

Introduction

There is an emerging consensus, as indicated by various other background papers for this conference, about how

- important it is to take into consideration the perspectives and voices of civil society in global governance to ensure human rights, social justice and prosperity
- civil society, mainly due to fragmentation, does not have adequate or effective voice or place at the decision making 'tables' of global governance
- civil society organisations and forums are organised and aggregated in various manner which is inadequate for becoming an effective voice and influence
- there are many reasons why civil society organisations are unable to or have failed to come together collectively to any effective form of global aggregation
- new ways and methods of consolidating, aggregating and presenting powerfully the perspectives, voices, resistance and propositions of civil society organisations and social movements are needed urgently to have influence and results at the global governance 'tables'.

This paper is an attempt to initiate discussions and explore possibilities about ways and means of developing an entity, a forum or a framework for ensuring aggregation of civil society voices in the global arena. The ideas outlined below have benefited from discussions, perspectives and ideas from my colleagues¹ but what is presented here does neither represent their or ActionAids's

- a. There exists a whole range of organisations, networks and campaigns which are aggregated in various forms and scale due to a mixture of internal (branding and unity inside the organisation) and external (fundraising and influencing) pressures. These aggregations of organisations and networks are mostly vertical within the organisation or sector. The World Social Forum (WSF) is for example a huge aggregation of cross-geographical and thematic organisations, networks and movements but it does not claim space or seeks engagement in the global governance arena. The WSF is rather about exchanging and mobilising energy, ideas, solidarity and alternative thinking and concepts. The Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) is a recent exception that has brought together the whole range of civil society organisations, networks and movements from across sectors, themes, faith and geography in an unprecedented global coalition but mainly for mobilisation within specified timef

- c. One can argue that significant, and possibly adequate, global influence and policy change can be achieved from concerted, coordinated and coherent civil society advocacy, campaigns, negotiations only in and with the world's 20 most powerful countries. Most of these countries are in Europe and North America and some can be identified in emerging powers in Asia, Africa and Latin America. However, the proposition in this paper is based on the understanding that disaggregated country level efforts and action would need to be aggregated and negotiated at the global level for effective change in the world order. Similarly, changes are more effective, particularly when it comes to implementation of global policy changes, when countries at the demand-side beyond just the powerful 20 countries, are also involved and mobilised.
- d. As mentioned in one of the background papers, there are numerous reasons- particularly of competition and political differences- why civil society organisations and formations may not be naturally inclined to come together for aggregated collective action. However, the proposition in this paper is based on the understanding that civil society organisations will be able to come together in one or other form of aggregation on the basis of shared need when the agenda is specific and the opposition is big and obvious. This in effect also implies the impossibility of the diverse civil society organisations across the sectors, themes, faith or geography ever coming together into a formalised, structured and sustained aggregated entity. While individual streams of organisations, movements and networks along their sectoral, thematic and faith would be able to have- and in many cases already have- formalised and sustained aggregated structure at the global level, they can also potentially further aggregate their negotiations and actions in times of greater need for a time and task bound formation (one or more) without having to surrender or maintain a sustained entity of aggregation.

The proposition

The proposition is to develop a broad based global coalition of civil society organisations, movements and networks from across sectors, themes and faith that will be able to convene together during a time of need to create, change and expand space and terms of engagement and negotiate and agree results in the institutions and processes of global governance.

- a. This global coalition is likely to start with a possible total of 30-40 members, organisations, movements and networks mostly those which already have their own global formations with vertical organisational structures from national to global levels. Regional organisations, movements and networks will also participate thus ensuring critical mass of the participation from the developing countries:

- Development
 - Environment
 - Human rights
 - Trade union
 - Consumer
 - Faith-based
 - Social movements and campaigns: Feminist, Education, Peasants, Trade justice, Debt, Anti-race, Peace/anti-war, Child rights, Disabled people, indigenous, anti-racism
 - Academia- development studies and development research
- b. The specific purpose of this coalition will be to
 - Review and expand the nature and scope of current space available for civil society in structures and processes of global governance

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- Participation and negotiations at the table will be led by the organisations whose constituency is most affected by the agenda and by organisations which have done most work towards framing, researching or mobilising on that particular issue.
- As far as possible similar coalition of participating organisations, movements and networks will also be promoted at national and regional levels.
- This coalition and its work will be self-financed from its members on a minimum and maximum cost sharing. However, a small pool of fund will be raised from donors and foundations only to cover for participation and

organisations, movements and networks mentioned above. Administrative support for the TF has to be established.

- The four main tasks of TF:
 1. To develop a detailed and refined concept note.
 2. Commission research to review and map current space, access and effectiveness of civil society voices in key institutions and processes of global governance
 3. To consult the concept note with a range of potential members from across sectors, themes, geography and faith.
 4. To consult the concept with a range of global governance institutions and processes including those at the regional level.
 5. To consult potential funders as well as secure from e.g. foundations initial funding required for the TF to deliver outlined tasks
 6. To convene the first meeting of

Conclusion

- This idea of aggregation of the contested and competitive civil society space at any level intrinsically goes against the grain and is likely to be unattractive particularly for those organisations, movements and networks who already have space, or at least access to arenas of global governance that we are trying to influence. Any dedication of energy or effort to move forward towards some form of aggregation beyond that can be justified most importantly by the need to create space at the 'table' for those actors who are currently unable to do so or are left out due to size or location (developing countries).
- The degree of structure of such aggregated coalition will be inversely related to its success in staying together and using the acclaimed space. At the same time, any structure-less coalition will unlikely be able to get any seat at the negotiation table.
- It is important to remember to strike an appropriate balance of propositional and oppositional politics and action so that negotiations at the tables as well as the grass-roots support are strengthened and sustained and ensured relevant for each other.
- It will be important to realise that innovative leadership, the ability to step back behind its own organisational profile & branding desire and funding model will be crucial to sustaining the collective nature of the coalition.
- Finally, sufficient time for building relationship, thrashing out issues and aligning politics and positions and generating mutual solidarity and trust as well as a collective sense of purpose will be essential and is as an important exercise as getting then space in the global governance arena.

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Ramesh Singh, Johannesburg, September 2006