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# The Role of Civil Society in Policy Formulation and Service Provision

*Report of the UNRISD Geneva 2000 Seminar  
New York, 31 March 2000*

As part of its work in preparation for Geneva 2000, the Special Session of the General Assembly on the Implementation of the Outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and Further Initiatives, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) organized a seminar on the role of civil society in policy formulation and service provision. Specialists from UNRISD's international research network on civil society and social movements met to discuss some of the most important trends affecting governance at local, national and international levels. Also attending were members of delegations to the Second Preparatory Committee for the Special Session, mission personnel, representatives from United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)-accredited non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and New York-area researchers and academics. The seminar was made possible by financial and logistical support from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA).

The report of the seminar follows. Other UNRISD work relevant to this theme is listed on page 11 herein and includes an overview report titled *Civil Society Organizations and Social Integration* distributed as United Nations document A/AC.253/16/Add.6. In addition, a number of UNRISD Occasional, Discussion and Programme Papers have been published on this topic; these are available from the Institute or from the UNRISD Web site at <http://www.unrisd.org>

## Opening Session

**John Langmore**, Director of UN-DESA's Division for Social Policy and Development, opened the seminar with an overview of preparatory activities for Geneva 2000, which he referred to as the "Social Justice Special Session". This Special Session of the General Assembly will assess the progress made in implementing the agreements reached at the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) in Copenhagen in 1995. Langmore noted that the Special Session will be both a technical and a political meeting. He asked the seminar participants to address the technical issues surrounding the increasing participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) in service delivery and policy formulation, because it is essential to learn what

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works—and what does not—in a technical sense. But he also urged the participants to acknowledge the political context in which technical decisions are made, arguing that it is only when both the technical and political dimensions of development strategies and policies are

recognized that real advancement can be made in development efforts.

**Thandika Mkandawire**, Director of UNRISD, noted that in some ways Geneva 2000 has a more difficult task to perform than did the WSSD, which identified areas of consensus around social development goals and strategies. Geneva 2000 will be assessing the implementation of these goals and strategies in a much more concrete sense, and it is therefore likely to be a more political and contentious meeting.

Mkandawire noted that there have been many missed opportunities to advance the Copenhagen goals, but there have also been major gains, especially in the realm of ideas. The WSSD took place during an era of neoliberal triumphalism, during which the “invisible hand” of the

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***Progress toward the Copenhagen goals must come from conscious and specific efforts by governments and public-spirited individuals to contribute to well-being and social integration.***

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market was thought by many to be the best means through which social progress could be made. The dominant discourse has since shifted, and it now more readily acknowledges the importance of “visible hands”—deliberate human agency—in social change. Mkandawire argued that progress toward the Copenhagen goals must come from conscious and specific efforts by governments and public-spirited individuals to contribute to well-being and social integration.

## **Session 1: CSOs in Social Service Provision**

**Peter Oakley**, of the International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC), assessed the state of knowledge about the involvement of CSOs in social service provision. This involvement has increased dramatically in recent years, the result of public sector reform and government restructuring as well as increasing donor support for CSOs. CSOs are often seen as a way of “including” the poor more significantly in development efforts, and there is a widespread assumption that they are more concerned with reform and efficiency than are governments. In some countries, CSOs are major players in economic and social

development—the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, for instance, has an annual budget of \$200 million. But there is a broad range of patterns of CSO involvement in social service provision around the world, and there are no reliable statistics on the resources

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***The question of how to “scale up” successful CSO activities needs to be addressed.***

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controlled by CSOs globally. It is therefore difficult to make generalizations about CSOs and service provision. Nonetheless, it is useful to address a number of questions in any assessment of CSO activity.

First, how successful are CSOs at *reaching the poorest*? In the projects examined, CSOs tend to be able to deliver services more effectively to the poorest than do governments. However, the coverage of CSOs is limited—they tend to reach only small pockets of the population. The question of how to “scale up” successful CSO activities therefore needs to be addressed.

Second, what is the *quality of the services* that CSOs provide? Do increased resources for CSOs lead to an increase in the quality of provision? There is no clear evidence of global trends on this question, and there are many conflicting examples. In many instances the quality of services that CSOs provide is high—this tends to be especially true for specialized services, such as those providing support for the blind or for people with leprosy. In other cases, quality is not superior to services provided by the state.

Third, how *efficient and cost effective* are CSOs in service delivery? There is a widespread perception that CSOs are generally more efficient and cost effective than governments. However, this is a difficult area to measure. Very little empirical data are available on this question, and CSOs themselves tend not to carefully monitor or evaluate their activities. There is a need for more well-designed empirical research to address this question.

Fourth, how *sustainable* are CSO activities? CSOs are generally dependent on grants and contracts to finance their activities, which are seldom inherently sustainable. Some donors have been requiring that CSO projects become more self-sustaining; however, in the context of service provision, this would generally require CSOs to impose user fees—a strategy generally incompatible with the goal of reaching the poorest.

Fifth, what *linkage* exists between CSO service delivery activities and those of the state? One of the inherent weaknesses of CSOs is that they are seldom able to provide an overall framework in which to operate at both national and regional levels. Because of the diversity of NGOs, and of their goals, in most countries, a framework to ensure that all people have adequate access to services can be provided only by the state. The state must therefore take primary responsibility for services, but useful partnerships can be established between governments and CSOs, in which the state provides a coherent policy framework, and often funding, and CSOs bring innovation and strong community links.

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Sixth, what are the impacts of the trend toward awarding *contracts* to CSOs for the delivery of specified services? In the past, most CSOs applied for funding for projects they formulated themselves; increasingly, CSOs are being contracted to provide services that donors request. This has had an enormous impact on the nature of the CSO sector. It has reduced opportunities for CSO input into the policy formulation process, and stimulated the creation of CSOs that resemble private sector subcontractors, more than participatory organizations.

Seventh, what is the impact of *government legislation* on CSOs? The increased reliance on CSOs for service provision often has a beneficial spillover effect on legislation regulating the CSO sector as a whole. Governments have become more tolerant of CSOs in the last few years; however, it is still not clear whether the loosening of restrictions on CSOs will open greater political space for them.

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***The challenge to CSOs involved in social service provision is to improve performance and accountability, both to their beneficiaries and to government.***

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Finally, will CSOs be able to take advantage of their increasing role in service delivery to exert positive *political influence* at the local level? It is important to remember that political space exists not only at the policy formulation stage, but also at the policy implementation stage, when resource allocation decisions are made.

The challenge to CSOs involved in social service provision is to improve their performance and accountability, both to their beneficiaries and to government. They should also work to ensure that they do not lose sight of their original purpose. In the process of providing services to meet people's basic needs, CSOs should concentrate on developing a *rights-based approach* that seeks to strengthen people's ability to demand their rights to basic human services from the state.

**Jocelyn Dow**, of the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) and The Red Thread Women's Collective in Guyana, discussed issues of class, race and gender that can arise in the transfer of responsibility for social service provision from the state to CSOs. In many cases, CSOs in which women are generally overrepresented are seen simply as a low-cost mechanism to deliver social services. As the state progressively divests itself of social sector responsibility, the quality and coverage of public sector social services have fallen, and it is systematically women who are expected to compensate, often on a volunteer basis. Although women's organizations and other CSOs undoubtedly fulfil an important function in mitigating the adverse effects of the state's retreat from social service provision, certain questions should be raised:

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***In many countries, social stratification has an ethnic or racial dimension, with some groups having access to private services, and others served only by CSOs.***

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Is this a trend that should continue? Is increased involvement of such CSOs in service provision a goal to be pursued in its own right? What are the long-term implications of such a strategy?

As social services become increasingly commodified in the name of improved efficiency, the upper classes have access to higher quality private health care and education, while the poorest are being served by low-cost, low-wage organizations. In many countries, such social stratification has an ethnic or racial dimension, with some groups having access to private services, and others served only by CSOs.

At the same time, CSOs are constrained by donors' priorities. For example, funds are more likely to be available for family planning services than for education or for economic empowerment.

Even though CSOs are increasingly called on to fill the gaps left by the state, there is still resistance to the idea that they should be consulted on matters of policy. Governments welcome the funds that CSOs bring in, and they value their contributions to service delivery,

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but governments also argue that CSOs are not representative and that therefore they are not entitled to have input into policy decisions. Directives from donors to bring CSOs to the policy table have had little real impact on government behaviour. Because CSOs are being kept at service delivery tasks, advocates are being kept out of government; there is a voice that cannot transform.

### Session 1 Discussion

Discussion brought up a number of points. First, the question of how CSOs are to raise issues of rights was broached by several speakers. This was seen as a hurdle to be overcome, as CSOs emerging to take advantage of the funding available for service delivery do not have their origins in struggles for local-level rights, as many established CSOs do. Although some types of CSOs, notably women's organizations, tend to be centred around human rights issues, others have very little experience with this kind of advocacy work. It was argued that generating rights-based demands should be an explicit goal of service delivery CSOs.

Second, a discussion of possible trade-offs between efficiency and quality took place. It was argued that the goal of high-quality service should not be lost sight of in the search for efficiency, and that both quality and efficiency of CSO services should be evaluated more thoroughly through increased monitoring and outcome studies.

Third, doubts were raised about the rationale of a strategy of increased reliance on CSOs for service provision. It was argued that the ability of the state to provide services should not be dismissed too quickly. The state should be challenged to come up with the resources necessary for such services by making them a priority. The example of Cuba was raised to show that it is possible for the state to provide high-quality and

comprehensive social services to the entire population, even in a poor country.

## Session 2: Organized Labour and Social Development

**Dan Gallin**, of the Global Labour Institute, advanced several propositions about organized labour, NGOs, and social development. Organized labour, primarily in the form of trade unions, has been a driving force for development over the last 150 years. The overarching goal of organized labour is a better society for everyone. Social development does not happen by itself, it is the result of a struggle, and that struggle has been led largely by labour unions and political parties. The repression of organized labour is a serious obstacle to development, and such repression has often been severe, especially in industrialized countries.

In the last few decades, the labour agenda has narrowed; it has been reduced to its core interests, and to a largely corporate agenda. This has happened for several reasons. The labour movement suffered enormous losses due to repression in the first half of the twentieth century, while the postwar European society relied on the state as the primary vehicle of an egalitarian agenda. More recently, with the rise of multinational corporations and increasingly mobile capital, organized labour was put at a growing disadvantage and left without the protective umbrella of the state.

In the 1980s and 1990s, NGOs began to fill the gap left by organized labour. The task now is for the labour movement to return to addressing broader social issues and to forge a stronger alliance with NGOs. In some areas where the two groups have converging agendas, such as human rights, such alliances are already occurring.

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For many years, labour unions were slow to advance a women's agenda, but this is now changing. The majority of workers around the world today are in the informal sector, and the majority of informal sector workers are

women. It is essential for organized labour to address the needs of the informal sector, and of women in particular.

At present, co-operation between trade unions and NGOs is growing. Trade unions cannot successfully advance their agenda without NGOs, while NGOs need unions as well. It is essential to foster this co-operation; social development is a struggle, not an academic exercise, in which all sectors must join.

**Shirin Akhter**, of Karmojibi Nari (Working Women's Organization) in Bangladesh, spoke on challenges to the labour movement in promoting social development in her country. Although the workers of Bangladesh are not highly organized, organized labour played an important role in the democratization movement of the early 1990s. However, organized labour faces many obstacles to advancing social development in Bangladesh. Labour agreements reached with government are repeatedly ignored. Laws regulating labour activity

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hinder effective organization. Religious fundamentalists, allied with the military, threaten newly established democratic institutions. The trade union movement is factionalized, with some unions linked to political parties, and some putting political or monetary advancement over the interests of workers. Only about 5 per cent of workers in Bangladesh are organized, and their bargaining power is being reduced further by the increased informalization of the workforce—87 per cent of workers are engaged in the informal sector. Informal sector workers have no state-sanctioned right to organize, and labour unions have little interest in organizing them.

Almost 40 per cent of Bangladeshi women are in the labour force. The majority of women work in the informal sector, although export processing zones have created more formal sector jobs for women in recent years, primarily in garment factories. The struggles of these women workers, although limited in scope, have influenced the labour movement in Bangladesh, which has recently begun to add women's issues—such as equal pay, maternity benefits and childcare—to its

agenda. Unions have also been influenced by the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) and subsequent women's policy initiatives of the government of Bangladesh.

Relations between NGOs and unions have not always been harmonious in Bangladesh. NGOs do not support unionization among their own employees, and have focused little attention on workers' rights. A new generation of NGOs is needed in Bangladesh—one that is not afraid of organizing mass movements to demand basic rights.

Donors should fund a broader range of CSOs than they do, and should take contributions to democratization into account when making funding decisions. NGOs and unions must increase efforts to collaborate, and to gain access to the decision-making process of the state.

## Session 2 Discussion

Discussion touched on several themes. First, the impact of the women's movement on trade unions was discussed. The increasing inclusion of women and the recognition of women's issues has been a positive development, and although women are still underrepresented among union leaders, the situation is improving.

Several interventions were made on the topic of organizing the informal sector. This sector was recognized rather late by trade unions, and it is difficult and expensive to organize. However, wherever workers exist, they do spontaneously organize, and informal sector workers are organizing themselves. The informal sector is the majority of the global labour force, and if it does not become organized, there is little chance of changing the balance of forces in society, which currently provide little support for the interests of workers.

Relations between NGOs and unions were also discussed further; they can be problematic for several reasons. In some countries, unions are part of an organizational culture that makes them uninterested in organizing certain groups of workers, while there may be NGOs who take up their causes. Increasingly, international networks of trade unions are providing mechanisms for building bridges in such situations. International trade union federations may support the organizing efforts of NGOs, while international NGOs also provide support for local trade unions and workers' associations.

The issue of core labour standards was also raised during the discussion. It was argued that basic workers' rights—collective bargaining, shop-floor representation, freedom from forced labour—do have a universal application. Similarly, basic health and safety standards should apply to all workers: the well-being of all humans should not be made a variable, subject to the requirements of trade. Workers themselves support such standards: it was argued that, in countries opposing core standards, workers have not been asked their opinions.

Finally, a debate took place regarding the contribution of organized labour to social development. It was questioned whether organized labour was promoting social development for all, or whether it remained conservative and exclusionary. Gallin replied that unions are not service providers, they are political organizations. The culture of unions is a culture of solidarity rather than one of charity. Although unions do not offer direct assistance to all sectors of the population, their agenda is conducive to social development because it addresses power relations. It is true that unions were slow to recognize the importance of organizing the informal sector, but this has now become a priority of many national unions and of international federations.

### Session 3: Influencing Policy at Local and National Levels

**Julian Disney**, of the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), discussed four key elements that crucially affect the role of CSOs in relation to the making and implementing of policy at national and local levels.

First is the question of their very *existence*: in many countries, people face severe constraints in seeking to establish and maintain a CSO. There may be legal constraints to registering CSOs, as well as political constraints, which may include violence and intimidation. Financial constraints often exist because members are typically unable to make substantial financial contributions to their organizations. The preference of many donors to fund reparatory work rather than advocacy that addresses underlying causes of social problems, together with their tendency to issue short-term funding, exacerbates these financial constraints.

*Knowledge* is the second element affecting CSOs' ability to influence policy. Practical knowledge—that of what is happening on the ground—is a strong point of CSOs. However, many people with this “front line” experience are working in conservative organizations that do not draw on their expertise to gain a nuanced understanding

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***Four key elements that crucially affect CSOs' making and implementing policy at national and local levels are existence, knowledge, access and influence.***

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of poor people's situation and needs. Instead, two opposite perceptions of poor people prevail: some CSOs have a patronizing attitude, assuming that the poor are helpless, while others glorify poor people, asserting that they alone have all the knowledge and expertise necessary to solve all their problems. It is important to take a more realistic view of what poor people can contribute to the development process. They can identify most of the problems they face and interventions that do not work. But they should not be expected to devise all solutions to all their problems without assistance from other experts in appropriate cases. The same is true, of course, of everyone in the community.

CSOs also need technical expertise and experience in policy-making processes in order to influence policy. They need to be familiar with the key structures, procedures and personalities involved in the development and implementation of policy. This means that CSOs need to be able to attract and keep personnel long enough to build a working knowledge of policy procedures—which is often difficult, given the low status and low pay in the CSO sector. Effective CSO policy actors combine passion for their cause with an ability to keep lines of communication open to those with dissenting views; they combine ambition for the long term with pragmatism regarding what can realistically be achieved in the short term; and they combine patience with endurance, as the policy formulation process can often be a long and tedious one.

*Access*—both to government and the public—is the third element affecting CSOs' ability to influence policy. CSOs are often granted only token consultations with government, sometimes with sympathetic but non-influential government personnel. CSOs need to gain and maintain access to the people most influential in policy formulation; often this will mean economic

ministers. CSOs also need access to the public through the media. They need to develop their communication strategies to become better able to persuade people of the validity of their goals and strategies. Too often, CSOs are “preaching to the converted”: focusing their communication efforts on those who are already in agreement with them.

Finally, CSOs need *influence*, which may be achieved through intellectual persuasion, political strength or financial power. CSOs’ effectiveness at intellectual persuasion has at times been hampered by their tendency to talk more about problems than solutions, while policy makers are interested in constructive and specific recommendations. CSOs need to avoid generalization and rhetoric, to establish their priorities, and to communicate these clearly and reasonably. Political strength depends heavily on the existence of accountability and integrity in governance; corruption is a particular problem for CSOs. Financial power depends on achieving mass support to build financial resources, or to mobilize pressure on the financial position of other actors. The potential ability of CSOs to exert such financial pressure is often underestimated, and it is a tactic that is not being used as often as it might be.

### Session 3 Discussion

Following Disney’s presentation and short interventions by Jocelyn Dow on Guyana, Shirin Akhter on Bangladesh and Charles Reilly on Guatemala, discussion returned to the question of how the poor are to be involved in development efforts: one speaker stated that policy changes must originate from below; to insist on the intervention of experts borders on questioning democracy. Disney suggested that either/or distinctions regarding “above” and “below” are misguided: both the poor and experts are needed. In the short term, it is essential that poor people’s immediate needs are addressed, but in the longer term the reasons why people are poor must be investigated. Poor people do not have all the answers, and should not be expected to have them, any more than other people have all the answers to their own problems.

In relation to the question of the factors that contribute to the ability of CSOs to influence policy, the need for dynamic and competent leadership was noted. It was also argued that efforts should be made to enhance the ability of the rank and file to contribute to policy dialogue, as most CSOs depend on voluntary activities

of citizens to accomplish their goals. It is therefore important for governments interested in enhancing social integration to consider how their policies affect the capacity of citizens to participate in such activities.

The question of the accountability of CSOs was raised: if CSOs take a role in policy formulation, to whom are they accountable? It was suggested that there was a need to distinguish between the two ends of the CSO spectrum: some claim a role in policy making because

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they are representative of certain groups, and are accountable to those groups for their actions. Others are not representative of any particular groups, rather they base their claim to a place at the policy table on their expertise and interest. This is acceptable, as long as the latter CSOs do not claim to be representative. Problems do arise, however, when well-intentioned individuals, usually from the North, pluck Southern groups or individuals out of their social contexts and present them as being representative of local civil society, which is often not the case.

### Session 4: Reform of International Institutions

**John Foster**, author and NGO member of the Canadian Delegation to the General Assembly Special Session, examined the context in which CSOs seek influence in global decision making. An enabling environment for effective social development requires modification of dominant global economic policies. Global conferences have provided an opportunity for CSOs to build consensus around a common agenda, but CSOs have, for the most part, been marginalized from key decisions over trade, investment, finance and global economic governance.

While the Special Session preparation continues, negotiations are moving forward in the World Trade Organization’s General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). They touch on virtually every sector of service delivery, including health, education, water, prisons, garbage and public parks. “Trade creep” has led to increasing privatization and commodification of social services ranging from health care and

education to libraries and museums. We face a global situation in which large private deliverers of services dictate their terms, capture the most profitable sectors (“cherry picking”), and leave parts of the population, often the poorer groups, to be serviced by government or CSOs.

It is easy to say that governments may set the framework for social services and social development. However, through the GATS negotiations, it is governments influenced by private service deliverers who set up a framework that serves those corporations rather than the general public and the poor. A current focus of this issue is public medical care in Canada, where the overall public system is threatened by privatization. Once begun, under the terms of NAFTA, private US insurance and health firms would be permitted to enter the market, a process that cannot legally be reversed under the treaty’s terms. There is a profound and urgent need for CSOs to regroup around defence of public non-profit services, of the overall responsibility of governments and universal access.

On the global level, CSOs must actively defend basic rights, and access to public space and services. The series of global conferences in the 1990s led to a remarkable increase in the visibility and level of co-ordination of CSOs. Commitments made at these conferences show the unmistakable influence of CSOs. This has continued to grow in many areas, with the impact of the disruption of the Seattle trade talks evident in the subsequent negotiations on the biodiversity protocol in Montreal.

Yet in some areas, notably economic policy, CSOs have been less successful in making inroads into policy formulation. CSOs are most likely to have influence when the issues under contention are highly visible but of low political and economic cost. In general, CSOs are more able to influence agendas and monitor outcomes than to influence policy decisions.

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The challenge now is to develop a framework in which global civil society becomes able to hold multilateral economic institutions accountable. Such a framework

might include new procedures for accessibility and accountability, a strengthened and more comprehensive United Nations, a global Economic Security Council within the United Nations, and a global civil society assembly bringing together a variety of sectors, issues and actors.

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**Charles Reilly** is currently Director of the US Peace Corps in Guatemala and was one of the architects of the Inter-American Development Bank’s (IDB) strategy of opening up to CSOs. He discussed the recent reforms undertaken at the IDB in this regard. The IDB, as a multilateral bank, is not inherently receptive to incorporating organized citizens. However, it has encouraged strengthening of the CSO sector, its involvement in social programmes, and its participation in policy dialogue. Particularly since 1994, and in recognition of the “social debt” resulting from structural adjustment, the IDB sought to increase its contribution to social programmes. It set a target of channeling 40 to 50 per cent of its loans to the social sector. This target meant that the Bank needed new partners; it could not continue to work only through the state.

Although many CSOs hoped that the IDB would set up a grant programme as part of its CSO initiative, the Bank judged that the CSOs’ partnership programme would have greater impact and continuity if CSOs instead participated in the mainstream loans to governments. The Bank has tended to welcome CSOs that concentrate on service provision or job creation more than those focusing on research, human rights or policy advocacy.

The CSO programme is not a large part of the IDB’s portfolio; it is not revolutionizing, but it is useful. The task now is to build a consensus for the notion that CSOs can make contributions to social sector development with Bank support, and to convince people in CSOs that they need to develop the skills and expertise to deal with financial institutions. This will require that CSOs know and have access to the people in their governments who influence these institutions—and the IDB in particular—that they know the personnel who negotiate operations in their country, and that they become familiar with the



institutions' project cycle, and learn the best strategic and tactical moments for timely intervention.

CSOs must also:

- improve their negotiating skills with governments;
- better orchestrate strategic alliances with international CSOs;
- demonstrate which specific goods and services they can effectively provide;
- ensure responsiveness to their own clientele;
- sustain a persistent lobbying approach to successive administrations;
- maintain a holistic, integrated approach to development; and
- recognize that they are in a competitive arena.

Citizens and their organizations have an essential role to play in helping international financial institutions and governments better balance and more fairly reallocate responsibilities among the spheres of state, market and civil society.

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#### **Session 4 Discussion**

Discussion began with questions regarding the specifics of Bank lending to CSOs: Through what mechanisms are the loans repaid to the Bank? Are commitments being made to guarantee or subsidize loans in a way that will eventually increase the debt burden? Do loans really make a contribution to social development when they tend to be used for physical infrastructure rather than the recurring costs of health and education programmes? More generally, why have banks begun to emphasize CSOs—do they really see CSOs as a democratizing force, or is this new focus a way of legitimizing their interventions and ensuring the stabilization that their operation needs? In reply, Reilly noted that the IDB tends to concentrate on state reforms, and that this function cannot be duplicated by other bodies or sectors. For instance, some countries are reluctant to impose the direct taxation necessary to fund social services; CSOs will not demand taxation, it is generally up to the Bank to urge such measures. Banks similarly have a

voice in governance issues, including elections. These reforms in turn will benefit the CSO sector and social development more generally.

Discussion also revisited the issue of civil society participation in global governance. What would the mechanisms look like that would allow such participation? The body now existing that is closest to what is necessary to channel civil society input into global issues is ECOSOC. However, ECOSOC would have to be substantially reformed before it could take on such a role. In particular, smaller countries must create regional groupings to gain a larger voice in global bodies. Small countries that seek to maintain an independent voice will remain marginalized.

Finally, discussion returned to the value of global conferences and the terms and concepts elaborated at them. It was agreed that words do have value: the changing discourse, concepts and terms of reference around development issues do eventually have concrete impacts. It was suggested that work toward a future global conference on global governance may be a useful goal for the medium term.

## Agenda and Speakers

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### Friday, 31 March 2000

- 9:00 - 9:15      **Opening Remarks**  
*John Langmore*, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
(UN-DESA), New York  
*Thandika Mkandawire*, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development  
(UNRISD), Switzerland
- 9:15 - 10:30    **Session 1: CSOs in Social Service Provision**  
*Peter Oakley*, International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC),  
United Kingdom  
*Jocelyn Dow*, Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) and  
The Red Thread Women's Collective, Guyana
- 10:30 - 11:00    BREAK
- 11:00 - 12:30   **Session 2: Organized Labour and Social Development**  
*Dan Gallin*, Global Labour Institute, Switzerland  
*Shirin Akhter*, Karmojibi Nari (Working Women's Organization), Bangladesh
- 12:30 - 14:00    LUNCH
- 14:00 - 15:30   **Session 3: Influencing Policy at Local and National Levels**  
*Julian Disney*, International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), Canada  
*Charles Reilly*, on Guatemala  
*Jocelyn Dow*, on Guyana  
*Shirin Akhter*, on Bangladesh
- 15:30 - 16:00    BREAK
- 16:00 - 17:30   **Session 4: Reform of International Institutions**  
*John Foster*, author, social activist and Canadian delegate to the forthcoming  
UN General Assembly Special Session, Canada  
*Charles Reilly*, US Peace Corps, Guatemala
- 17:30 - 18:00   **Further Debate and Wrap-up**

## Related UNRISD Publications

- **Civil Society Organizations and Service Provision**, *Andrew Clayton, Jon Taylor and Peter Oakley*  
PP CSSM 2, UNRISD, Geneva, forthcoming June 2000
- **Trade Unions and NGOs: A Necessary Partnership for Social Development**, *Dan Gallin*  
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