



*Global Cooperation September 2006*

**In this edition, the ICSW Global Conference and meeting of NGOs with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations**

**ICSW Global Conference Brazil 2006**

In the August edition I promised you a report on the Global Conference in Brazil. The theme was Social Inclusion: Facing Poverty and Social Inequality. The conference as expected had a strong South American flavour in both content and participation. The papers from the conference are being processed and readers will be advised when and how they can be made available.

In this newsletter I will link the content of ICSW workshops with a question that I am often asked: “Can you summarise ICSW activities?”

The basic mission of ICSW is to promote social and economic development, with the aim of reducing poverty, hardship, and vulnerability throughout the world, especially amongst disadvantaged people. They are the words but how do we do it?

ICSW seeks to create a balance between economic and social development. To achieve a balance, ICSW works to strengthen the ability of civil society to link economic and social development. Governments and financial institutions tend to see development as economic development. They see social development as a secondary consequence of economic development. There is an aversion by the economic developers to engineer social development in parallel with economic development.

The process of bringing our influence into debates and policy occurs at different levels. Each level is mutually dependent if we are to create a consistent impact on policy makers. The first level is the local level, the second is the national level, the third is the regional level and the fourth field of influence is global. A gap in any of the four levels reduces the impact on policy and programmes.

The basic building blocks in ICSW’s strategy to influence policy are the national umbrella organisations for social welfare and development. As the major instruments of ICSW’s long term strategy national Councils are the most important part of ICSW membership. Umbrella organisations, as ICSW sees them, are genuinely rooted in their own countries. They are indigenous and autonomous in each country and are not subsidiaries of international NGOs. They have direct links to the poor and disadvantaged sections of society through their membership. Their members include people who are disadvantaged for whatever reason, including: disability, age, chronic illness, migrants and ethnic minorities. The membership embraces sections of society who may be

exploited including children and women. These members form a democratic structure which is the national umbrella organisation. The umbrella organisation is characterised by a high level of voluntary participation. An umbrella organisation to be successful needs to meet a number of criteria. These include:

- A high degree of consensus around a small set of objectives, which arise from and give reality to the Council's purpose and identity.
- A sound understanding of the social and organisational environment in which the Council exists. Its functions and programmes will be responsible to this environment.
- Good linkages and relationship with its member organisations, which are actively involved in and committed to the Council and its programmes.
- A key role in a broader collaborative national network which links across different social sectors and reaches all levels of social organisations.
- An effective and open communication system and efficient information services, which deliver appropriate, succinct, targeted and useful information to members and networks.
- A competent, committed, well-organised and democratic leadership team of elected officers, committee members and staff.
- Flexible, efficient and action focused management structures and processes, which provide the Council with sound planning, decision-making and implementation capacities.
- An adequate and diversified resource base, which provides reliable core-funding under Council control as well as project funding. Resources will be utilised to the maximum through efficient and disciplined procedures and creative imaginative strategies.
- Inbuilt processes for organisational growth and adaptation, which ensure there is an appropriate synthesis of continuity and change in the Council's life cycle.
- A well-balanced set of programmes, which reflect the interest of disadvantaged groups, Council members and the Council itself that advance equally the Council's role of coordination, membership service and innovation; and are appropriate to the capacities and limitations of the Council.

These criteria were included in the paper – *Elements for effective national councils* presented at the ICSW conference workshops <http://www.icsw.org/globalconference.htm>.

ICSW is grateful to those donors who have recognised that building this most basic structure will take time (years) and resources. Unfortunately the building of national umbrella organisations has a history of intermittent effort coupled with inadequate resources. No wonder then that civil society continues to have a small impact on Poverty Reduction Strategies in many countries. And this is not only in the South.

ICSW has adopted a new programme - North South Cooperation. The model for North South Cooperation is being piloted by the ICSW umbrella organisations in Finland and Tanzania. It takes years to gain the strength to have a consistent and strong influence on government policy. The Tanzania Council of Social Development and the Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health have established a long term partnership and through this we expect to see a sustainable and robust umbrella organisation in Tanzania. Other European and African members of ICSW are considering similar arrangements.

Representatives of the Tanzanian Council and the Finnish Federation presented a paper at the conference on their partnership (see: <http://www.icsw.org/globalconference.htm>).

So far I have described the interlinking of the first two levels – local and national. I now move to the regional level. Governments have developed regional groupings which deal primarily with economic matters. ICSW is seeking civil society intervention in regional structures. In some regions there are well established mechanisms. These include Europe, Southern African and South Asia. ICSW would like to see existing NGO mechanisms achieving greater linkages with regional governmental bodies. More recent examples of cooperation with regional bodies include the Black Sea region and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In both these regions there has been enormous progress in building links. A report on the September 2006 Governmental – NGO meeting in Bangkok follows this article. ICSW has produced guides to regional economic bodies. *Engaging with ASEAN* is the most recent (<http://www.icsw.org/whatsnew.htm>) and further guides will be produced for the Economic Community of West African States and the Black Sea region.

The mechanisms I have described exist to foster social development and poverty reduction. Donor agencies and the international financial institutions have over the last decades changed their approach to poverty reduction. Poverty reduction has moved from donor driven projects to structural adjustment programmes and more recently, budget support. An excellent paper presented at the global conference on poverty reduction processes, *Entry points for ICSW to promote Social Justice in national Poverty Reduction Strategy processes*, can be found at <http://www.icsw.org/globalconference.htm>. A strong emphasis in the paper is the requirement for a society to have a balance between economics, society and environment. The paper describes the tension between elements of government and society - economics, security, gender, environment, politics, human and socio cultural.

The paper leads me to the fourth level of ICSW work – global. It is no surprise to learn that the World Bank has 10,000 economists and only a few hundred non economists. And the orthodox, neo-liberal and macro economists dominate the labour economists and those engaged in industrial policy. Timo Voipio contrasted the strength and unanimity of the international financial institutions with the fragmentation and weakness of the UN. In particular he outlined the fragmentation of social policy in the UN. ICSW is seeking resources to be a major actor in the UN agencies, the International Labour Organisation and the World Bank. With new resources we would work to strengthen social policy in these environments.

Finally, the outline of the ICSW workshops and the papers presented appear on the ICSW website: <http://www.icsw.org/globalconference.htm>.

### **ASEAN Governmental-NGO Forum breaks new ground**

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Governmental-NGO Forum held in September in Bangkok aimed to establish a permanent ASEAN Governmental-NGO mechanism on social policy and practice.

This first Forum comprised ASEAN delegates, members of ICSW and other NGOs. The recommendations developed at the Forum will be tabled at the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting for Social Welfare and Development (SOMSWD) in December. If the recommendations are accepted and ratified by the December ASEAN Summit, they will provide the foundation for a formal mechanism between ASEAN and NGOs where social policy, frameworks and implementation programmes can be discussed and developed.

***The agreed recommendations were:***

- Formal inclusion of NGO delegates from Social Welfare National Councils to participate in the SOMSWD meetings.
- Establishment of an ongoing yearly ASEAN Governmental-NGO Forum.
- Establishment of mechanisms for ongoing cooperation between ASEAN, ICSW and National Councils.
- Support for capacity building of National Council social welfare peak bodies in the areas of service delivery, consultation and research, advice to governments and public advocacy.
- Studies on issues including social protection and NGO legal frameworks and pilot projects to strengthen best practice.
- Mechanisms for joint Governmental-NGO monitoring mechanisms.
- Strengthening of regional social work networks.
- Ratification of the forthcoming International Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

The Forum was hosted by the Thai Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. It was funded by Japan and ICSW donors including the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Swedish International Development Agency. The Forum was organised by the Thai Ministry, the ASEAN Secretariat, and ICSW.

***Prior to the Forum,*** NGOs in many member countries met at the national level with a broad cross-section of NGOs with interest in the social welfare field. They identified issues and strategies that would benefit from an ASEAN focus. NGOs met with ministerial focal points on social welfare to discuss and develop joint papers for presentation to the Governmental-NGO Forum. This joint collaboration was key to the success of the Governmental-NGO Forum where there was the opportunity to openly discuss critical issues, share lessons learned, identify good practices and challenges and recommend proposals for future courses of action both at the national and regional levels.

The Forum demonstrated the strong willingness between Governments and NGOs to work together on social welfare concerns and confirmed the distinct and complimentary skills that government and NGOs can bring to these complex issues.

***The challenge now*** is for governments and NGOs to ensure that this encouraging beginning leads to concrete results.

Editor of Global Cooperation: Denys Correll  
Website: [www.icsw.org](http://www.icsw.org) Email [icsw@icsw.org](mailto:icsw@icsw.org)  
International Council on Social Welfare  
C/O NIZW International Centre  
P.O. Box 19152 3501 DD Utrecht  
The Netherlands