



Global Cooperation March 2007

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From research to policy to action

Global and regional leaders of ICSW were invited by UNESCO to the meeting of government ministers, researchers, policy makers and civil society. The meeting was linked to the UNESCO initiative of regional forums of ministers for social development. There have been four regional forums of ministers with the 5th to be held in Morocco in April 2007 and the 6th in Latin America in May.

One of the outcomes of the Nairobi meeting was the move to an interregional meeting of social development ministers.

The participants were asked to reflect on three ideas:

- Social science can contribute decisively to social development policies
- No one has a monopoly on knowledge in the social sciences
- Greater dynamism in the research – mobilisation – government action nexus is above all a matter of innovative mechanisms.

The following is not a record of the meeting in Nairobi but an attempt to capture some of the most interesting discussion.

Southern Africa

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) recognises that their agenda is broader than trade liberalisation. Social policy is critical and includes social exclusion, HIV/Aids, poverty etc. SADC has initiated a forum of social development ministers within its region. In November 2006 social development ministers met in Johannesburg to discuss concerns and the slowness in dealing with social challenges. They recognised they needed comprehensive policies in a variety of areas.

The outcome was a commitment to develop a social policy framework for the region and find ways to implement social policy. Social challenges include housing, cross border health, water, gender, education and specific groups eg ageing.

Ministers recognised they need the cooperation of international organisations to take the social development agenda forward.

World Bank

As would be expected there was discussion of the World Bank. The Bank has moved through stages of project support, structural adjustment and more recently budget support. But the structural adjustment phase introduced powerful new actors at national level. These new actors are corporations either national or international. They became active as part of the World Bank privatisation agenda. Corporations are increasingly influential with governments particularly in economic and fiscal policy. Civil society has not matched this and therefore social development and public-goods policy plays a small part in government policy.

At global level this policy dominance is replicated with economic and fiscal policy being tightly controlled in the Bretton Woods institutions. In contrast social policy is spread across a myriad of disjointed agencies. To add to the confusion civil society organisations are plentiful resulting in international agencies not knowing who to talk to. The UN review of relations with civil society was a lost opportunity. The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) has created an impossible situation by recognising nearly two thousand civil society organisations. The UN has no idea how to work with such a plethora of organisations. It has enough difficulty reaching consensus with a few hundred member states let alone two thousand NGOs.

Returning to the World Bank. Policies have consequences long after implementation. The World Bank has probably conducted the best analyses of their own mistakes. It is disappointing that they do not use the accumulated knowledge from previous errors.

Evidence and knowledge in policy making

What counts as “evidence” for the purposes of policy assessment? Rather than “evidence based” policies it is more accurate to speak of “evidence-aware” policies. Policies always need competing evidence and alternative interpretations, including those of target and user groups. In the face of complexity and uncertainty, evidence can only be persuasive, not conclusive.

The use of knowledge became a main area of debate at the UNESCO meeting. There seemed to be a consensus that knowledge exists but it is not used by politicians. This led to a debate on how policy priorities are set in social development. Priorities are primarily set through a political process. Policies are set by pressure from international financial organizations but this has been less than in the last decade. States have more autonomy than a decade ago. In part this is due to a less clear global agenda.

Increasingly, however, perception of threat from global poverty and inequality is pushing an alternative global agenda. Litigation is having a bearing on the development of the social agenda when social rights are constitutionally entrenched

Civil Society

The discussion moved on to civil society.

What kinds of knowledge can non-government organisations (NGOs) produce? How can such knowledge be made available to the policy process? To what extent can NGOs take responsibility for service delivery?

To whom are NGOs accountable? To whom should they be?

In the discussion there was a perceived need to reconsider the phrase “non-government organisation” which does not capture all aspects of organized civil society. Accountability to donors is not enough. There is a need for accountability in respect of use of public money. Excessively strict accountability demands are likely to exclude civil society. Civil society cannot be accountable to government – but can civil society organisations challenge the state?

Conclusion

ICSW congratulates UNESCO for their very useful innovation of bringing together not only ministers for social development but also researchers, policy makers and civil society. This dialogue is producing good thinking and excellent interchange of ideas and practices. The dialogue is increasing understanding between sectors.

Much more could be said on the World Social Forum. If you want to read more on the World Social Forum there are many reports in the Civil Society Observer Volume 4, Issue 1 January - February 2007 Special Section: World Social Forum 2007

<http://www.un-ngls.org/>

New From UNRISD

Political and Social Economy of Care

This project is undertaking comparative research on the multiple institutions of care, their gender composition and dynamics and their implications for poverty and social rights of citizenship. The research spans across eight countries drawn from four different regions: Argentina and Nicaragua; South Africa and Tanzania; South Korea and India; Switzerland and Spain.

<http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BF3C2/setLanguageCookie?OpenAgent&langcode=en&url=/80256B3C005BB128/search/37BD128E275F1F8BC1257296003210EC?OpenDocument>

The Return to Social Policy and the Persistent Neglect of Unpaid Care

The failure of orthodox economic policies to generate growth and eradicate poverty has led to renewed interest in social policies. The return to ‘the social’ has seen contending conceptualizations of social policy, premised on different values, priorities and understandings of state responsibility, vying for influence. This article argues that the currently dominant agenda of social sector restructuring is likely to entrench gender inequalities in access to social services and income supports because of its failure to recognize the structures that underpin those inequalities, which are pervasive across labour markets and the unpaid care economy.

<http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BF3C2/setLanguageCookie?OpenAgent&langcode=en&url=/80256B3C005BCCF9/search/2B95647C94106E7EC125729E00498759?OpenDocument>

Human Rights in South Asia

The Asian Centre for Human Rights has released its *SAARC Human Rights Report 2006*. This is the first such report prepared by any organization or institution in South Asia. *SAARC Human Rights Report 2006* ranks members of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation based on the incidents and patterns of human rights violations. According to the *SAARC Human Rights Violators Index 2006*, Bangladesh is ranked No. 1 violator of human rights, followed by Bhutan (No. 2), Nepal (No. 3), Maldives (No. 4), Pakistan (No.5), Sri Lanka (No.6) and India (No.7).

<http://www.achrweb.org/reports/saarc2006/main.htm>

International Poverty Centre UNDP

The International Poverty Centre has announced a new issue of our One Pagers: *One Pager # 26: What is Poverty? Good Question* by Terry McKinley.

Available online as PDF at: <http://www.undp-povertycentre.org/pub/IPCOnePager26.pdf>

The Center invites readers to post their comments on this publication at the IPC Open Forum: <http://www.undp-povertycentre.org/forum.htm>

All publications are available for downloading from the IPC webpage: <http://www.undp-povertycentre.org/>

Coming events

ICSW - European Region International Expert Seminar on Social investment and social protection as productive factors. The role of decent work and social integration for an economically successful and socially cohesive society

To be held in Madrid (Spain), 25th to 27th May 2007

Hosted by the Comité Español para el Bienestar Social (CEBS)

secretaria@cebs-es.org <http://www.cebs-es.org/cebs/default.asp>

Partnership for People-centred Development: Challenges and Responses in a Globalising World

The International Association for Community Development (IACD)

<http://www.iacdglobal.org/> biennial conference will be held at the City University of Hong Kong, China on 24-27 June, 2007.

(http://ssteach1.cityu.edu.hk/~iacd/IACD_brochure.pdf).

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