

**Earth Summit 2002 online debate at www.lifeonline.org/debate:
'What should Earth Summit 2002 be trying to achieve?'**

Summary of the debate of week 2 (10 - 14 September 2001):

How can marginalized people participate effectively in today's globalised world? What are the roles and responsibilities of key actors? What obstacles and processes should be addressed at Earth Summit 2002 to tackle this issue?

Purpose and structure of the debate

Ten years after the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, the world's nations will gather again in Johannesburg next September to review progress and plan for the future. Preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002 are well under way, emphasising a transparent and participatory approach.

The debate was part of www.lifeonline.org - a multi-media initiative exploring the impact of globalisation on the poverty and social development agenda of the Istanbul+5 meeting in June 2001, as well as the upcoming 10-year review of the 1992 Earth Summit. This electronic forum was aimed at initiating a focused and constructive public discussion on some of the priority issues. People were invited to share their ideas, knowledge and diverse perspectives.

The report, incl. the summaries of all four weeks, will be widely disseminated to policy-makers and all other interested stakeholders engaged in the 2nd PrepCom of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (New York, January 2002).

To download the pdf or txt version, please go to www.earthsummit2002.org/es/life/default.htm

Moderation process

The debate was moderated by Jasmin Enayati, UNED Forum (www.unedforum.org) with support from *Lifeonline* partners One World, TVE, and PANOS.

The purpose of moderation was to keep the volume of material posted to a manageable size (max. 10 messages per day), as well as to ensure observance of the ground rules. In addition to the ground rules, the criteria we considered were: relevance; substance of contributions; concreteness of argument; and constructive tone.

Numbers

By the end of the debate we had more than 660 subscribers from 80 countries, representing many different stakeholder groups (academics, architects, artists, businesspeople, faith communities, governments, NGOs, Indigenous Peoples, local authorities, media, scientists, students, UN officials, urban planner, women's groups and individuals).

Summary

The following is an attempt to summarise and give an impression of the arguments as they developed through the debate, using mainly selections from the submissions.

Where possible, the name, organisation and nationality of the contributor will be given.

Initial contributions

We had invited five key actors to contribute initial articles for the debate.

Barbara Gemmill, Environment Liaison Centre International, Kenya;

Magdi Ibrahim, ENDA Maghreb, Morocco;

Harsh Jaitli, Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), India;

Sheela Patel, Society for the Promotion of Area Resources (SPARC);

Kalpana Sharma, Deputy Editor of The Hindu, one of India's largest English language dailies.

Thanks

Thanks to these five authors and all the other participants for making this debate happen and putting their time and effort into this debate.

Introduction

Contributions to the debate focused on a number of key issues; such as the lack of political will to include the marginalized in decision-making, the need for transparency and systematic processes of participation, the dominant economic system and the need for good governance. Some of the key barriers to achieving more inclusive strategies were discussed, like the effects of globalisation on marginalized communities and the elitism of the discourse that dominate decision-making processes. Several examples of good models and ideas on how to overcome barriers were suggested, such as the further development of multi-stakeholder processes. Roles and responsibilities of key actors were discussed: to balance the weight of responsibilities, democratic structures have to be strengthened; partnerships between the North and South have to be consolidated and a better education system will enable people to participate more effectively in decision-making processes. Recommendations were made as to how the Earth Summit 2002 should address the issue.

Initial remarks

"Nothing will be sustainable without a culture of peace"

(Mitchell Gold, International Association of Educators for World Peace, Canada)

During the week of this debate, we witnessed the terrorist attacks on the US. You will find references to the events in some of the contributions that were written afterwards. For many the question was how to transform the violence into some meaningful ways of working on sustainable development and social justice.

The topic of marginalisation allowed for some reflections on the events, which Derk Loorbach (Researcher, Maastricht University, Netherlands) summarised as follows:

"Several global developments are coming together and emphasizing the need for radical change. Pollution, terrorism, poverty and inequality are major problems and they can result in a further polarisation of this world, including military conflicts or devastating ecological changes. We have to give people (poor and rich) more influence in their immediate environment and surrounding. This can only be done by re-evaluating the position of the so-called 'first world'. When western countries and their multinationals understand that their practices have contributed (to use an understatement) to the present situation of inequality, they will realise that they have to change their policies dramatically to be able to prevent terror like we've seen in Washington and New York."

Keypoints

Lack of political will

The exclusion of poor people in the decision-making process on any level is foremost due to a widespread political will to exclude. Dr Barbara Gemmill, Environment Liaison Centre International, Kenya & Harsh Jaitli, PRIA, India and other contributors agree on that.

Need for transparency and systematic processes of participation

"Participation is not a substitute to Western democracy. To be effective, it must include both transparency with regards to the economic choices and the impact those will have on the life of citizens (particularly the poorest) as well as the rehabilitation of the regulatory role of the state, not the market."

(Dr Magdi Ibrahim, ENDA Maghreb, Morocco)

"Indigenous and poverty stricken people are only able to participate in the growing world economy through organised meetings, groups and set agendas based in the marginalized communities."

(Andrea Powell, yAIDS, EcoLogic, USA)

"Most examples of marginalisation are the result of long-term lack of participation of communities in their localities and globalisation adds to this deficit... There needs to be a long-term commitment to developing new ways of organization, community education and mobilization that helps people locally to project their needs and aspirations globally."

(Sheela Patel, Society for the Promotion of Area Resources)

Many contributors point out that none of us can afford the dominant **economic system** in the long-term. This issue needs further examination. Participation is the best vehicle to enhance democracy:

"For poor people to have a real and effective voice in decision-making processes, we will have to stand the current world order on its head." In this new service orientated knowledge economy there is little space for the poor, as Thomas Kocherry, leader of the fisher people in India, states: "Globalisation is about the free movement of capital but not the free movement of labour".
(Kalpana Sharma, Deputy Editor of "The Hindu", India)

"..in today's hegemonous capitalist world system, as mega-corporate structures of economic and political power assume center stage, we start experiencing a new pattern emerging" – the disenfranchisement of the working class, the middle class, the intellectuals. Without a political voice, all of us are ... becoming the 'wretched of the earth'. None of us can afford fossil fuel driven economies, mega cities, toxic foods, polluted water & air, deculturalisation, alienation etc.
(S. Diaz-Garcia, Faculty, Johns Hopkins University, USA)

The direct economic links between abundant consumerism and gross exploitation / marginalisation of the poorest, is least understood by consumers in the countries that consume the most – the USA leads the world in both wasteful consumption and in consumer's utter ignorance of the direct causal link between their consumption and grotesquely inhumane exploitation of poor people throughout the world. Above all we must remove the economic patterns of exploitation and replace them with patterns of co-operation.
(Don Scott Johnson, Citizens of Earth, US)

"Globalization must protect the interests of poor people."
(Olivier Kambala, Co-ordinator, International Center for Peace in Central Africa, DR Congo)

Good governance

"The problem is that change takes time, while retaining the status quo is instantaneous... Any system of good governance must offer people a realistic hope that they can rise out of poverty, which is almost always a structural part of an economy (hence, the almost universal systemic marginalization of the poor). To become un-poor, the poor must have a place to rise to. Therefore, a main strategy in de-marginalization is the creation of a broad middle class that is open and accessible to the poor through education and work. National policies that favour expansion of the middle class may be as pro-poor as any direct intervention in the slums."
(Jay Moor, UNCHS, Kenya)

Key barriers

The key barrier to achieving more inclusive strategies lie with the effects that globalisation and **economic structures** have on marginalised communities:

"...those with political and economic power find the poor an inconvenience. It is difficult to persuade them to work towards solutions that open up spaces for the marginalized in the new economies governing cities around the world... The days when cities were manufacturing centers are over. Today, you need either capital or specialized knowledge to survive and succeed. And the poor have neither."
(Kalpana Sharma, Deputy Editor of "The Hindu", India)

"... unless we understand fully its [globalisation's] many dimensions in terms of its impact on the lives of the poor, strategies such as 'inclusiveness' appear to be like band-aid on a gaping wound...For consultation does not alter the harsh reality of economics"
(Kalpana Sharma, Deputy Editor of "The Hindu", India)

"Institutionalised participation which does not address the real issues of market domination and hegemony. - Decreasing state control as the management of public utilities shifts to market regulation rules via multinationals."
(Dr Magdi Ibrahim, ENDA Maghreb, Morocco)

"Poverty – but not simply lack of wealth. Education – but not simply lack of access to schools or literacy. We need to understand the complexities of what it is that marginalizes people. Perhaps the underlying problem is of scale. Not everyone can participate in large scale government, whereas at

a very local level even the poorest and uneducated can contribute to shape their immediate surroundings."
(Michael Saunby, Futurologist, Teachmore, UK)

Many contributors point out that **elitism and the technicality of discourses** that dominate the decision-making processes, on both the global and the most local level contribute to exclusion:

In global fora, the "forms of discussion, the language, the abstraction at which discussion takes place all exclude the poor, their local and even recently emerging global networks."
(Sheela Patel, Society for the Promotion of Area Resources)

Harsh Jaitli, India agrees in saying that issues related to environment are projected as complicated, loaded with technical jargon. It has become a challenge for NGOs and community groups to work within the boundaries of these external agencies over which none of us have any control.

Good Models / Ideas to overcome barriers

Multi-stakeholder processes

Change the very basis of relationships from "efficiency through competition" to "efficiency through cooperation". Different sections of society are related to the resources in different ways. Very often such relationships are in conflict with one another. The need of the hour is to devise relevant conflict resolution mechanisms in a " (true) democratic spirit". Such mechanisms will put self-imposed constraints on the resource users and ensure sustainable use of the resources. To achieve such objective it is imperative to

- a) appreciate the existence of multiple stakeholders in respect of any resource in particular and the resource system as a whole,*
- b) identify them, and*
- c) ensure a democratic negotiation across the stakeholders to reduce and gradually wipe out the areas of conflict.*

This process is known as "multi-stakeholder process" in the present day literature. It is now well known that UNED Forum has done a considerable amount of homework in concretizing the concept (see UNED Forum's website on multi-stakeholder processes at www.earthsummit2002.org/msp).

(Milindo Chakrabarti, Director, Create, India)

Along the same lines, Jayakumar (Thanal Conservation Action and Information Network, India) suggests to create mechanisms and social process that can bring the marginalised to the mainstream of activities:

"Clarify the theoretical framework and implications of marginalisation and then solutions will emerge... To me the solution is informed decision-making and the biggest limitation is the motivation to participate. Somehow everything around us from stories / news and advertisement give the message that change is impossible and difficult. The campaign ahead is on how much each of us will succeed to convince others that change is possible and the solution to most of the problems lies in changing practices and values."

The **Culture of Peace** Program, educational materials and activities could assist in the development of the changes required to empower the disenfranchised (Mitchell Gold, International Association of Educators for World Peace, Canada). See, for example: <http://www.geocities.com/iaewptest/presentation/cup.html> and <http://www.homeplanet.org>

"A strong network of friendship between all humans in this world – this is what we need and this is what we'll use to make the world better. The main responsibility is to help people in building this network of friendship."

(Reyhan, High school student, Azerbaijan)

Micro-credit programmes

"The micro-credit program that has been taken up by several NGOs is an enthusiastic approach for making the poor self-reliant should be linked with capacity building program."
(Tariq Bin Yousuf, Environmental Engineer, Bangladesh)

Earth Charter

Adopt the Earth Charter which defines objectives around which we can organize efforts to eliminate poverty, change patterns of consumption and production and reduce exploitation. Press for legislation that mandates the printing of an 'economic justice ratio' tag on all products.
(Don Scott Johnson, Citizens of Earth, US)

In-depth coverage of complex problems by **mass media** should be supported in an organized way:

In Tampa, Florida, the coverage of the World Conference on Racism, by Democracy Now, was in depth, passionate and emotionally powerful – such programming needs to be the rule rather than the exception. We need to seize every opportunity to expand public media outlets that amplify the voice of the people directly – WMNF radio station 88.5 in Tampa is a wonderful example.
(Don Scott Johnson, Citizens of Earth, US)

Roles and Responsibilities

Reflecting on roles opened the question of how to **balance** the weight of responsibilities:

Participation is double edged – while it invites the various players from civil society to take part in the decision-making process, it also shifts a greater share of the responsibilities upon them without providing the means to undertake such responsibilities.
(Dr Magdi Ibrahim, ENDA Maghreb, Morocco)

Democratic structures at local and international level need to be established and strengthened:

We need processes, which create an enabling environment for people's participation ... including the percolation of information to common people. We need processes, which recognize people's experiences and value their knowledge.
(Harsh Jaitli, PRIA, India)

"21st century democracies must make an effort to decentralize and demilitarize; to create small scale economies that include environmental, cultural and labour capital as assets, and to establish strong community and local governance."
(S. Diaz-Garcia, Faculty, Johns Hopkins University, USA)

Dr Barbara Gemmill, Kenya; Judy Imbanga, Indigenous Information Network, Kenya and other contributors agree that this can be achieved by listening to the marginalized people in their own environments:

"...opportunities for public comment and public access to information are important tools; mechanisms need to be built in at the local level to ensure this.

Most international advocacy processes need long-term linkages with local activism. There needs to begin an "examination at a global level of the kinds of spaces that need to be created for dialogue" and participatory democratic strategies, because these will begin to open local spaces and facilitate new participation and inclusion rituals. Trends in global development investment seem to make larger commitments to poverty and marginalisation, yet lesser attention is paid to creating robust institutions that will sustain participation of marginalized groups.
(Sheela Patel, Society for the Promotion of Area Resources)

Consolidate **partnership between North and South**

There are a growing number of NGOs based in the North who give technical skills and funding to marginalized groups all over the world, ... supporting education, capacity building and training in trade, finance and globalisation in terms of how it could work for them. I think that having the backing from NGOs in the North who can help financing but having the organizational base in the

marginalized community is the best way to achieve a solid front to globalisation.
(Andrea Powell, yAIDS, EcoLogic, US)

Role of **governments**

"Marginalization can be addressed by getting on with reform: good macroeconomic policies, sensible budget priorities, privatization, transparency in government, a judicial system that can enforce the rule of law, democracy, and reduction of barriers to trade and investment."
(Thomas L. Hutcheson, Macroeconomic Advisor, USAID/Nigeria)

Education is key in relation to effective participation of marginalised people. Education will enable marginalised people to become aware of their role and can help to transform them into "agents" of change. Education of civil society will enable people to understand their role in positively influencing the lives and livelihoods of marginalized communities

"Education is not only a human right it is also a precondition for achieving sustainability and to ensure marginalised people's participation in the global debate. Through education people create individual and collective awareness of social change, democratic rights and environmental issues. Education and knowledge is linked to power. Lack of education has through time always been used to suppress poor and marginalised people and this has not been changed with the process of globalisation."
(Morten Blomqvist, Ibis, Denmark)

Capacity-building is necessary to enable the marginalised to take charge of their socio/economic "development" - to become participators in the process of change rather than victims of change. This will lead to the understanding, skills and confidence necessary to engage in the discussion and decision-making and also enable them to engage in, and benefit from the implementation of these decisions.
(Peter Martin, WWF, UK)

"in most cases marginalization happens because of the lack of awareness, training, accessibility, poverty, institutional capacities of governments and NGOs and simple tradition of decision-making systems. Therefore, with [continuous] practice, the participatory approach might become the new tradition."
(Dr Iyad Abumoghli, Assistant Resident Representative, UNDP, Jordan)

Role of **technology and the media**

... use advances in technology to communicate and organize across every kind of border... Also the media should take responsibility to provide democratic public information throughout the world. We need to organize and demand in-depth coverage of real human stories rather than put up with regurgitated mindless babble of corporations and politicians.
(Don Scott Johnson, Citizens of Earth, US)

How should Earth Summit 2002 address this issue?

Address the conflict between environment and development priorities that takes place in sustainable development:

"Poverty often puts the poor as abusers in the limelight, and the victims become the perpetrators of crimes that larger global systems set up, making it easier for the poor to be further victimized"
(Sheela Patel, Society for the Promotion of Area Resources)

A more thorough understanding of the **basic framework** will eventually result in a different approach:

"Johannesburg will be an opportunity for us all to state which commitments and what means are necessary for civil society to fully play its role.... To be credible and reach beyond the simple dream, participation must be based on several frameworks adapted to the specific aspects of each society... All players should be able to call out for a referee should the commitments remain unfulfilled."
(Dr Magdi Ibrahim, ENDA Maghreb, Morocco)

The right questions need to be asked – not 'how should we help the marginalized' – but 'how should we stop marginalizing', we should not ask 'how should we help the poor', but 'how to eliminate poverty', and most of all we should ask 'how do we transform the patterns of economy

from exploitation to cooperation?
(Don Scott Johnson, Citizens of Earth, US)

Best practice

*"Earth Summit 2002 could be a good platform to highlight the achievements of the common people. This will not only provide recognition but motivate the rest of us to take up similar initiatives... Rather than projecting the depressing picture, we should try to bring achievements of poor people to the global arena."
(Harsh Jaitli, PRIA, India)*

Environmental Governance

*"International environmental governance coming out of the Earth Summit 2002 should reflect such mechanisms [of public access to information/of participation], making the process more accessible and meaningful to all the public."
(Dr Barbara Gemmill, Environment Liaison Centre International, Kenya)*

*Form an integral agenda and forms of sharing and dialogue... we need to underline that not single positions but the concert of aspects and views form a greater whole.
Review and include existing institutions like the UIA (www.uia.org) or the Network of worldwide projects (<http://benking.de/radio-bridge-overseas.htm>)
(Heiner Benking, Millenium Project, Germany)*

Build technological capacities

*"Earth Summit should support technological empowerment. Support indigenous technologies, support small and medium industries, which employ more people in poor countries, and design packages that address poverty and unemployment."
(Martin Marani, Industrial Ecology Institute, Kenya)*

*I suggest to make this phrase the criterion of this Summit: "Everything you do today is to prepare you for something better tomorrow"
(Reyhan, High school student, Azerbaijan)*

Summary provided by Jasmin Enayati, moderator of the Earth Summit 2002 online debate.
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