UNRISD United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

CONFERENCE NEWS

Global Civil Society Movements

Dynamics in International Campaigns and National Implementation

Report of the UNRISD International Colloquium at the World Social Forum, 22–23 January 2007, Nairobi, Kenya

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Introduction

Since the 1970s, the work of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) has emphasized the importance—both normatively and in practice—of popular participation in development. Attention has been paid to the mobilizing dynamics of particular actors, such as peasant farmers, workers and labour unions, as well as to movements involving the urban poor, indigenous peoples and women. As a research institute, UNRISD has undertaken critical analysis of how these political actors contribute to the transformation of the global public sphere by breaking away from traditional state-to-state dialogues. Recognizing that civil society activism has increased and grown in importance, UNRISD has sought to tackle issues that are crucial to improving UN–civil society dialogue and mutual understanding. Legitimacy is central in this respect: for a strong relationship, it is essential to know whose interests are represented by all parties.

The legitimacy of civil society organizations (CSOs) is among the crosscutting issues addressed in research conducted by UNRISD under its recent project, *Global Civil Society Movements: Dynamics in International Campaigns and National Implementation*. This project, which began in 2003, examined the strengths and weaknesses of selected civil society networks and movements. Thematic studies were commissioned on the social basis of activism, and the implications of North-South relations for social movements. The project also studied the nature and organizational structures of five international campaigns—debt relief, international trade rules and barriers, anti-corruption, fair trade and the currency transaction tax (CTT)—that have brought together activists at the global level. Five country studies were carried out—in Argentina, Bolivia, the Philippines, Senegal and Turkey—to look at national-level activities around the five campaigns. UNRISD worked with research institutes and universities in all five countries to examine the key national actors, forms of contention and institutionalization, and roles of public opinion and development debates that surrounded the five international campaigns.

UNRISD held an international colloquium—bringing together civil society activists, academics and others—at the World Social Forum (WSF) in Nairobi, Kenya.[1]

1 The WSF, an annual event initiated in 2001, is organized by civil society groups involved in the alternative globalization movement. It brings together a large number of organizations and individuals representing global civil society.

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A public meeting was held on 22 January to present the findings of the *Global Civil Society Movements* project to WSF participants. On 23 January UNRISD organized a closed workshop that brought together the Institute's research staff and academics who had contributed to the research, to discuss the research findings and explore possible future research areas.

The WSF colloquium was divided into two sessions. The first session was devoted to presenting the findings from research on four of the five transnational campaigns: the global debt movement, the fair trade movement, the movement for the currency transaction tax and the movement to change international trade rules and barriers.[2] The afternoon session covered four of the five country studies, which focused on national social movement activities in relation to the different international campaigns mentioned above.[3]

Public Meeting

Opening session

The colloquium was opened by Thandika Mkandawire, Director of UNRISD, who began by briefly presenting the Institute and its place within the United Nations system. He underlined the fact that UNRISD has the advantage of autonomy within the UN system, since it does not receive funding from the UN general budget but instead relies exclusively on voluntary contributions. UNRISD works extensively with an international network of researchers, including many from developing countries. This presents a dual advantage: it gives the institute access to fresh ideas and also allows it to bring voices from the South into international debates on social development. After briefly presenting the Institute's programme of research, Mkandawire explained the importance to UNRISD of presenting the findings of the research *on* global civil society movements *to* members of civil society. Through its research on civil society and social movements, the Institute has sought a better understanding of the influences, dynamics and roles of social movements in policy making. The research represents a tool to help both international organizations and civil society better understand their constraints and capacities. This research offers CSOs an external and, hopefully, insightful perspective on their activities. In a context where there is always a danger of stagnation, well-informed movements should be able to function better.

Kléber Ghimire, coordinator of the UNRISD research programme on Civil Society and Social Movements, introduced the research project. The goal of the project, he explained, was not just to understand why certain social movements have been successful, but also to study how particular trajectories have led to certain results. What internal resources were available within the different movements at the international and national levels? To what extent were national and international alliances essential to their success? This meant examining the relationship between international networks and national social fabrics. The issue of institutionalization was also present throughout the different studies. There seemed to be a paradox between movements, which, almost by definition, reflected a certain level of spontaneity, and what appeared to be an increasing need for recognition from governments and international institutions alike. This then led to the question of political strategies and ways of dealing with state institutions. All these issues transcended the research and seemed to cut across all contemporary movements. Within the WSF, for example, there was ongoing debate on whether the Global Justice Movement (GJM) should become a new international non-governmental organization (NGO) or whether it should maintain its present form as a mechanism for the exchange and debate of ideas.

In concluding his remarks, Ghimire highlighted two issues that had emerged throughout the research and could represent new areas of inquiry. The first was the relationship between social movements and the political establishment. Even though these movements were relatively strong and well established with the wider public, there was very little evidence that policy makers were ready to accommodate demands put forward by some of them. The second was resources: the international nature of these movements has tended to

2 Findings from the study on the anti-corruption movement were not presented in Nairobi because the researchers could not participate in the meeting. However, the country studies, presented during the afternoon session, dealt with the movement in national contexts.

3 The researcher in charge of the Turkish case study was unable to present his findings during the public meeting. However, the findings were presented in the closed workshop the next day.

increase financial pressure on them (due, for example, to the cost of holding global and regional meetings). Furthermore, many of these movements have little or no income from membership fees, making them dependent on public and/or private subsidies. This marks a clear break with past mass movements (such as trade unions) that could, to a large extent, depend on their members for financial support.

Global social movements: Issues and trends

The first session, chaired by Alejandro Bendaña, heard presentations of the papers on four of the five global movements.

The rise and development of the global debt movement: A North-South dialogue

Katarina Sehm Patomäki

For decades, the debt issue has remained a front-runner—perhaps even *the* front-runner—on the agendas of CSOs and social movements throughout the world. A wide range of CSOs—from the reformist to the more radical—are involved with the debt issue, but the church-based movements are the most active. The debt movement has been successful in raising public awareness on the issue, especially in the North. In the South, movements (for example, Jubilee South) argue for immediate and complete cancellation of debt, which they sometimes describe as a mechanism of recolonization. In the North, mass mobilizations have attracted the attention of creditor governments and led to calls in the media to solve the problem of "illegitimate" debt. One of the most impressive mobilizations took place at the G-8 summit in Birmingham in 1997 when 70,000 people took to the streets and created a human chain in the city centre.

If getting an issue onto the political agenda is an indicator of success, the debt movement has been extremely successful. However, although the work done by CSOs has created public awareness of the debt problem, research indicates that actual debt reduction has been modest. Figures show that indebted countries have paid the amount owed to international financial institutions just in interest. Movements regularly use this argument to position the debt issue as a political rather than an economic problem. However, Sehm-Patomäki said, in her research she seldom comes across papers by political scientists on the debt issue. This gap in debt research is often filled by the sections of civil society whose primary task is to maintain a political perspective on the debate. She also observed that, while there has been a lot of research on debt, there is little on debt cancellation.

Fair trade as a social movement

Murat Yilmaz

Can the fair trade movement be considered a social movement? According to Murat Yilmaz, the question has been complicated by the increasingly close ties between fair trade organizations and large retail outlets. Is the current fair trade movement comparable to what it was 10 or 15 years ago? Yilmaz looked at the evolution of the fair trade movement, concluding that it has evolved in a way that has led to a contradiction within the movement itself. It has generated public interest on the issue of fair trade. In turn, this has increased consumer demand for fair trade products and, to some extent, led fair trade organizations to adapt by improving their efficiency and competitiveness in order to increase sales output. Yilmaz predicted that this might ultimately distance the practice of fair trade from its founding principles: self-sufficiency and autonomy for the producers of fair trade goods. As his research showed, ever since its products had begun to appear on the shelves of large supermarket chains, fair trade itself had faced pressures to adapt to market constraints.

The movement's founding principles may be jeopardized in order to respond to rapidly increasing demands from the North. Yilmaz believed that the risk for fair trade, as a social movement, was that it would not reach its primarily development-oriented goals and would sometimes even have the adverse effect of reinforcing the mechanisms of dependency that already exist between the North and South. He concluded by saying that the best principles sometimes gave birth to the worst practices and unfortunately, the history of development was full of examples of this.

The movement to change international trade rules and barriers

Manuel Mejido

In presenting his ongoing research, Manuel Mejido focused on some conceptual issues that have emerged so far in his work. Mejido presented a typology of different movements, comprising four categories,

conceived in relation to the movement he was studying.

- **Non-governmental organizations (NGOs):** NGOs are relatively formal and, on average, have greater resources (financial, organizational, professional staff) than other types of movements. The issues that arise in this category are:
  - tensions concerning alliances between NGOs and government organizations;
  - the problem of instrumentalization of NGOs by governments; and
  - the issue of instrumentalization by NGOs of grassroots social movements.

- **Social movements:** Social movements are more spontaneous than NGOs. They are less formalized and tend to be more general in the nature of their mobilizations: there is no rationalized type of campaigning or lobbying, which presents a methodological problem for researchers who wish to study social movements and their impact. Their interactions with governments and state actors are far more complex than in the case of NGOs because, in many cases, they express a desire to break away from representative democracy while, at the same time, interacting with it at various levels.

- **Networks:** Networks represent movements of NGOs (for example, the trade justice movement). Networks use technology to mobilize and create synergies. There are questions about the place of the individual within networks: they tend to mobilize organizations, which may alienate the individual.

- **Plateaus:** Plateaus are regional, global, thematic forums (such as the WSF) that are usually more related to social movements. However, plateaus are usually centred around specific events, and therefore lack the continuity of networks.

Global tax initiatives: The movement for the currency transaction tax
Heikki Patomäki

In opening his presentation, Heikki Patomäki pointed out that the political origins of the World Social Forum could be found in the CTT. Attac France created global momentum around the idea of such a tax, and was also among the founders of the WSF. Patomäki looked at what had led to the emergence of this movement and the conditions for its success. He then described two sequences of events that could lead to the implementation of a CTT.

- **Proactive sequence:** In the proactive sequence, one country would decide to implement the tax but, because of the possible consequences of acting on its own, it presses for other countries to agree on an international treaty.

- **Reactive sequence:** In the case of a reactive sequence of events, a disaster would trigger global media hype which, in turn, draws the public's attention to the CTT issue and leads to a demand for new regulatory measures. This is what happened in the case of the Tobin tax. A series of financial crisis in the 1980s and the 1990s created a receptive environment in many countries for the promotion and implementation of the CTT. The Asian crisis, for example, triggered demands for new regulatory systems, and "ideological entrepreneurs" only needed to present an idea that they had already worked out.

Looking at the evolution of the CTT question, it would appear that the momentum created by the Asian crisis slowed by 2004. While Belgium, Canada and France passed laws—in 2004, 1999 and 2001 respectively—to put in place the CTT, the actual implementation is conditional on other countries doing the same. No other country has passed such a law, which has undoubtedly had a demobilizing effect on the CTT movement. Stagnation has been worsened by the fact that, within the movement, different groups have supported different versions of the CTT.

One version, supported by groups like War on Want (United Kingdom), Patomäki described as "minimalist". Their proposed tax would aim to raise $20 billion to help fund the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This version of the CTT would not seek to distort the market but to gather funds for development aid. Another version was developed by the Free University of Brussels. Rather than simply raising funds for countries to be able to fund development aid and respect their MDG engagements, this version would include

the creation of a democratic organization that would have the power to decide how the revenues are spent.

Patomäki ended his presentation with his impressions on what the future may hold for the CTT. He believed that it would take another financial crisis for the CTT to re-emerge in the public sphere. While he recognized that this was not an ideal solution, it nevertheless seemed to him the only way forward in the current context.

Discussion

The discussion raised several issues, related to both specific movements and movements in general. One participant said that it was difficult to talk about fair trade without looking at the question of solidarity economics. Broadly defined, this is a grassroots form of cooperative economics connecting local production groups worldwide to create large-scale, viable and creative networks of alternatives to the "profit-over-all-else" economy. In this context, he inquired, what was the role of the state, especially in transitions from fair trade to solidarity economics? In response, Yilmaz reaffirmed his belief in the need for a more explicit distinction between fair trade and solidarity economics. More attention should also be paid to the distribution of profits generated through fair trade in order to guarantee their fair redistribution among local producers. A representative of a Kenyan NGO pointed out that the issue of fair trade was not always at the top of the agenda of movements in the South. For example, there were cases when land was taken over from peasant farmers because of foreign direct investment. Without land, it was impossible even to envisage fair trade. A prerequisite for the implementation and generalization of fair trade would be a resolution of the land distribution issue.

Concerning the CTT, a participant said that the Tobin tax was initially devised as a solution to financial problems, but it was currently being used to raise funds destined for development aid. Was such a tax appropriate for welfare when its original goal, as James Tobin had imagined it, was to deter financial speculation? Distribution of the funds is also cause for concern. Who levies taxes, and how do we ensure that these taxes are democratically anchored? Another participant asked what the largest obstacle was to the realization of a CTT. In response, Patomäki explained that according to the draft treaty developed by the CTT movement (of which he was an active member), a council of ministers, in accordance with a democratic assembly, would decide on the allocation of the funds. The democratic assembly would be composed of representatives of both national governments and civil society. The possibility of implementing a lottery system had also been discussed within the movement.

Regarding the presentation on the global debt movement, there was a view that European groups still considered debt an economic issue, whereas in the South it was seen as more political. In response to this, Sehm-Patomäki pointed out that this was probably due to the fact that political power was still concentrated in the North. The debt movement offered important lessons that could help actors within the Global Justice Movement collaborate more efficiently in the future.

Regarding Mejido's classification, some found it difficult to place certain movements within this typology: for example, women's movements, trade unions, youth movements, human rights and social services movements. The criteria used to elaborate the typology were questioned, as was the absence of trade unions. In response to these remarks, Mejido stressed the fact that the typology he developed was conceived in relation to the specific movement that he was studying. He also explained that variables that were more historically specific were difficult to integrate into a typology of transnational movements.

On a more general level, one participant said that most movements did not emphasize democratic practices within their own processes; yet the importance of this could not be minimized, especially given their own call for global democracy. Indeed, some movements had been led by the same charismatic figures for the past 30 years. In order for movements to advance, the question of accountability had to be studied, and confronted head-on. NGOs are often intermediaries, and in some cases, the majority of their resources are used for administrative purposes. How do civil society actors deal with cases of corruption that take place within their own movements or organizations? In response, Patomäki said that this problem had been overemphasized. In his view, NGOs were not meant

to be accountable to society at large. Because membership to NGOs is open, only members have the legitimacy to question the organization's accountability. Why should movements have to be accountable to outsiders? The main issue is not the accountability of NGOs, but how to conceive and devise accountable systems of governance.

Transnational social movements and national linkages

In the second session, the main research findings from four of the five national case studies were presented. For each country, researchers were asked to look at the national dynamics related to the five global movements presented earlier. The session was chaired by Babacar Diop Buuba.

The case of Argentina

Sebastian Pereyra began his presentation of the Argentina case study by stressing the ideological dimension of social movements in the Argentine political landscape. Rather than a single social movement, there is a wide variety of movements with diverse demands, but sharing a rejection of neoliberalism. However, this denunciation was set in a regional, rather than global, context.

The campaign related to the global issue of international trade rules and barriers, for instance, has not been integrated into social movement contentions in Argentina. However, regional discussions with regard to the establishment of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) gained momentum as an important issue for a number of organizations and alliances. Criticisms grew stronger with the expansion of neoliberalism in the country through a series of free trade agreements, which led to the mobilization of dissident trade unions opposed to these new policies. During the 2001 financial crisis, the denunciation grew even stronger. It reached a peak in 2002 when many international campaign groups saw in the Argentine crisis an example of the devastating social impacts of neoliberal policies. During the 2002 Argentine Social Forum, the coalition Autoconvocatoria emerged as an important moment in the articulation between local struggles and global issues. However, the main issue which appeared to mobilize the majority of the movements in the Autoconvocatoria was primarily anti-imperialism and anti-Americanism. This tended to limit the global scope of the movement since its main opponent was not global trade but a country, the United States.

Argentina does not have a history of activism around the fair trade issue. Only a small number of producers are linked with the fair trade movement since Argentina has historically been a relatively rich and developed country, and therefore never felt the need to find alternative ways of exporting its local products. Argentina has also been able to boast a strong internal market for agricultural products, which clearly differentiated it from other developing countries. This is why there are few, if any, national outlets of large international fair trade organizations. It was relatively recently—after the 2001 economic collapse—that Argentina began waking up to the possibility of producing fair trade goods. Discussions on fair trade have emerged specifically as a result of new interest from activists and organizations. This growing interest is set in a post-crisis context where people and sectors of the economy have started to explore alternative ideas to redevelop their country.

Attac Argentina started out by focusing on the Tobin tax question, aiming to open a public debate on the issue. The development of Attac Argentina quickly ran into problems, however, the most important of which was its inability to mobilize individuals and organizations active in Argentine civil society. This was further complicated by the country's 2001 crisis, which changed the orientation of militant activity in general but also within Attac Argentina. Opposition to the FTAA now became the main objective of the organization, and all efforts were concentrated on the creation of a "militant space" capable of building strong opposition to this project. Thus, Attac shifted its priorities: instead of campaigning for a new international tax, Attac began to campaign against the FTAA; and instead of focusing on a global objective, it focused on a more nationally oriented one. It would appear that the national militant context and the political situation were key elements behind this shift. In other words, the globalization process lacked the capacity to produce sustained collective action unless it could be directly related to a national problem.

On the issue of debt, Pereyra said that the Argentine state was not merely a target for the movements active

on this issue. It has actually organized activities, supported positions in favour of certain demands of the movements and offered opportunities for action. On different occasions, the state actually led mobilizations in favour of debt alleviation. Over the past few years, the "national" coalition, Dialogo 2000, has been the main actor on the issue of external debt in the country although it had a predominantly global perspective (which was not necessarily an advantage in the Argentine context). Dialogo 2000 originated in a series of campaigns that were initiated by political parties and unions in the 1980s. Both the present movement and its predecessor perceive the debt issue as:

- a political problem, an instrument of dependency;
- one aspect of a system of domination often associated with the neoliberal project of the military dictatorship (1976–1983) and the violation of human rights; and
- the loss of national sovereignty.

However, the difference between the current mobilizations and their predecessors lay in their approach to the issue. Whereas earlier strategies were largely concentrated at the national level, Dialogo 2000 moved toward international action and campaigning. This was linked largely to the movement's need for support from international organizations since, in Argentina, only a limited number of organizations specifically focused on the issue. The relevance and importance of the debt issue for the wider public contrasted with the relatively limited number of social movements and organizations focused on the issue of external debt.

Pereyra concluded by presenting his research findings on the issue of corruption. As in the rest of the world, there has been growing concern about corruption over the past few years. International support has contributed to the development of organizations specializing in this issue. These organizations are usually funded through a wide range of programmes that have helped support activists and experts. The presence of a variety of international networks has undoubtedly played a fundamental role in providing ideas, which are then communicated to the public in Argentina.

The case of Bolivia

Fernando Mayorga began his presentation on Bolivia by saying that social movements had been important contributors to the country's recent political transformations. Two main factors have led to the emergence of strong social movements in Bolivia: the crisis of neoliberalism; and the crisis within the Bolivian political system. The latter has led several social movements to join the political system and contribute to its transformation. In Bolivia, social movements have embraced global issues and grown in strength through protest and campaigning. They began by proposing alternatives and eventually became purveyors of public policy through their participation in the government of Evo Morales.

At the time of the "water wars" in Cochabamba in 2000,[4] a movement was formed in opposition to the implementation of the FTAA. It brought together a wide variety of actors: trade unions, small farmers, NGOs, intellectuals and leaders from different backgrounds. Bolivia's current foreign policy is largely based on the legacy of this movement.

Mayorga said that only a handful of artisans or farmers sell their products through the fair trade system. The vast majority of social movements, rather than generalizing fair trade (within current international trade routes), would rather struggle for an alternative form of supranational trade integration that would go against the current free trade agreements promoted by the World Trade Organization (WTO). In the case of Bolivia, the main argument in favour of fair trade is the security that it brings to producers. Fair trade competes with solidarity economy initiatives, such as the Coordinadora de Integración de Organizaciones Económicas Campesinas de Bolivia (CIOEC). This initiative seeks not only to develop fair trade, but also to develop South-South exchanges. Morales has taken on many of the proposals made by these kinds of networks. In an initiative known as Tratado de Comercio de los Pueblos (TCP), signed with Cuba and Venezuela, *comercio justo* (fair trade) becomes *comercio con justicia*, (trade with justice). The TCP criticizes, and breaks away from, the traditional approach to trade that is accused of marginalizing the issue of equity and the preservation of cultural identities.

Mayorga then discussed the Bolivian mobilizations around the issue of international trade rules and barriers.

4 Protesters contested the privatization of the municipal water supply.

The Bolivian movement participates in the Continental Campaign against the FTAA (Campaña Continental contra el ALCA), and the Bolivian Movement against Free Trade Treaties and the FTAA (Movimiento Boliviano de Lucha contra el TLC y el ALCA), later called the Movimiento Boliviano por la Soberanía y la Integración Solidaria de los Pueblos, is actively engaged in the struggle against free trade treaties. Three factors led to the emergence of international trade as a contentious issue in Bolivia: government decisions in the 1990s to privilege foreign investments; mobilization against the negative effects of neoliberalism and against the privatization of public services; and the actions of foreign corporations in Bolivia and their own international networks. In the Bolivian case, the debate on the issue was closely tied to the process of rejuvenating social mobilizations, the most well-known of which related to privatization of the water system in Cochabamba. In 2000, there was a great deal of mistrust between the population and traditional political parties, which were accused of acting in their own personal interests and in a non-transparent manner. Since the 2005 elections, which saw Evo Morales become president, experiences and contacts with social movements have been taken on board and integrated in initiatives such as the TCP as an alternative to the TLC. This has given the Bolivian movement a privileged status at the global level, where it is considered a leading player in the social movement struggle against privatization and neoliberal globalization.

Debt has been a key issue in Bolivia since the 1980s. The decision by the Hernan Siles government to stop repaying debts in the mid-1980s was taken in a context

Jubileo (Jubilee Foundation) in 2003 which led to a Platform of Action against Poverty. Both the foundation and platform were active at the international level in the Global Jubilee 2000 campaign. From a movement which had demanded debt alleviation, the Bolivian debt campaign was now calling for its total cancellation.

The sociopolitical conditions in Bolivia have not encouraged the development of a movement in favour of a CTT. Despite the existence of Attac Bolivia, social movements' programme of action has focused mainly on the issue of political transformation, which makes a movement for a CTT problematic in the Bolivian context. Without having strong roots in the trade unions, it is extremely difficult for such a campaign to take off in Bolivia. Furthermore, the CTT is also generally seen as a typically "first world" type of proposal.

Finally, Mayorga described the Bolivian anti-corruption movement. The issue of corruption is a very particular one when compared with the other international campaigns. The organizations combating corruption in Bolivia are often derived from very institutionalized initiatives rather than grassroots social struggles. Although their findings may be debated, various studies in Bolivia tend to indicate that the state in particular and society in general are affected by corruption (even within civil society). Moreover, the various organizations concerned with corruption define the issue differently. A closer look at the organizations in question reveals that they often receive funding from foreign countries. Red Anticorrupción Bolivia, for example, is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), la Movida Ciudadana Anticorrupción is funded