil society in the face of a financial meltdown. He concluded by hoping to see greater North-South development cooperation and also predicted a profound change in the current global finance and trade system in favor of more China- and India- centric structures within the next decade or so.

## DAY 2

Day 2 of the FIM Forum New Delhi consisted of two presentations and a plenary identifying the major challenges for civil society in moving forward. The Forum concluded with a reflection and summary by Dr. Tandon and Mr. Martin respectively, as well as a Forum evaluation for all attendees.

### PRESENTATION I

*How are Civil Societies in African Countries Influencing the African Union (AU) Debate on the Establishment of an AU Government?*

Mr. Ezra Mbogori (Kenya)

**Abstract:** The establishment of the African Union on July 9, 2002 in Durban, South Africa, heralded the beginning of what Thabo Mbeki – the then leader of South Africa – described as the ‘African Century’. On the occasion of Ghana’s 50th independence anniversary, the 2007 African Heads of State Summit held in Ghana was slated to discuss one agenda item – the establishment of a “United States of Africa” with an appointed president, ministers of foreign affairs, finance, health and more, as well as a central bank. This African government had been proposed by the Libyan head of state Muammar Gaddafi and echoed in different forms by Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal among others. Civil Society organizations across Africa took a variety of positions on this proposal. This presentation looks at the positions that took form at the Accra debate and how they have translated subsequent to the Summit of 2007.

### Discussion Points

- Civil society participation in the process grew, but faced hurdles in terms of accreditation and engagement at the political level.
- Civil society was caught up in the battle between “gradualists” who wanted incremental change and “big bang” types who wanted radical change.
- Barriers faced by CSOs include low capacity of regional economic bodies, low levels of trust across national borders and bureaucratic constraints.
- Lessons learned for civil society actors include enhancing staying power beyond the short term and building capacity and influence through such AU organs as the ECOSOCC (Economic, Social and Cultural Council), so as to have a greater say in the further design and functioning of the Union.

### Discussion

Participants had several queries regarding the role and motivations of CSOs in Africa and many wondered if they shared a common ultimate goal. It was mentioned that there were Pan-African groupings of CSOs within the continent. Others identified a capacity deficit and resource constraints, including human resource constraints, as major stumbling points for African CSOs. One participant wondered why there was a high level of distrust across borders and whether perhaps a trade based partnership (anti-WTO) could help to overcome this. Some participants pointed to the history of colonialism as a deterrent for many African leaders to mistrust multilateral “meddling” and, at the same time, to harbor hyper-sovereign sentiments regarding ceding power to a supra-national institution. Finally, a couple of the participants noted the lack of direct political engagement by African CSOs, possibly because, for them, the process was fraught with difficulty and danger.

In response, the presenter pointed to the many intricacies and ground realities existent within the African environment. Chief among them were the fact that not all African CSOs had the same attitudes and expectations. The dizzying array of over 140 regional economic bodies for CSOs to maneuver through, along with the reality that member countries of these bodies were uncooperative and acting in their self-interest, were factors seen to be frustrating the overall process. Further impediments to African CSOs engaging at the multilateral level were suspicions over issues such as ancestral land division and miscommunications caused by language differences. In the final analysis, it was felt that, for African CSOs to be effective and relevant in influencing any future steps the AU decides to take, they must work at multiple levels (local, national, and regional) while engaging with the political process.

## **PRESENTATION II**

*Engaging and Disengaging with the Multilateral System: General Principles for Good Practice*  
Dr. Kumi Naidoo (South Africa), presented by Mr. Siddharth Bannerjee

Abstract: It is clear from the extensive FIM forum discussions held in the past ten years that the time has come to deepen the discussions on strategy and lessons learned, to think more broadly, and to articulate general principles of civil society engagement with the multilateral system that underpin these strategies. Knowledge of key principles of civil society engagement with multilateral institutions is seen by civil society activists to be a critical missing element for guiding civil society strategic thinking and action in an increasingly complex multilateral system. Importantly, and increasingly, civil society must hold itself accountable to moral and ethical standards and principles. Such principles will help to guide strategic decisions and actions and will point to the highest possible standards for conduct. This draft working paper outlines ten principles for civil society engagement (and disengagement) with the multilateral system, focusing on issues including representation, accountability, transparency, credibility, and autonomy.

### **Discussion Points**

- Why do we even need these principles?
- Principles should capture the FIM experience/illustrate FIM's perspective.
- There is a difference between tactics/strategies and principles/values.
- Are principles actually pre-conditions? And if so, are there some "deal breakers" which would preclude civil society from facilitating engagement with certain constituencies?
- It is important to determine the most appropriate level for civil society to work at (local, national, regional, global, program, project, policy).
- Are these principles too broad brushed? Not all multilaterals operate in the same fashion.
- Multilaterals' experiences with civil society are mixed due to a perceived lack of commitment from certain civil society actors.
- Multilateralism is necessary in the face of alternative (unilateralism).
- Civil society must maintain institutional memory, perhaps by utilizing the academic community as a resource.
- Who do these principles refer to? Individuals or coalitions of CSOs?
- There is a need for civil society to monitor itself including its impacts.

## Discussion

This session was hotly debated and many important and interesting points emerged. The first point raised was regarding the confusion as to whether these principles were strategic or tactical in nature. It was understood that these principles were to be approached as values or standards (rather than direct action points) that would inform greater engagement, enhance collaborative capacity, and could also be injected into the prevalent discourse on cooperation with the multilateral system. By doing so, CSOs would also serve to bring to the global level standards of conduct by nation-states, thus making them global benchmarks of performance. At the most fundamental level, we should not forget that these principles must serve to positively impact multilateralism and various political processes and thus provide an impetus to democratize global governance structures by strengthening civil society engagement.

Several attendees questioned the most appropriate level to engage, pointing out that real differences exist amongst levels of the multilateral system. Given these differences, applying general principles can be inappropriate or counterproductive for some levels. Precious civil society resources could be wasted if attempts were made to engage with heavily resourced levels of the multilateral system. Forum participants from multilateral organizations spoke of a mixed bag of experiences in dealings with CSOs and warned against clubbing together different agencies under the same rubric. In fact, from the perspective of one particular development agency, it was felt that civil society was dragging its feet in terms of providing timely and useful input.

Most participants felt that the most useful outcome from the articulation of such principles of good conduct was the potential for coalition building and issue linkage amongst diverse and globally disparate civil society actors. Through coalitions, civil society can consolidate its vast power base while fulfilling its collective responsibility to the NGO community. Caution was advised in making this a clear-cut, accountable, and politically grounded process which would bring the discussion to the grass-roots level and ensure representation in input making mechanisms. Overall, it was felt that no "one-size-fits-all" approach could be taken for obvious reasons, but instead an approach that fleshed out what matters, what counts and to whom, must be adopted and contextualized to be consistent with the ends civil society wishes to achieve when engaging with the multilateral system. It was also strongly felt that the language of 'FIM's principles' should be less technocratic and more political/value driven.

The facilitator summed up, pointing out that the FIM Board will take this discussion under consideration in aligning the principles with FIM's mandate and position regarding the value of democratization of the multilateral system through inclusion of missing voices at all levels from local to global.

## AFTERNOON PLENARY

The final plenary asked the participants to voice the biggest challenges facing present day civil society, as well as the best responses to these questions. The groups listed the main challenges facing CSOs in the next two years as the following:

- Global economic recession;
- Restrictive national security agendas;
- Domestic laws against normal CSO functioning;
- Issue burnout;
- Energy and environmental/biodiversity crises;
- Food shortages;

- Apathy by governments;
- UN Security Council reform;
- China's growing power; and
- Lack of focus on human development and security.

Several strategies were proposed to address these challenges. The first group proposed identifying specific civil society actors in particular regions and engaging them in partnership-based enterprises to make them more viable in the current global climate. In addition, given the adverse economic situation, a common civil society platform may be a good tactic to engage international financial institutions and donor agencies.

Group two wanted to focus on understanding in depth the systemic and structural issues confronting global civil society, and to make clear the need for cross-sectoral initiatives. In addition, they saw the need to engage within the right contexts (i.e. discerning which institutions and at which venues), with a proactive vision and shared voice. Some members felt the need for new leadership within civil society, one that would strive for a paradigm shift in terms of pushing for enforceable laws at the international level.

The third group felt that the financial crisis was in fact an opportunity because its severity would force governments to open up more and on other issue areas, including on national sovereignty and holding the private sector more accountable. They also shared the view of the other two groups that since CSOs had so much in common, a coordinated civil society response would be prudent at this time. But for this to happen, the tendencies to work in silos must be overcome and this could be accomplished by meeting regularly at events such as the pre-ECOSOC summit, the CIVICUS World Assembly and UN General Assembly Meeting on May 23rd – 26th 2009. All the groups saw the emergence of China on the global stage as a call to engage with its, as yet nascent, civil society as a top priority, perhaps by having a summit on microfinance held within the mainland.

## **FORUM REFLECTIONS AND SUMMARY**

Dr. Tandon and Mr. Martin concluded the Forum by looking ahead and forecasting, in the next 2-5 years, a hitherto unseen democratic shift in both global as well as national confederations. They felt that the post World War II Bretton Woods institutions would face a major overhaul and that the developing world would engender a new development paradigm. This would be mostly due to their large population numbers and consequent increased importance.

Dr. Tandon's reflections alluded to a change in the rights and obligations discourse and a new compact between the citizen and the state brought about by over two decades of rapid globalization. In concrete terms, this would mean that individual rights may be made more durable under constitutionally sanctioned definitions. And, although shifting gears might be difficult, both urged attendees to grab hold of the present circumstances to reassess the meaning and dynamic of political processes by proposing new ways of engaging, particularly at the transnational and global levels. Mr. Martin concluded the Forum by stating that, as the divide between the global North and South disappears, so must the silos and disconnects that plague global civil society - so that missing voices can be heard loud and clear via democratically appropriate means.

Respectfully submitted,

Siddharth Bannerjee  
Rapporteur General

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