

International Council on Social Welfare
32nd Global Conference on Social Welfare
Theme: Social Inclusion: Facing poverty and social inequality

A series of five workshops on civil society involvement in and contribution to poverty reduction and social inclusion.

The meetings and training were conducted as special workshops during the five conference workshop sessions from Monday 17th to Wednesday 19th July.

The theme for the workshops was poverty reduction which is a key component of the ICSW Mission. The workshops related to the following components of the ICSW Global Programme. Regional Cooperation, North South Partnerships and South – South policy dialogue (Components 5, 6 and 7) of the Global Programme.

The overall theme was civil society involvement in and contribution to poverty reduction and social inclusion. Related to the theme were the structures and processes that civil society needs to influence poverty reduction at both national and regional level.

ICSW regional leaders and other workshop participants were introduced to poverty reduction strategies. Each region of ICSW is expected to develop, with their members, their own responses to poverty reduction. The process involves strengthening civil society organisations in their regions. This project is for the period of the current support from Finland and Sweden which concludes in mid 2008.

Some definitions

“Social development: A process of planned social change designed to improve the welfare of the population as a whole in conjunction with economic development.

Social exclusion: The exclusion of certain groups from an acceptable standard of living or basic level of political participation.

Social policy: Measures that affect people’s well being, whether through the provision of welfare services or by means of policies that impact upon livelihoods more generally.”

Hall and Midgley 2004ⁱ

The World Bank defines social development as “transforming institutions to empower people” Quoted in Kanbur Ibid P.17

Why strengthen civil society?

Strengthening national councils is fundamental to influencing government policy, government budgets and poverty reduction strategies.

Thandika Mkandawire has outlined his perspectives on why we need to strengthen civil society. His thoughts are in a paper “*Disempowering New Democracies and the Persistence of Poverty*” Mkandawire 2006ⁱⁱ

Private capital is strengthened in new democracies undergoing market-oriented reforms. Private capital “wields tremendous veto power over macroeconomic policies”. The consequence is a weakening of the “state’s capacity to regulate the economy and to

mediate class and sectoral conflicts”. (Mkandawire Page 18). The state and business have established new deliberative mechanisms but the same cannot be said of the poor due to “their lack of institutionalised channels that service their needs”.

There is a contradiction in all this. Mkandawire refers to the “dramatic increase in funding for (service provider) NGO’s”. (Page 19). Mkandawire then comes to the conclusion “With their focus on service delivery at the micro level, NGO’s are, as such, unlikely to constitute a major political force in combating poverty”.

The major obstacle to mobilising “democratic institutions for poverty alleviation are the organisational weaknesses of the poor themselves”.

In another section of the paper (Page 22), Mkandawire returns to the problems created by institutional deficits. “For all the talk about participation and consultation in PRSP’s, there are neither institutional arrangements for, nor political understanding of, the role of democratic institutions”. Mkandawire suggests “there has been a systematic attempt to circumvent elected bodies in the consultative process of drawing up PRSPs”. So much has been said about empowering the poor at the micro-level but at the same time the poor have been disempowered at the macro level.

Social development has disappeared from state policies in response to neo liberal policies that favour targeting social provision. Emphasis has moved from benefiting the population as a whole to social safety nets and targeting the poor.

Mkandawire is critical of the adoption by the International Financial Institutions of structural adjustment policies with their focus on targeting in social policy. Mkandawire notes that the World Bank does not take the same attitude to economic policies where it has “an aversion to targeting in many economic activities such as selective industrial policies or credit rationing in the financial sector”. (Page 24).

The 2003 report “Africa’s experience with the PRSP: Content and Process” AFRODAD 2003ⁱⁱⁱ reinforces Mkandawire’s arguments from the view of those on the ground.

In the “Lesson learnt” section the report states, “The positive lessons include the importance of public awareness and capacity building for effective participation. All reports point to shortcomings in the area of capacity building of civil society”. (Page 9). The report is clear that civil society needs to build and strengthen structures for participation. The ways of strengthening civil society include capacity building through economic literacy, research and advocacy.

The report was based on reports of PRSP processes in ten African countries. The report concludes, “All the country reports chronicle serious and far-reaching anomalies in the consultative process”. (Page 25).

In this section “Why strengthen civil society?” I have quoted two authoritative and quite different sources. Both are clear that civil society must have a stronger voice in the poverty reduction process. Mkandawire is particularly clear in his refutation of neo liberal targeting policies. He advocates a return to the concept of social development.

The workshops started with an introduction to poverty reduction. Later workshops looked at what leaders in civil society can do to become active and influential actors in the process. This requires regional and national leadership. It requires resources from donor governments. It requires the commitment of our North members to assist in the process

through North – South partnerships. Finally, it will take time to build, strengthen and increase the credibility of civil society.

ⁱ Hall Anthony and Midgley James. 2004. *Social Policy for Development*. Sage Publications. Quoted in Kanbur Ravi 2005 “What’s social policy got to do with economic growth?” Arusha Conference New Frontiers in Social Policy December 2005 P.4

ⁱⁱ Mkandawire, Thandika 2006 “Disempowering New Democracies and the Persistence of Poverty”
[http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/httpNetITFramePDF?ReadForm&parentunid=660234231C9D6710C125717800248890&parentdoctype=paper&netitpath=80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/660234231C9D6710C125717800248890/\\$file/mkand-pp-dghr.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/httpNetITFramePDF?ReadForm&parentunid=660234231C9D6710C125717800248890&parentdoctype=paper&netitpath=80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/660234231C9D6710C125717800248890/$file/mkand-pp-dghr.pdf)

ⁱⁱⁱ The African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (AFRODAD) 2003 “Africa’s experience with the PRSP: Content and Process”

The Workshops

Workshop One

Introduction to the workshops and introduction to poverty reduction. This included the various approaches to poverty reduction including PRSP, their relationship to MDGs, structural issues in economic development and catering for minority groups eg disability. Key inputs Timo Voipio and Judith Kaulem.

Workshop Two

Involving national umbrella organisations in a national poverty reduction process. Subjects included: Role of civil society in influencing governments. The place of peak umbrella organisations in social policy. Working with and establishing credibility with members; establishing credibility with governments; finding resources to operate; Key input from Gerry Fox.

Workshop Three

Establishing policy priorities and contributing to the government budget process. Understanding the relationship of national budgets to PRSP. Developing advocacy skills. Key inputs from Michael Raper and Mariana Raposo.

Workshop Four

North South Cooperation; The example of the Finnish Committee for ICSW and the Tanzania Council of Social Development (TACOSODE) contribution to the process; resources to regions; contracts with regions; reporting and responsibility to donors; follow-up processes. Key inputs from Mikko Mäntysaari, Leif Rönnerberg, Theofrida Kapinga and Thomas Bruno Nzumbi.

Workshop Five

The last session in this series of five looked at directions suggested in the first four workshops. Regional leaders gained a sense of direction and developed some knowledge

to develop or revise regional plans. Regional plans will have three major components with the intention that the region has a balance of the three areas. The first is the recruitment and strengthening of national councils and national organisations as ICSW members in the region. The second is to initiate and develop collaborative relations between nations in the region and with regional bodies. The third is to contribute to global activities of ICSW.