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# Cross Sectoral Collaboration to Promote Sustainable Change

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## **Outline**

1. Introduction
2. Why cross sectoral collaboration?  
A different partnership this time?  
What does it take to work and why?
3. What sustainable change?
4. What's happening: state of collaboration art?  
Positive outcomes and movements: islands in big streams?  
Commitment-action gap: collaboration a virtual reality?  
Davos-ians and Porto Alegre-ans: collaboration impossible?
5. Overcoming obstacles to collaboration  
Transcending mindsets and cultural divides  
Restoring and nurturing trust
6. What now? Where to?
7. References

# Cross Sectoral Collaboration to Promote Sustainable Change



## **Introduction**

**WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CROSS SECTORAL** collaboration for sustainable change worldwide? How can we tell if what we know is indeed the kind that deserves to be promoted by a global movement like CIVICUS?

CIVICUS promotes citizen participation worldwide in the context of multilevel and manifold interactions of three sectors—state, market, and civil society—around issues affecting the common good. As used in this paper, it is not the sectors as massified wholes that are interacting but the people and institutions within each and across different sectors. It might be less contentious to just speak of civil societies with public and private persons and institutions. And for purposes of this paper, citizens and institutions cooperating for sustainable change.

The meaning (or meanings) of sustainable change also needs teasing out. Can any change brought about by citizen participation and leading to greater citizen participation count as sustainable? In other words, is this something that can be reduced to increasing the civic-ness of civil societies? Is it possible to have a civil society, and moreso to sustain it, where the ever widening rich-poor divide continues to destabilize our societies and our living environments threaten to fall apart?

This paper is not about listing the stories out there—a difficult job in itself. Rather, it is about what judgements can be made about what practices of cross-sectoral collaboration indeed promote sustainable change—a task no less daunting. The focus is on what make or break such kind of collaboration.

**T**he main proposition runs as follows. [1] Citizens from different sectors must recognize and understand the problem needing their cooperative action as affecting them in common and what's at stake is the common good and their common future; [2] that they can overcome the barriers that divide them—mistrust, intolerance, and so on; [3] that the mode of collaboration is workable; and, [4] that the changes resulting from such collaboration are not only mutually beneficial and self-satisfying for all participants but also can show promise of being sustained through time.

### **Why cross sectoral collaboration?**

Need it be questioned that changes, whether transient or sustainable, can happen even if we each go it alone? Consider cut-throat capitalism, for example. Having outlived the socialist system, can it be conceded that capitalism is more sustainable than its opponents ever imagined?

What if the agents working for commonly desired changes are united only around some negative causes, as in anti this or anti that, and then start parting ways once that anti cause is done with? As what happened in the Philippines in 1986 and 2001, for example, different sectors seemed to be at the peak of their solidarity when fighting a common enemy and then tended to fragment after it's gone.

Likewise, it does happen that cooperation within each group or sector produces self-satisfying changes and outcomes but which in reality are counterproductive from the viewpoint of sustainability.



**W**hat then is driving cross sectoral collaboration for sustainable change? To state the obvious, the most stubborn problems of modern times—like poverty, inequality, social breakdown, and deteriorating natural systems—are cross sectoral and transboundary in causes and consequences. The unsustainable human condition we are talking about cannot be addressed adequately without cooperation that transcends sectoral boundaries.

But why do these problems persist if the reason and the kind of action required to address them seem so obvious? Is it that the mindsets, structures, and driving forces underlying these problems seem much stronger than the collective efforts to change them? Or could it be that the different sectors who already recognize their stakes in every desired solution have been failing miserably to collaborate to promote sustainable changes in the way we live our separate yet interconnected lives?

### ***A different partnership this time?***

This paper prefers the term “partnership” and will use the term “collaboration” throughout (as per CIVICUS specs) to mean basically the same thing. Partnership seems to be more an inclusive concept. As defined in the dictionary, it means ‘the state of being associated in some action or endeavor’.

Partnership is not a simple coming together in one or other form of organization among different actors. More, it is not a one-off thing or short term project to address a particular problem or conflict of interests. It implies a fair degree of commitment and sustainability.

But do participants realize that every partnership may be viewed as a power relation, though not reducible to this? Often north-south partnerships are framed by the north’s terms of reference and end up skewed against the south. Even in sanctioning deviation, as in the case of trade treaties and numerous multilateral agreements on the environment (MEAs), the powerful industrial nations usually have their way and get away with double standards.

**P**ut more positively, power entails responsibility in the private as well as the public spheres. More power means more responsibility; global power means global responsibility. But what right has anyone or any institution to presume responsibility for every soul on this planet? What global institutional arrangement can guarantee that power will be judiciously exercised to improve the lives of so many excluded?



Collaboration or partnership requires basic respect for the other, the capacity to listen and to learn from each other, to work with the less familiar other, and the humility and determination to achieve progress and outcomes that redound to the benefit of all and the common good.

The *Geneva Forum 2000* International Symposium on Partnerships for Social Development in a Globalizing World, held on 26-28 June 2000 in parallel to Copenhagen+5, bannered the concept of partnership. The Geneva Forum recognized that partnership, as both a concept and a practice, has gained high credibility in contemporary political culture. Frequently alluded to in international debates and agreements, partnership evokes participation and joint interests, including the sharing of risks and benefits.

In contrast, terms such as alliance or coalition are very similar but they imply relations among states, or relations explicitly based on power considerations. Partnership has a more informal, even convivial connotation. It evokes the free, willing, deliberate, almost joyful decision of autonomous persons or institutions to get together and accomplish something mutually beneficial. It has a dynamic meaning. Most of all, it bears a natural association with the pursuit of the general interest and the search for the common good, whether there are only two or many partners.

The Geneva Forum hastens to add a caution. The term partnership is also often used to denote specific social relationships such as 'bridge partners', or to describe collaboration for anti-social purposes, such as 'partners in crime'. The same applies to "collaboration" or "collaborators" to label unpatriotic behavior or 'sleeping with the enemy', as in war situations.

The Habitat Agenda crafted in the 1996 Istanbul Summit also uses partnership and enablement as key strategies. The Commission on Human Settlements and the Habitat Center are again reminding governments in the follow up process, the Istanbul+5, that progress in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda rests heavily on the effective workings of these strategies.

Partnership is the strategy for a successful implementation of all the agendas decided in various UN summits. Without this, little progress can be made towards objectives that each actor would find difficult to achieve alone. Partnership implies a common objective to be reached, a purpose to be shared and fulfilled. Short of this kind of cooperative orientation, actors with opposite interests yet common stakes, are bound to edge each other out, as they often do, and find



themselves locked in cross purposes and mutually-destructive competition.

Considering what partnership should and should not be, what examples that you know of would come up to par? Or are we talking here of a different world and not a real one?

### ***What does it take to work and why?***

**E**xperiences in cross-sectoral collaboration have been very diverse and complex in terms of context, processes and outcomes. But what is it that spells success or failure in cross-sectoral collaboration for sustainable change? The answer is by no means clear-cut, though it seems that the presence or absence of certain essential elements might spell the difference.

*Mutual trust.* Trust is a gift earned not just given. It develops and gets nurtured through interactions. Here, in these truisms, comes the Catch-22 in collaboration to address issues that seem to divide us so fiercely. Around us there's so much mistrust and often there's no trust at all, to begin with. But how can you have it and sustain it if you don't even try to make a go at collaborating. As the famous Nike ad line says, just do it.

*Shared values, shared goals.* Development actors usually share values like concern for justice, equality and human rights, trust and tolerance, mutual support and benefit, caring for nature, etc. and these are woven around common goals like democracy and sustainable development. But aren't civil conflicts and wars waged on the very same grounds?

*Willingness to reach out to and work with others*—Different sectors share common values and goals without collaborating but they cannot collaborate if they are unwilling to work together.

*Credible leadership*— Individually and collectively, leaders of sectors must be able to command respect through their ideas and deeds. It's hard enough to identify with the leaders of your own kind who you cannot fully trust. What leadership then would be immune from sectoral bias to win cross-sectoral allegiance?

*Ability to find common ground*—Diversity is something to be celebrated and upheld. But this same diversity demands from each collaborating sector a high ability to seek and find common points for collective action.



*High degree of tolerance for differences*—Though there will always be differences, cross-sectoral collaboration need not fall because of them. Collaboration holds because participating sectors respect each other as they strive to engage and act in common.

*Initiative and responsibility*—Many collaboration projects tend to be hung up on issues of representation and become so bureaucratic. More, they usually move according to the pace of the slowest members. Dynamic collaboration have members who take initiative and are ready to account for what they say and do and their consequences.

*Participation and inclusiveness*—Initiative, if confined to a few, can be divisive. Those who lead must strive to include “all” or make sure each one feels to be included and participating. The strivings and feelings are what usually count. For the questions about participation and inclusion will continue to dog us and perhaps will not be completely answered. How participatory and inclusive can any collaboration get? Isn't it the case that once we begin to select based on any set of criteria we already begin to exclude others who don't fit?

*Flexibility and sense of humor*—Noble causes and missionary zeal tend to make us rigid and rob us of our capacity to laugh at our mistakes.

*Sense of satisfaction and fulfillment*—Good or bad times, participants in collaboration projects got to have some feeling that they're getting somewhere. Who would be crazy enough to want to be associated with a failing project?

### ***What sustainable change?***

Sustainability means different things to different people. The kind of change that leads towards this direction likewise remains contested. Different states and governments, market players, big and small, and actors and institutions of different civil societies across this planet have each to say about the meaning of sustainability and how to realize it. Perhaps, the only sure thing that can be asserted is, it's hard to find someone who will defend social inequality and injustice, monopoly of power, environmental destruction. Really? How can we tell the real score from mere social-speak and green-wash?

The state of development discourse and activism seems to suggest a worldwide consensus around the idea that the human condition as we find it today is unsustainable and can by no means be justified and allowed to continue. By implication, discourses and civic initiatives intending to change such condition should be promoting sustainability



of some kind. Maybe.

**Y**et it cannot be assumed outright that existing modalities of collaboration among state, market, and civil society actors are indeed for or leading to sustainable changes. They need to be analyzed case by case.

Can we know it when we see one? A possible index will have to include generally accepted principles and parameters of sustainability, as in Agenda 21. In this sense, the kind of collaboration we're talking about will have to impact not only on the governance of societies and economies but also of ecological systems. Have existing efforts in cross-sectoral collaboration come anywhere near that level of recognition? In words maybe, in action hardly. And what if our agreed frame of reference, i.e., Agenda 21, is itself contested, viewed by many critics as amounting, at bottom, to an agenda for sustainable growth, not sustainable development?

### ***What's happening: state of collaboration art?***

#### **Positive outcomes and movements: islands in big streams?**

**T**rilateral collaboration is a fairly old practice in the UN. One pioneering example is the ILO initiatives in getting capital, labor, and government to work together for industrial peace. In summit after summit, especially in the 1990s, the UN created various platforms through which states, NGOs and a range of civil society institutions, citizen volunteers, and corporations could thresh out problems plaguing societies, nations, and all of humanity.

The UN core principle that cooperation is always more productive than confrontation permeates all its negotiations on agreements and strategies to address some of the same pressing problems of the world. More, this principle assumes that development and progress require the committed and responsible participation of all, including those who continue to be excluded and denied of voice and power.

Out there, beyond the realms of intergovernmental collaboration, stories of cooperation from the local to the global level, are created in the everyday struggles of citizens demanding their basic entitlements and their right to participate in decisions that affect their daily lives and welfare.

Since the UN opened the doors for dialogue with NGOs in the early 1950s, considerable progress has been made in cross sectoral



collaboration. This is indicated by changes in attitudes, policies and approaches to the way governmental and intergovernmental bodies conduct the business of governance. Where before governance of society and the economy was restricted to official representative bodies, whether elected democratically or simply de facto, now it has expanded to include the participation of different sectors of society. This kind of collaboration has produced such signal success stories as the treaty to ban the use of land mines.

Closer to the ground, there are many other successes in cross sectoral collaboration for sustainable change. The cases of Kitakyushu and Porto Alegre are two examples that fit the billing.

The case of Kitakyushu was held up during the 1992 Earth Summit as a successful cooperation among state, corporate, and civic sectors to transform an environmental basket case into a unique environmental success story. The city and the surrounding prefecture was the industrial center that lifted Japan to modernity and to the status of a global power before and after World War II. One could only imagine the heavy costs of such take-off to the people and their living environments. The city was once choking in pollution and blinded daily by overcast smog, its ground water was heavily contaminated, marine life in its baywaters was totally gone. The dramatic story of restoration began as a voluntary action of ordinary citizens who sought government action and the involvement of academic, technical, and research institutions and later the industrial sector. In Kitakyushu one finds an example of leadership in scale transformation.

**P**orto Alegre, a city in the southernmost state of Brazil, Rio Grande do Sul, seems to be a phenomenon of sorts in good governance. Its claim to success is demonstrated by dramatic improvements in basic services, such as education, health, social housing, public transport and roadbuilding and sewerage, waste management, environmental clean up, culture, law and order, and so on. Key to such performance is its noted "participatory budget" (orcamento participativo). Ruled by the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT) for 12 years now, the city government has ensured that citizens of every neighborhood vote democratically on where and how municipal funds are to be used. The citizens decide what infrastructures they want to build or improve and are able to monitor closely how work is progressing and how the money is being spent. This is supposed to leave less room for corruption and diversion of public funds. And that investment is more likely to match popular demand.



Such stories might be few and far between. Or we just have not been good enough in tracking many quiet ones out there that hardly catch media attention.

And models as these two cases might seem, still more questions are left unanswered. In the Kitakyushu case, the cash involved in the clean up ran up to billions of dollars. Who really paid the bill and how? As expected, the later generation of Japanese taxpayers, through the national budget allocation and financing. Is this not equivalent to transgenerational inequality, and therefore unsustainable? Or is it simply a well-deserved payback to Kitakyushu people who made possible the high living standards of the present generation of Japanese? But consider further that the shift to clean production needed massive transfer of the dirty (i.e. heavy and chemical) industry to willing hosts elsewhere in Asia and other less developed regions. Isn't this clean up at the expense of another country's carrying capacity? On balance, can we consider Kitakyushu a replicable model of cross-sectoral collaboration?

The Porto Alegre case of good governance hardly includes the business sectors, media and other mainstream institutions which remain controlled by conservative and rightwing forces. Can this kind of collaboration sustain without the willing participation of the rich? And how can the rich be engaged to participate in a process that demands a heavy price on their possessions? How much of their wealth and power are they prepared to give up for the common good? What compromises the state-citizens alliance are willing to make seem uncertain. What value do we put to a kind of collaboration seeking to sharpen the rich-poor divide in order to dramatize the compelling need for social leveling?

#### **Commitment-action gap: collaboration a virtual reality?**

Some of us in the business of partnership may holler, but it may be said that much of what we see as cross sectoral collaboration for sustainable change is only virtual reality. The demand for social and environmental justice, democratic participation, and so on, have been resonated in meetings after meetings. The apparent universal consensus on these *must be's* of human survival falls flat on the realities of widening social inequality, power concentration, and continuing environmental deterioration. Till now the sectors that have committed to forge concerted action continue to be at odds with each other around many issues concerning sustainability.

A good indicator is the state of international cooperation with respect to international human development commitments. These



commitments, now bundled up in official development literature as International Development Goals (IDGs), are big promises made by states in the cycle of UN summits of the 1990s. To make good at them, there has to be collaboration at all levels not only among states but also between states and all possible actors who could be enjoined to take a piece of the huge agenda of human survival and sustainability. If the follow up events—the so-called +5s and +10s marking the milestones of progress, say, from Rio, Copenhagen, or Istanbul—are to be our judge, then indeed much leaves to be done. How do we account for lack of progress, even outright failure, say in combatting world poverty and reducing CO2 emissions?

Could it be that negotiations in UN conferences are but proxies of intense conflicts happening elsewhere—between rich and poor countries, between the rich and the poor in those countries, among communities, neighborhoods, clans and families, between men and women?

It's not hard to recognize the realities of despair, poverty and conflicts in Africa, the exploitation of Asia and other developing regions by global corporations, the inequalities we see everywhere. It's not as obvious why collaboration to deal with those realities could not move forward to bring genuine and enduring relief. Stand-offs in negotiations express, for example, in stubborn refusal of powerful nations to budge on important language in UN declarations pertaining to resource or technology transfer. It's amazing to see the intransigence of the rich and powerful to make a change. Where's the common ground here?

Outcomes of collaboration efforts seem to be greeted with contagious scepticism everywhere. World poverty seems much more easy to reproduce than to reduce. Jobs and livelihoods are much more easily lost than sustained, like during the 1997 Asian crisis. The super rich-bottom poor divide is increasing rather than getting narrowed down. The inventory of environmental hotspots is increasing and existing hotspots are not cooling down a tiny bit. While democracy is embracing more and more countries, problems of governance even in established democracies are many. And yet the universal demand for citizen participation, especially on issues that matter to the poor and the excluded, are largely unheeded by entrenched powers that be.

Are differences in judgement on what progress there is a mere question of perspective? Is it just the predisposition of one side of the divide to see only the negative side, refusing to recognize any sign of positive movement? Or is it the case that the powerful and super rich of this world still don't get it? What's the future of collaboration then?



## Davos-ians and Porto Alegre-ans: collaboration impossible?

For good or ill, there has emerged two new symbols or metaphors that present a difficult test to collaboration. One is the World Economic Forum, the other, the World Social Forum. Which side is CIVICUS on? If neither, what might that side be?

The World Economic Forum, founded by Swiss corporate mogul Klaus Schwab, was created as an annual platform where global capitalists meet with the leaders of politics, media, and academe to debate and act on some of the world's problems. Contrary to the dream of its founder, it now shares with the three Bretton Woods institutions, the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO, the top billing as symbol of capitalist exploitation and negative globalization.

The World Social Forum was originally an idea of a group of global activists led by Bernard Cassen of the radical monthly 'Le Monde Diplomatique' and other French leftists. This forum was held in January 2001 at Porto Alegre, the Brazilian city that made a name in participatory governance, sound social and environmental policies, transparency, accountability, and rule of law. The Porto Alegre forum, organized in direct challenge to the annual Davos forum, promises to be a global movement against global capitalism.

The World Social Forum is setting a trend in global activism triggered in Seattle in December 1999 during the aborted WTO millennium round of negotiations. This new trend is characterized by a coming together of environmentalists and development activists, NGO lobbyists and old-type social movements of workers and farmers, intellectuals, socialists, communists, anarchists, liberals, anti-globalist forces of differing ideological colors and orientation. These motley forces hardly related to each other during much of the 1980s and 1990s when NGO-type activism became the "in" thing and dominated the development scene.

If the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions are there to moderate global capitalism, the alternative movement of Porto Alegre seems out to radicalize the anti-capitalist struggle. If the Davos Forum has George Soros for a symbolic figure, the Porto Alegre Forum has Bove of McDonald fame and Che Guevarra as its universal icon. Davos, this Calvinist and icy Swiss alpine resort, is proxy for the exploitative North. Porto Alegre symbolizes not just the Latin elan and zest for life and solidarity for a better future but also the exploitation, exclusion, and poverty of the South. Ask for any contrasting symbols, Davos and Porto Alegre will probably find one for you.



The first encounter between the two in January 2001, via satellite, seemed to suggest that collaboration is like mixing oil and water, as it were. In the debate Filipino activist and intellectual Walden Bello told Davos, "Porto Alegre is the future while Davos is the past. Hemingway wrote that the rich are different from you and me (never mind that it's F. Scott Fitzgerald not Hemingway who said these lines) and indeed, we live on two different planets: Davos, the planet of the super rich, Porto Alegre, the planet of the poor, the marginalized, the concerned. Here in Porto Alegre, we are discussing how to save the planet. There in Davos, the global elite is discussing how to maintain its hegemony over the rest of us."

The two "planets" are poised on a collision course. The Porto Alegre Appeal for Mobilization, signed by participants of the six-day forum, is an urgent global call and a declaration of commitment to intensify the fight against global capitalism in every arena anywhere in the world. It resonates the militant activism demonstrated in Seattle WTO meeting, in Bangkok IMF meeting, in Washington DC headquarters of the World Bank and IMF, in Changmai meeting of the ADB, in Prague, in the latest violent encounters in Davos and Zurich during the last Davos Forum.

**F**inancier George Soros, speaking for the Davos Forum, commented that the televised debate was an interesting experience but "it showed it is not easy to dialogue." He lamented being made the target of verbal abuse: "I don't particularly like to be abused. My masochism has its limits." He didn't shut the door for dialogue though, acknowledging that an "intelligent" conversation could be held in private. This "dialogue at a distance" was considered by many in the international media as "a dialogue of the deaf".

In his own way UN Secretary General Kofi Annan echoed the message of Porto Alegre. He told the World Economic Forum at Davos: "If we cannot make globalization work for all, in the end it will work for none."

How would CIVICUS place itself in this polarized situation? On a positive note, CIVICUS has links with people in both Davos and Porto Alegre forums. George Soros, a plenary debate panelist in the Budapest 2nd CIVICUS World Assembly in 1997, has agreed to tax currency speculation and use the proceeds to finance global goods. Would he be a useful gauge of how far the super rich are willing bend? Perhaps such symbolic capital might matter in future dialogues on collaboration. But then again, the question: collaboration to what end? And just how far can it get and how long can it be sustained?



## ***Overcoming obstacles to collaboration***

### **Transcending mindsets and cultural divides**

Words come easy and cheap. The moment people ask each other why ***what is*** strays too far away from ***what should be*** then they begin to be embroiled in contradictory analyses of the problem.

Having defined a problem is already half resolution, so goes conventional wisdom. But it does happen, like we've seen in Rio and other summits elsewhere, that a radical analysis does not automatically lead to a radical solution. In the 1992 Earth Summit there was unanimity in the view that humanity is now at a defining moment of history. How come proposed solutions fell short of defining?

**H**ow to make positive movements around issues where we find the most fundamental disagreements about where our problems lie is an even greater challenge. Consider some examples. To David Korten, it's the corporation and the capitalist system built around it. To Soros, the main threat to an open society are the market totalitarians. Anti-globalization forces of different colors of persuasion see only mostly evil in the current process of economic integration. Donella Meadows suggests that the one never-mentioned solution to our struggle for sustainability is to "slow down", yes, "slowing down" (Donella's repeated emphasis) the pace of everything, including what she alluded to as a different though subtle form of violence. And that is, the activism of earthsavers in a hurry like herself, like many of us.

Some fundamental critiques of mainstream development tend to trace the problem of unsustainability to Enlightenment thinking which is founded on [1] the power of reasoning; and [2] the perfectibility of human nature. This kind of thinking is being blamed for the scientific arrogance of humanism that has been driving human progress in the last 300 years or so. As well, to this mode of thinking has been associated much of the kind of human action that seem to take humanity to the edge, as it were. But can this so-called Cartesian rationality be skipped?

Such thinking has been branded as Western and opposition to it means resistance against Western cultural imperialism. Values such as liberty, tolerance, mutual respect are viewed as Western Against these are now being pitted the so-called "Asian values" that are sometimes romanticized as though they hold the key to the Asian future, if not the common future of all of humanity. Where's the common ground here?



What might be suggested by this kind of reasoning and analysis, considering that it has permeated much of the discourse on sustainability? What kind of obstacles does it pose to cross sectoral collaboration?

**T**wo such obstacles have been pointed out by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. The first which he terms “cultural boundary” concerns the view that values are culture-specific, that problems and solutions affecting different societies and communities must be tailored fit to the peculiarities of their individual cultures and traditions. This also suggests that there’s a lot of nonsense about claims to universal values. At bottom, this kind of reasoning and analysis might explain the stubborn resistance of the Chinese government in practically all international meetings where human rights are at issue. How might such barrier be considered in transnational collaboration?

The second, which Sen called “cultural disharmony”, talks about the possibility that people reared in different cultures may systematically lack basic sympathy and respect for one another. They may not even be able to understand one another, and could not possibly reason together. Since atrocities and genocide are typically imposed by members of one community on members of another, the significance of understanding among communities can hardly be overstated. And yet such understanding might be difficult to achieve if cultures are fundamentally different from one another and are prone to conflict. Note, for examples, the cultural animosities between Serbs and Albanians, Hutus and Tutsis, Hindus and Muslims, or Israeli Jews and Arabs. How might collaboration succeed where cultural disharmony is taken as a fact of life? How has the process of globalization dealt with this obstacle? Apart from dismantling cultural barriers, what’s in this process that might help transborder collaboration?

Let’s consider yet another illustration of mindsets that stand in the way of collaboration to get out of the modernization bind.

**T**he Japanese are perplexed by US views of Japan, says Doug Struck of Washington Post Service [International Herald Tribune 9/02/01]. US officials have been urging Japan to change, to reform what these official consider as stagnation in the second richest country of the world. U.S. Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neill put it this way, “how do we help the people of Japan achieve a higher standard of living? To this, Noriko Hama, chief economist at Mitsubishi Research Institute in Tokyo, replied, “It’s a bit bizarre to be talking about raising the living standard of this country. Japan is the largest net creditor in the world and is thus the richest country, in the world. This is far from



a country that needs its standard of living raised. If anything, because people's standard of living is so high, they are a bit complacent about the economic situation." And added that Mr. O'Neill's view was "about a quarter-century old."

The Japanese have higher incomes, more savings, longer lives and better health than Americans. And they work less to achieve all this: ILO said that average workweek among manufacturing workers are shorter by five hours than in the U.S. and that American workers on average put in the equivalent of two weeks more work per year than the Japanese. Japanese also pay less of their salary to taxes, 12 percent to the 16 percent for the American. Yet they get better services. Health care is virtually free. Child care is offered at a modest fee for working parents. Japan's public transportation system is probably the most efficient in the world, with its commuter trains providing 21 millions rides a day. Proportionately more Japanese take overseas vacation than Americans—and they still manage to save money.

**C**ooperation, the US way, implies getting the global economy to roll on and on to the limits of the earth's carrying capacity. Doing it the Japanese way suggests keeping growth levels where they're at. But isn't the Japanese norm itself already unsustainable as it is?

Ironically, these two countries, not to mention other members of the OECD, have all the means and resources to help redress global inequalities. Can we account their failure to deliver on ODA commitments to mindset and cultural barriers?

### **Restoring and nurturing trust**

Mutual trust and respect are a pillar of any cooperation and partnership. It's there or not there. Once there already, it must be nurtured continuously. For it's hard to restore once gone, as in the scar of a wound that keeps reminding us of a trauma.

There's widespread and deepening mistrust of mainstream institutions of civil society, as one Harvard study observed. It is not only that people don't trust government, they also don't trust churches, media, corporations, the police and military and many other institutions that have to do with their everyday existence. Why is this? Who do people trust then? Who can get their trust? And how?



## *Combatting corruption*

Decline of public confidence in different institutions of civil society often points to corruption as a major reason. This problem is blamed for the erosion of values and principles of governance. Indeed it has penetrated bureaucracies from top to bottom and tainted their operations and performance in delivering public services.

**C**orruption, like prostitution, has been with us for as long as anyone can remember. It is not unique to poor and developing nations, though most studies focus almost solely on so-called corrupt Third World governments. Corruption is an international problem. "There is always somebody who pays, and international business is generally the main source of corruption," says George Soros.

Civic vigilance is an antidote to corruption. Corruption thrives on secrecy, but has less opportunity where there is more transparency. Cross sectoral collaboration to deal with corruption needs to look into information disclosure policy. Taxpayers and the public should know what's happening, say, in foreign loans, in defense and civil works contracts, in procurements, budget allocations and use of taxpayers' money.

The anti-corruption campaign initiated by Transparency International, now with World Bank support, is a good example of cross sectoral collaboration that deserves to be promoted by organizations like CIVICUS.

## *Partnerships for good governance*

Most of the issues that divide us seem to converge around the issue of governance—how our economies, societies, natural environments are being run to serve the common good. Governance is at bottom a question of who decides what changes to make, for what and how.

**T**he government remains the most powerful institution of civil society. It is the largest repository of resources—human, symbolic and material—which can be used to either preserve or redress existing social inequalities.

The right of every citizen to be governed rightly goes without saying. The problem is, good governors and good governance are hard to find. Transparency, rule of law, accountability and democratic participation are accepted principles of governance that are breached at every opportunity. We also know that effective governance does not



necessarily mean accountable. The Suharto regime delivered dramatic results in poverty reduction in Indonesia but it was judged as the most corrupt by one study of the Transparency International. Besides, the Suharto government has yet to fully account for its terrible human rights record.

A nation not willing to finance its own poverty reduction programs and social development deserves little respect. Governments have to do more to make taxation, planning and budgeting truly democratic instruments for social-leveling. The example of Porto Alegre is worth looking into.

**W**e can always hold government to account for their promises, for the consequences of their decisions. Our right extends to a justifiable act of removing an unaccountable government. Recent regime changes in the Philippines, in Serbia, in Indonesia, are outcomes of multisectoral collaboration driven by calls for reform in governance, and eradication of corruption in particular.

Partnerships involving reformers in government and citizens make for successful collaboration in governance reform. Insiders know the workings of government but are usually constrained by bureaucratic rules and processes. Outsiders have more flexibility but lack appreciation of the predicament of their allies in government.

But the quality of governance cannot rise much higher than the existing level of political culture and practice of the governed. In this sense we deserve the kind of government we get. If we're not getting the right kind that means we still need to exert more to deserve one.

#### *Linking global to local governance*

On this planet live six billion souls who think, believe, value, enjoy, do different things. They each belong to one or other kind of grouping—family, a clan, an institution, a neighborhood, a village, a town, a province, a nation, a community of nations. Each of us help shape and are continually being shaped by these interlocking circles of connection and belonging-ness. How can every soul have a dignified place on the table? With more than half of humanity having barely anything to keep body and soul together, what governance regimes will ensure more inclusion instead of more exclusion?

Whose voice and vote counts and how? What institutional arrangements at any level can ensure that each voice and vote count? Can existing



systems of governance give space to the voice and power of ordinary citizens?

The UN system, despite its many imperfections, is thus far the only existing form of governance at the global level that could best amplify and perhaps represent different people's voices of global civil society threatened by destabilization. Yet it can only do so much even under the best of circumstances. Now, its authority and capacity to manage world's problems and mediate international relations have been undermined.

Collaboration for UN reforms must be promoted. This should be aimed at making the UN live up to the spirit of its universal declaration "We, the Peoples". The reform process should target the redress of widening inequalities among member-nations. And rather than recentralize global decision-making it should enable more decentralization and local autonomy.

A high point in civic initiative is where citizens depend less on government and more on themselves. In this rapidly globalizing world the central government is not only a big disappointment in defending national interest but also helps facilitate further loss of sovereignty of local communities. Would civil societies be better off with weakened nation-states and governments? Will this work in favor of strengthening community and individual sovereignty? What would this suggest for global solidarity?

### ***What now? Where to?***

Actors across sectoral divides are struggling to find ways of working together to address some of the same outstanding issues that continue to divide our societies. Why is it that only a few succeed and many don't?

Practices in cross sectoral collaboration for sustainable change are very diverse and somewhat intractable. These are dominantly collaboration among governmental organizations, NGOs and social movements around common concerns of both the local communities and the entire UN system and other multilateral institutions. Cases which include the corporate sector, like the one dealing with the diamond conflict in Africa, are rare and are presumed to be more local than transnational in scope. Business councils for sustainable development have become fashionable since the 1992 Earth Summit, indicating a willingness of some big business to engage other sectors in dialogues and common action.



Why won't CSO-business collaboration fly? Generally, that is, and as compared with CSO-government collaboration? From the standpoint of many CSOs, governments and big companies cannot be trusted and are usual suspects for both past failings and things that can go wrong. Between the two, big companies are more suspect. The feeling is mutual, they don't trust NGOs or CSOs either, so the other side would say. To them, NGOs or CSOs are but a noisy, negativistic bunch of 'do-gooders', high in commitment but without authority other than what they assign themselves, and who are only good at fighting for lost causes but can never be trusted to run government or business.

How do we overcome the deep mistrust? Consider that the negative impact of globalization are being blamed on global corporations which are seen to more powerful than most governments. How might closer encounters between the Davos-ians and Porto Alegre-ans be transformed from a "dialogue of the deaf" into a "dialogue of partners" for sustainable change?

How can partnerships for sustainability do better? How can these partnerships be made to really deliver on intended outcomes? Are obstacles to progress really that formidable as to entice social movements to courses of action other than dialogues, negotiations, mass education, and peaceful mobilization?

**M**ilitant voluntary action and civic activism are on the upbeat. We see new social movements framing the terms of development-environment debate. We see them swamping dialogue platforms with their radical advocacies. More, we see them taking to militant, even violent, actions in the streets if only to dramatize their claims. Yet, regimes of governance around the world are changing, too. And for the better, it seems. More and more companies, big and small, are showing more social and environmental responsibility. As well, none of them seem to be under any illusion that they can hack our common problems single-handedly. Still, why do they seem to be coming apart instead of coming together?

How should CIVICUS relate to what seems to be a renewed trend of global polarization? Would more dialogue with the super rich be a better investment option to further its mission? How might CIVICUS harness the surging voluntary energies and movements to foster broader cooperation and common strivings toward sustainability?



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