

Global Social Policy Forum

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Global Social Policy Forum

Guest Editors' Introduction

The articles in this *GSP Forum* are focused on the protagonist role of social movements and civil society organizations (CSOs) in the challenge of developing and pursuing new strategies for building regional alternatives.

Events in the last years of the 20th century and at the turn of the millennium have underlined the fact that the key structures and institutions of the neoliberal economic globalization model are deeply dysfunctional, leading to profound de-legitimization of the International Monetary Fund (IMF)/World Bank (WB) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Sustained popular mobilization against free trade and investment regimes being imposed by the WTO and bi-lateral Free Trade Agreements, combined with the resistance of South governments has led to the stalemate at the WTO.

Meanwhile, social movements and CSOs globally have also emerged as a potent force for social transformation and have been recognized by the *Financial Times* as the 'other super power'. This current rise of social movements and CSOs has been characterized by two interrelated strategies – a strategy of resistance to corporate-driven trade and investment regimes, liberalization of markets and privatization and by the search for, and construction of, alternative strategies of development from the bottom-up, with a new emphasis on strategies of regional integration.

In this issue of the *Global Social Policy Forum* the authors have explored 'alternative regionalisms' from different perspectives. Dot Keet outlines the Why and How of the new Alternative Regionalisms and Cândido Grzybowski introduces the experiences and challenges in pursuing an inter-regional dialogue between social movements and CSOs in MERCOSUR (Common Market of the Southern Cone) and SADC (Southern African Development Community). The current stage of development of the government-initiated regions of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and SADC are analysed by Jenina Joy Chavez and Dot Keet respectively. They also discuss the challenges being faced by civil society in both regions in seeking to democratize these regional structures.

While regionalism has traditionally been government-initiated and state-centred, a new conjuncture is being shaped in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region, where social movements and CSOs have emerged as key protagonists of a new regionalism for Peoples' integration. A highpoint in this convergence has been the unprecedented exchange between social movements and CSOs and governments, which took place in Cochabamba in December 2006 as analysed by Gonzalo Berrón.

While acknowledging the significance of Cochabamba, Brid Brennan and Cecilia Olivet place the emergence of these regional alternatives in the broader context of resistance to economic globalization and the convergence of social movements and the search for alternatives that is most visibly expressed in the World Social Forum process. These initial regionalisms are embryonic and their future will to a great extent depend on how social movements and CSOs will sustain their resistance, and while guarding their autonomy, constructively engage those governments embarked on the construction of new regional alternatives.

The complexity and the specificity of the current stages of development in the existing regions and the diversity of factors coming to bear on the outcome of regional integration in Asia, Africa and Latin America, are reflected on by the authors. Moreover, all are agreed on the urgency and importance of the participation of social movements and CSOs if current regional formations are to be democratized and if alternative regionalisms are to be shaped according to a broad people's agenda for sustainable development.

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NOTE

1. This programme has been jointly initiated by the Brazilian Institute of Social and Economic Analyses (IBASE) – Brazil, Alternative Information and Development Center (AIDC) – South Africa, Focus on the Global South – Thailand, and the Transnational Institute (TNI), The Netherlands.

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