

**POWER IS FINDING NEW PATHS****In this issue**

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>Changing Perceptions</b>  | <b>1</b> |
| <b>Advocacy Groups Take Their Own Medicine</b>                       | <b>2</b> |
| <b>Cameroonian NGOs Vow To Promote Transparency</b>                  | <b>3</b> |
| <b>Islamic Civil Society Occupies A Different World</b>              | <b>4</b> |
| <b>From Local to Global</b>  | <b>5</b> |
| <b>Brazil's Innovative Small Farmers Set To Redefine Development</b> | <b>6</b> |

Voices of the South on Globalization is a monthly newsletter intended to inspire a meaningful North-South Dialogue by raising awareness for global interdependences and by offering a forum for voices from the South in the globalization debate. Each edition will present short analyses or commentaries from a Southern perspective on one particular issue of the globalization process.

Voices of the South on Globalization is published by IPS Europe with financial support from the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

*For further information please contact:*

IPS-Inter Press Service Europe,  
Ramesh Jaura, Marienstr. 19/20, 10117 Berlin  
Tel.: ++49-(0)30-28 48 23 60  
Fax: ++49-(0)30-28 48 2369  
rjaura@ipseuropa.org

**CHANGING PERCEPTIONS**

*What goes by the name of civil society is all very well, usually, but what really can it do?*

For long civil society groups have been considered a bunch of dubious do-gooders sponging off grants off institutions with money that need to exhibit such grants for their conscience.

Civil society lacks the nuts-and-bolts power of executive authority, or the more sweeping powers of elected or self-appointed leaders. And it has faced continuous derision that it lives off the crumbs of the very institutions it seeks to challenge.

But such a perception of civil society is beginning to change. Certainly, people within civil society do not see it that way, and that is a vastly growing number of people now.

"In the United Kingdom for instance there are more members in Amnesty International than there are in the UK Labour Party," Civicus secretary-general Kumi Naidoo said on the eve of the world assembly of civil society groups June 21-25 in Glasgow, Scotland.

Some of the leaders of the civil society movement challenge those set notions about civil society so widely prevalent within political parties, the bureaucracy and most established media.

"Civil society has been over the past decade ahead of governments on many of the key issues of our times," Naidoo said.

"Whether we take the issue of land mines, whether we take environment, whether we take HIV/AIDS or the global poverty agenda, or gender equality for that matter, civil society's impact is quite significant in terms of raising difficult challenges of time and putting forth solutions that are more bold, more courageous and more innovative than what many who are constrained by political office allow people to do." And civil society has done this "even without holding formal political power."

Civil society has gained to the extent that the political establishment has not delivered – cannot deliver – what a growing number of people need and expect.

"In view of the inability of the political system to solve many urgent problems, civil society, which represents an infinity of views and ways of thinking, has organised in different ways to express its wish to change and correct the orientation of political management, and put pressure on those who do have political and executive authority," said Mario Lubetkin, director-general of the Inter Press Service (IPS). And no longer as just a verbal pressure group, he said. "Civil society is acting, and has achieved many significant results regarding the amendment of erroneous government policies in different countries.

**(continued on page 6)**

## ADVOCACY GROUPS TAKE THEIR OWN MEDICINE

*WASHINGTON - The leaders of 11 major international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) decided early June to practice what they preach to governments and business by endorsing an "Accountability Charter" for themselves.*

The six-page charter commits its signatories to, among other things, comply with the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ensure "good governance" and transparency, and maintain high ethical standards in their fund-raising and advocacy activities.

The charter's debut at the London headquarters of Amnesty International on June 7, came on the eve summit of the Civicus World Alliance for Citizen Participation in Glasgow, Scotland, a meeting that drew representatives of NGOs from 100 countries to discuss issues relating to development, and civic and economic justice.

Besides Amnesty and Civicus themselves, other signers included ActionAid International, Consumers International, Greenpeace International, Oxfam International, International Save the Children Alliance, Survival International Federation Terre des Hommes, Transparency International, and the World YWCA.

A series of global surveys stretching back several years has shown that international NGOs enjoy greater trust among the general public in western countries and elsewhere than do governments, business, the media, or other major social and political institutions.

At the same time, the influence and visibility of these groups have grown significantly, particularly in multilateral forums where, among other activities, they have pressed for the adoption of new international treaties and legal norms binding national governments to more rigorous standards on human rights, environmental protection, arms, and international justice, among other issues.

They have also campaigned for the adoption of binding codes of conduct for multinational corporations (MNCs) covering such issues as human rights, environmental protection, corruption, transparency, and economic equity in their overseas operations.

These efforts have spurred something of a backlash on the part of some right-wing groups and governments which have questioned, among other things, whether NGOs were themselves as transparent and accountable as many of the corporations and governments whose behaviour they tried to regulate.

In 2003, for example, the neo-conservative American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the right-wing Federalist Society joined with the like-minded Australian think tank, the Institute of Public Affairs, in sponsoring an all-day

conference entitled "NGOs: the Growing Power of an Unelected Few" at which they also launched a new website, [www.ngowatch.org](http://www.ngowatch.org), dedicated to "bring accountability to the NGO sector". The site states: "NGOs use their growing influence inside international organizations to push for the establishment of globalized standards and international legal norms. Yet this growing local and global role has in large part been unchecked and unregulated."

To some extent, the new Charter can be seen as a response to this critique. "NGOs are playing an increasingly prominent role in setting the agenda in today's globalised world," said Amnesty's secretary general, Irene Khan. "This places a clear responsibility on us to act with transparency and accountability."

"The Accountability Charter clearly shows that NGOs are willing to adhere to a code of conduct, lead by example, and encourage others to follow," she added.

David Nussbaum, chief executive of Transparency International, echoed that view, noting that "International NGOs have an essential role to play in global governance. This charter sets out specific ways in which we demonstrate that our accountability means in practice. Transparency International advocates for open disclosure of relevant information to maintain trust and credibility -- for NGOs as well as for companies and governments."

The charter, which is voluntary, is designed for international NGOs in particular, and lays out basic principles to which all signatories subscribe, including basic freedoms of speech, assembly, and association, non-discrimination, and the advancement of international and national laws that "promote human rights, ecosystem protection, sustainable development and other public goods".

It calls for signatories to adhere to financial accounting and reporting requirements in the countries where they are based and operate and to issue detailed annual reports on their mission, operations, funding, and compliance with the charter and to ensure that its governance structure is transparent and responsive to its membership and stakeholders.

It similarly advocates principles of "ethical fundraising", including the rights of donors to be informed how their donation is used and how it furthers the organisation's mission, and "professional management," including the use of best practices in financial management and defined evaluation procedures for boards, staff, programmes and projects. – **Jim Lobe**

## CAMEROONIAN NGOS VOW TO PROMOTE TRANSPARENCY

*YAOUNDE -* *Cameroonian civil societies have welcomed the first global accountability charter that leading international campaigners have publicly endorsed in Glasgow to govern the way non-governmental organisations (NGOs) do business.*

In their statement, the NGOs said: "In addition to an internal desire to be transparent and accountable, the accountability charter also seeks to demonstrate that NGOs deeply value public trust, do not take it for granted and are committed to sustaining and deepening that trust. This initiative comes at a time when the non-profit sector is coming under closer scrutiny, both from those who want it to flourish and those who seek to curtail NGO activities."

Campaigners hope that the charter will eventually be adopted by all civil society organisations. "(This is) an important initiative which will lead the non-profit sector toward greater social responsibility, transparency and ethical behaviour," Marie Ngouanfo, president of the Association for Equitable Development, said. Ngouanfo's group is an NGO based in Yaounde, Cameroon.

"NGOs greatly influence public opinion and government politics in Africa," she stated.

With globalisation on the rise, NGOs now abound in Africa but most manifest little concern for transparency and accountability, say some analysts. Some civil societies behave more like commercial enterprises than humanitarian organizations.

"Because of the growing roles played by NGOs in society and the confidence they inspire, NGOs need to have a code of conduct in place," Mathurin Nna, a professor of political science at the University of Ngaoundere in northern Cameroon, said.

"People who are in daily contact with NGOs as defenders of democracy, human rights and sustainable development, all pillars of good governance, logically look toward them for hope," Nna added. "For this reason, they need to be transparent in every respect toward the people they serve and for their own self-interest as well."

Some NGOs have taken major steps to improve the way they are governed. But other concrete measures are required to improve their internal management, for which they are so often criticised.

For example, NGOs are often involved in scandals and accused of lacking transparency. They are also accused of excelling in criticising others while failing to keep their own houses in order. "Are NGOs as transparent as they claim to be?" asked Nicole Elouga, a Yaounde-based attorney. "Many are often cited for corrupt practices."

She was referring to a vehicle-import scandal where an international NGO was caught bribing Cameroonian customs officers in 2005.

"In Cameroon, for example, several hundred NGOs operate in various sectors," said Paul Zemdjo, the coordinator of the NGO, Equal Opportunity for All, based in Yaounde. "But seven years ago only a dozen of the NGOs and some church projects agreed to comply with a code of conduct to promote transparency within and around the groups."

In March 1999, representatives of NGOs and churches met to discuss anti-corruption measures. At the close of the meeting, a code of conduct was adopted to fight corruption within the organisations involved.

"At that time (1999)", Zemdjo said, "corruption had become a cancer within the heart of Cameroonian society. It was a blight on every level of society, including the NGOs themselves."

The code required the NGOs to adapt structures and procedural rules such as rejection of corruption, the right to denounce and resist corruption, promoting transparency in financial management and adherence to term limits. About 23 NGOs honour the code now, Zemdjo said.

"We decided to fight corruption and promote transparency because people place a lot of hope in us (NGOs) for the role we play in society," said Martine Mbateck, a member of the Regional Centre for Support and Development of Women's Initiatives, an NGO based in Mbalmayo, south of Yaounde.

"To show we were serious, we promised to promote transparency in financial management. We introduced a double-signature system, made our accounts public and adopted procedural codes and external and independent account audits," Mbateck said.

But discussions of governance issues are still a taboo in Cameroon as well as in many other African countries. Despite these limitations, Zemdjo said, "The increased influence of civil organisations brought on by the wave of democratisation and pluralism replacing military regimes and single party systems has now allowed these issues to be debated more freely." In the globalisation context, transparency remains a concern of civil society to set up regional strategies promoting good governance.

— **Sylvestre Tetchiada**

## ISLAMIC CIVIL SOCIETY OCCUPIES A DIFFERENT WORLD

*GLASGOW – A mostly invisible dividing line through non-governmental organisations opened up at the world assembly of civil society organisations between the secular and the Islamic non-governmental organisations. No agreement could be reached on 'terrorism' either.*

"The Islamic groups are also civil society, though the groups are not registered," Sarra Osman Eisa from the Water and Development Foundation, an NGO in Sudan said. "And they are influential groups, they can get a lot of other groups to follow them."

Eisa herself works with one of the registered groups engaged in development work. There are more than 1,700 groups functioning in Sudan, she said. But while there is no definite number for Islamic NGOs, there are many around, she said.

"We keep hearing of new ideas, and then we hear that a group is established," Eisa said. "Islam is not just a religion, it encompasses so many systems of belief like how a country should be run, for example. And many of them work in the field of religious education for the young."

But these were not the kind of civil society groups around at the Civicus world assembly of NGOs. Some delegates at the assembly believe they should have been.

"Islamic organisations are excluded by the secular NGOs, they are seen as doing something not quite right, even if that does not amount to terrorism," Naved Chowdhury from Bangladesh said. "These religious groups are not considered worthy enough, and they are under-represented in all the big debates. No one tries to understand their ideology."

The perceived under-representation became an issue at a debate on civil society's response to terrorism at the start of the world assembly. There were only seven representatives from Muslim NGOs invited to the world assembly called by Civicus and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), Amani Kandill, Director of the Arab Network for NGOs in Cairo said at the meeting.

This opens up a huge gap between the secular civil society organisations and Muslims, she said. "Ninety percent of Muslims cannot relate to secular donor-funded civil society groups," she said. There is a need for greater recognition of "faith-based civil society organisations" engaged actively in promotion of health and education, Kandill said. The Civicus assembly has not reached out to such groups, she said. "No one is representing the Gulf countries here."

One Lebanese member complained that no translation facilities into Arabic had been organised at the Civicus assembly. This, she said, was another indication of the low priority at the gathering for Muslim and Arab voices.

The work done by religious groups is acknowledged to be considerable, but is rarely quantified. "A lot of schools in Bangladesh, the madrassas, run by religious groups reach out to millions," Chowdhury said. "A few of them have been found to have had links with terrorist groups. But the development work they are doing cannot be ignored, they need to be brought into the mainstream of the development discourse."

These groups are also civil society, Chowdhury said. "Just because they are religious does not mean that they are not a part of civil society." The civil society agenda has been taken over by "western educated, urban and secular" groups, he said.

"How many Muslim civil society members have been invited from Bangladesh?" Chowdhury asked. "None. So they are missing a huge constituency. They just call the same sort and listen to one another. This is dominated by a western oriented ideological bias," he added.

The Glasgow conference was characterised by deep divisions also over terrorism. They had to – there is no one view on terrorism, just as there is no one thing called civil society.

"Differences are opening up also over the emphasis civil society organisations place on terrorism on the one hand and counter-terrorism on the other," Yuri Dzhibladze, president of the Russia-based Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights said.

"Some of us who say that counter-terrorism measures are as dangerous as terrorism are told that we are not interested in fighting terrorism at all," he said. The stress that many civil society groups are placing on the dangers of counter-terrorism steps is also losing them public support.

The issue of "arriving at a judicious and socially acceptable balance between security and freedom is an extremely challenged and nuanced debate," Geoff Prewitt, civil society advisor to the United Nations Development Programme told a meeting on the subject.

"Simple solutions are hardly forthcoming as responses are highly contextual and – more often than not – driven by emotion, history, culture, value systems and other complex human interactions." Any country or geographical territory harbouring a 'suspected terrorist' is subject to assault by the aggrieved," he said, adding that he was offering his personal views, not those of the UN. – **Sanjay Suri**



## FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL

*GLASGOW - One of the most powerful memories of 2005 characterised by the Global Call for Action Against Poverty was the sound of fingers clicking. It was the stark illustration of a shocking fact that millions of people across the world are living a life in poverty, perpetuated not by nature but by politics.*

Warmed by the words of Nelson Mandela -- “sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great. You can be that great generation” -- people campaigned in more than 80 countries to “make poverty history”. But how much was really achieved by the upsurge of civil society protesting against this injustice? And did world leaders sit-up and listen?

“There were some victories on debt cancellation and aid but tragically rich countries betrayed the world’s poor by allowing the colossal inequities in world trade to persist,” Charles Abugre, Head of Global Advocacy for Christian Aid in Ghana, told assembled delegates at a conference entitled Global Call to Action against Poverty: Lessons of 2005. But it was suggested that though the mass action captured people’s hearts across every corner of the globe, it achieved little in terms of the eradication of global poverty.

There were more practical measures which could be implemented to reclaim national resources and re-distribute them to local economies. And now is the time to suspend current programmes, which were proven not to work, and look for new solutions.

“We have a moral imperative to positively deal with debt across Africa,” said Abugre, “and the starting point is a moratorium. We must deal with debt in a way that suits us, not governments, to provide lasting solutions. We must take forward our collective thinking to help society and relieve the poor of their debt. A moratorium is a starting point, a mechanism of change that has the power to influence. It has to be remembered that the world is bigger than the G8 and it’s not all about what they can do for us.”

Africa faces unique challenges in this respect. Where a moratorium was before seen as a sign of failure, it is now being embraced as a positive step forward towards eradicating the continent’s problems. Failure of anti-poverty programmes is now being acknowledged, enabling new solutions to be put forward.

But the continent is not alone in its struggle. Oscar Lanza, a Bolivian activist representing Health Action International, believes that lessons learned from last year’s protests mostly pointed to the fact that economic policies on their own would achieve little.

“Where people suffer hunger, it’s not just about lack of food and money; it’s about the structures put in place which either create or prevent poverty,” he said. “How can we push for a stronger economy when people are living in extreme

poverty and are at the mercy of others? First we must activate the people, and then work on the economy. And we must activate those who are directly affected, for example the poor. Economics should not govern people. People should govern economics.”

The conference heard that it was dangerous however to adopt a one-solution-fits-all approach to debt. Solutions must come from the grass roots, said Elizabeth Eilor of the African Women’s Economic Policy Network (AWEPON), and if governments failed to recognise this, it will prove “disastrous”. “It is true that eradicating debt across the world does not eradicate poverty,” said Eilor. “It is also true that money is not the only solution. What we do need is to encourage fuller participation in the grass-roots movement which takes local issues to the international arena through civil society networks. At present many of the structures are incapable of taking this forward but that is what we need to focus on in the future.”

Civil society has a massive role to play in this respect. Leading grass-roots activism towards the bigger, national and international policy agendas would enable fuller participation from the dispossessed, the poor and organisations representing them. A further challenge is to improve the effectiveness of civil society’s engagement in national and global decision-making. Where countries and multilateral organizations have signed up to international commitments, there is a need to ensure they abide these.

Dr Brian Pratt, Executive Director of the International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC), said that a balance now had to be found in the relationship between government and civil society if a realistic and sustainable solution to poverty is to be found. “We know that economic growth will not lead to re-distribution of wealth. That only comes through pressure from civil society,” he said. “The suggestion that economic growth trickles from the top down is patently not the case. The problem is not a simplistic case of resource transfer but it is about inequality. That has to be tackled first.” Pratt used the example of Peru where he said very little had changed despite concerted efforts to alleviate the poverty in the country. GDP had risen but a large percentage of people still lived on less than a dollar a day. “That suggests that the poor are still trapped in poverty despite positive economic growth. As a result, agencies like the Department for International Development (DFID), pull out, believing the work is over. But it’s only just beginning.”

- **Robert Armour**

## BRAZIL'S INNOVATIVE SMALL FARMERS SET TO REDEFINE DEVELOPMENT

*RÍO DE JANEIRO - While their protest marches and occupations of government and business offices recall the struggles of landless campesinos, this group of Brazilian farmers are drawing attention to a distinct facet of agrarian reform. These workers have mobilised to hold onto the land they own and build a more just and environmentally sound society.*

The Small Farmers Movement (MPA) has incorporated many new organisational ways of fighting economic and social injustice. The activists stepped up their protests this year, "with very positive results," Aurio Scherer, an MPA coordinator, based in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul said.

Following the protests held May 23 and 24, the government granted payment deferrals for investment loans and reduced debts taken on to pay for production expenses. Weather problems and falling prices have triggered several bankruptcies, and Minister of Agrarian Development Guilherme Cassel has acknowledged that there is a farm price crisis.

Another "major step forward" was, according to Scherer, the government's promise to make the temporary social security provisions for rural communities a permanent law, consolidating one of Brazil's main income-redistribution policies, by allowing campesinos to retire at the age of 60 for men and 55 for women and draw a pension equivalent to the minimum wage of 155 dollars a month.

These are some of the concrete results achieved by the relatively new organisation, which in just a few years has attracted national support in an agrarian sector dominated by export-oriented agribusiness and plagued by growing social and economic imbalances.

But even these successes reveal only part of the organisation's scope. In specific terms, the MPA addresses the day-to-day struggle to foster price, trade and credit policies favourable to small farmers, who are constantly threatened by climatic and market fluctuations. However, since its inception in 1996, the organisation has also incorporated broader, socially conscious ideals, such as salvaging and validating the campesino way of life through grassroots agrarian development projects.

With a hands-on, practical approach, the MPA organises farmers, providing support in their daily struggles to improve their quality of life and overcome the threat posed by agribusiness — that is, the expansion of monoculture export crops.

"We are defending an alternate production and technological model, based on campesino methods and agroecology," Altacir Bunde, a national MPA leader, he explained.

- Mario Osava

### Power is Finding News Paths (Continued From Page 1)

The cynics may still be the dominant force, but that domination is at least now significantly weakened. "The roles of civil society and citizens organisations are becoming better understood around the world," said Martin Sime, chief executive of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) which organised the assembly jointly with Civicus.

"We are an expression of the commitment that people make to their communities and to tackling the challenges facing our societies across the world," he said. "We give expression to the hopes and aspirations of many as well as supporting practical interventions which have a direct effect on people's lives. In an ideal world civil society would be complimentary to the democratic process, not a competitor to it, but in the current world we are surely right to challenge the inequality, waste and unsustainability of the current order."

At the heart of the growth of civil society is the belief that democracy must express itself between one act of voting and the next.

"When civil society organisations, such as environment organisations, promote campaigns to preserve forests and rivers and obtain the support of whole communities in the affected areas, they are actually promoting another form of democracy or politics," said Lubetkin. "This gives rise to a different culture and increases awareness on citizens' rights, which naturally has a strong influence on the actions by political parties."

Participative democracy is a more effective way of marshalling a genuine consensus and drawing on the actual experience of citizens when developing policy and legislation, said Sime. "It seems obvious that simply voting every few years and leaving the rest to politicians will bring democracy into disrepute but this argument has still to be won in many parts of the world, north and south alike."

Naidoo believes that understanding democracy as a vote even damages democracy. - Sanjay Suri

### DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung or of IPS Europe.