

CONGO FORUM 2007 REPORT – Raphael Bate

*Attended for Susila Dharma International by Raphael Bate (SD France)
and Joe Rosario (SD India).*



The objectives of the Development Forum 2007 were to contribute to Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) deliberations and decisions at their session of the High Level Segment meeting following the forum.

Susila Dharma is a Non Governmental Organisation (NGO), which has “consultative status” with ECOSOC, the main UN organ to which NGOs relate.

The theme for the forum in strategies was:

“Strengthening efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger, including through the global partnership for development”.

The debate focused on:

“Strengthening efforts at all levels to promote pro-poor sustained economic growth, including through equitable macroeconomic policies”.

The Development Forum was organized in a bottom-up participatory way, seeking inputs from NGOs. There was an opportunity for participants to display their activities at an international fair.

Joe Rosario set up a display of the work of Mithra Foundation and SRADHA from South India.

The Millennium Declaration, adopted by Heads of State and Governments at the Millennium Summit in 2000, calls for an unprecedented, results oriented, global development strategy to be achieved by 2015.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) are:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

However at the current pace of commitments, these MDGs will not be reached by 2015.

The UN is now ready to work more closely with Civil Society. CONGO and partners intend to launch an annual Geneva platform on development, gathering specialized agencies and multi-stakeholder partners through networks, campaigns and partnerships.

“Bread for self is material but bread for the other is spiritual.”

SUSILA DHARMA

“Even though you are a white person, you have within you black, red, yellow and brown siblings. And you also have within you the qualities of male and female.

.....
“So if you would like to come close to God and have God close to you, follow in God’s footsteps by treating all creatures the same, willing to be close to them all, guiding, leading and educating them.” (Bapak London 1967)

The Mission of Susila Dharma includes:

“Raising awareness of global issues and inter-dependence.”

And the guiding principles include:

“Partnerships –we reach out to work in collaboration with institutions that share our aims and objectives”.

The Millennium Development Goals are in accord with ours: intending to forge partnerships; build solidarity across regions and continents; promote the goals of peace; human rights justice; equitable and sustainable development, and eradication of hunger and poverty.

“The task for NGOs is to remind governments of their obligations; strengthening government’s backbone to implement the hard decisions that are necessary: advocating and testing new ideas and concepts that influence government plans and constructively criticizing governments’ shortcomings.”(Cyril Ritchie, CONGO)

While global wealth increases, the right of 840 million people to food is denied. While \$1.2 trillion is spent on arms, very little is allocated to development and the survival of families.

***When ever you are deciding to make a change in the world consider
What difference it will make to the poorest person (Gandhi)***

Ordinary economic growth does not necessarily translate into pro-poor growth. The challenge for developing countries is how to grow faster and at the same time how to ensure that the poor benefit from this economic growth. The fight on poverty is incomplete without macro-economic and social policies at national level that strengthen and benefit each other.

Numerous NGOs are now at the forefront in the fight to combat poverty and achieve the MDGs. One example that was described at the forum, was a Tanzanian NGO, CARITAS, that had training in monitoring their government’s projected budgets on poverty eradication and using this information to embarrass or press the government into fulfilling their commitments.

It was frequently affirmed that the fight on poverty must include all dimensions of human rights and that the Millennium Development Goals were in effect performance indicators of human rights.

Considerations for Susila Dharma as an association of NGOs.

The consequences of an NGO's work is not necessarily all positive, as even the largest ones, OXFAM and Christian Aid, only attend to 12-20% of the development needed in poverty alleviation in certain countries of the south. Some governments can use NGO efforts to cover their lack of adequate provision of basic services, while the majority of the population are still struggling with basic needs.

NGOs tend only to work locally and do not take into consideration the causes of the suffering. These causes may be from external sources such as International treaties, from governments and corporations, or from the lack of compliance with treaties signed or pledges made.

Eradication of poverty could be achieved by retrieving unpaid taxes hidden/held in Northern banks. Similarly, we need to draw attention to expenditures on armaments in relation to the figure spent on alleviation of children dying of malnutrition. Now we have the technical and financial means to end world hunger, but we are not doing it. Are the activists right when they call this genocide?

International World Poverty Day October 17

This day represents one day each year when the voices of people living in poverty can be heard worldwide. A day when they are given the opportunity to speak for themselves, or on behalf of their communities, about the adversities, obstacles and hardships which are faced every single day and the courage and resourcefulness it takes to deal with their extreme poverty.

It is an international Call-to-Action to encourage recognition of the central role of the poor themselves in the fight against poverty. Should we in SD join with this?

Let's Grow Up

We in SD must be more prepared to lift up our heads and look into the world at all levels and see how we can collaborate with those civil societies that are working towards the same goals as we are. We should align ourselves with campaigns aiming to highlight MDGs and take up advocacy for the issues with which we are trying to work.

It may be that we have not done this in the past because we do not feel comfortable with politics and pressure groups, as we are a spiritual organisation and we don't want to get our pure souls sullied in our special SD approach?

Most of our SD Projects are involved in contributing to several of the Millennium Development Goals in education, health, women's empowerment and income generation, but mostly only at local levels.

It would be useful to find out how our SD members have worked with other organisations, collaborated in campaigns to get reticent government to comply with commitments to poverty eradication.

Two examples are:

Rasjid Cesar's work with Tierraviva is inspiring because he is working at national level with the Federal Penitentiary Service of Argentina to change the way women and

children are treated in prisons. In south India, Mithra works on Human Rights Education with 200 schools throughout the state of Karnataka. The first gathering of CONGO India, in August 2007 has been initiated by Bella Rosario.

We have to realise that, relatively, we are a tiny organisation with committed members. We owe it to our beneficiaries and stakeholders to do the optimum to eradicate poverty. Inspired by Bapak's words,(above), we have a duty to achieve Human Rights for our siblings outer as well as inner, if we are to work towards true humanity of the Rohani level which is our birthright and that of all our non-Subud brothers and sisters.

IMPLICATIONS

1 Develop civil society networks to share experiences and information to influence policies of other sectors.

2 In evaluating and measuring progress on MDGs civil societies should do independent research at national and local levels. e.g. Budget tracking.

3 Get involved with six key sectors: civil society organisations, parliamentarians, the youth, media, private sector and local authorities. Efforts towards the realisation of the MDGs are gaining strength.

We must also involve the private sector, as it controls more social and economic decisions than do a large number of governments: employment creation; migration; pollution creation. Encourage corporations to adopt high ethical standards, and promote pro-poor economic growth. Civil society should influence and inspire its leaders, shareholders and investors to achieve "Life before profit".

There are many conventions, treaties, action plans and declarations. Far too many remain unfulfilled, sidelined or ignored.

We in SD need to be active, critical, constructive and imaginative and determined to persuade governments to do their public duty and to keep their word.

Maybe SDIA should have a year of collaboration, networking and action to move into the world and not only make ourselves known, but learn from all those travelling in the same direction toward the rights to a decent life.

Further information: The UN Millennium Campaign, info@millenniumcampaign.org

Raphael Bate. July 2007