



Civil Society at a New Frontier: challenges and opportunities presented by economic growth

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Conference overview

Recent world events have brought a new urgency to discussions about the future of civil society.

In Europe, the threat of recession and Eurozone crisis paint a gloomy picture. In other continents the outlook is very different, with growth and new relationships contributing to a sense of confidence and energy. In North Africa and the Middle East, the spontaneous mobilisation of people has shown the power of determination allied to new technology. It has inspired others – notably the Occupy movement in America and Europe. Yet, many old challenges are ever-present and we have recently seen new laws in several countries which threaten the space for civil society to function freely.

Meanwhile, new philanthropists have entered the international development arena with large ambitions and have been looking for a more personal and active engagement in the work they fund. Private sector companies have also brought new alliances and ways of working, and new donor countries are increasingly making their mark. Many of these developments have happened outside the relationships of the traditional aid sector.

‘Sometimes decades pass and nothing happens; and sometimes weeks pass and decades happen.’

Ingrid Srinath (CIVICUS), quoting V.I. Lenin

These trends are complex and do not offer a single story. But they have the potential to profoundly change the way that civil society organisations (CSOs) and actors relate, develop and find their support.

The conference was an invitation to pause and take stock of what this all means. Our intention was to create a space to **explore what is happening** and to **construct together a better understanding of the implications for civil society**.

We asked:

- What are the challenges and what are the opportunities of the ‘new frontier’?
- What new ways do we need of doing things in the future, and how best can we collaborate to make that future one of social justice?

Opening remarks – Civil society in the context of global change

Dr Brian Pratt (Executive Director, INTRAC) opened the conference. Late 2011 was chosen for a reflective review of the challenges facing civil society as it was the 20th anniversary of INTRAC. It was a good time not just for a retrospective on the past two decades but on the more profound and immediate changes we’re seeing all over the world.

Organisations and institutions that survive and even thrive on change are those that recognise it, and the need to adapt to it; there is too much ‘business as usual’ thinking in our sector.

The conference grew out of two major concerns:

1. To examine the challenges of post-aid society for those states that have grown economically. What does this mean for their civil society, especially where it has been dominated by professional, externally funded NGOs (many of whom are facing funding cuts)? How can we defend a broader conception of civil society at this time of change?
2. A concern that certain instrumental conceptions have reductively redefined ‘civil society’. Often the concept is thought of as being equivalent to NGO-based service delivery, rather than a more complex set of relationships (formal and informal) which are essential to a wider, healthy, society.

A changing world – trends in development

- Tough economic times have seen governments and politicians move towards rightwing policies. There has been some undermining of aid generally, and of civil society support specifically (notably in the Netherlands, Sweden, UK and Canada). Other NGOs seem to have lost their ability to set their own agendas instead of blindly following national or international orthodoxies. Organisations scramble for new money from global funds whilst ignoring long-held beliefs.
- There has been a retreat from aid to middle-income countries and a general reduction in donor-served development programmes (The Dutch government has reduced external assistance to only 15 priority countries; the UK from 100 to 30). We are left with aid accruing to a small number of countries: those in acute poverty (mainly sub-Saharan Africa), security threats (which account for the UK government's involvement in Yemen, Afghanistan and Pakistan) or those that line up with national interests (as countries maintain contacts with their ex-colonies, such as the Dutch in Indonesia or the French in West Africa).
- International NGOs are following their governments in deciding to focus on poor countries rather than poor people. It is worth noting that this approach constitutes a historical break. Previously the usual approach was to work with pockets of poverty rather than adopting a nationally-based decision making process.
- CSOs are being co-opted into becoming not-for-profit commercial sub-contractors to the state. For many it is now normal to conflate NGOs and civil society, and in doing so to consider them merely as sub-contractors delivering social welfare services. How did we move from being charitable or private development organisations to becoming part of the state service delivery system through the privatisation of social welfare? This model is now being introduced through international NGOs and aid agencies (the Paris Declaration, for example, implicitly assumes this approach).

There has been a narrowing of foci within the aid industry:

- **Short-term results.** Aid procedures now focus on impact by prioritising the measurement of short-term quantifiable results of intervention. The immediate product of international assistance (outputs and outcomes) have wrongly been relabeled 'impact', whilst the real long-term impacts of social, economic and political interventions are for the most part ignored.
- **Narrow aims.** We have retreated from concepts of social or human development and now hide behind the immediate outcomes of very specific programmes. Thus general health has given way to immunisation, education to basic literacy, economic development to microcredit. In and of themselves these are all worthy activities, but ones which fall far short of the longer term goals of sustainable and equitable human development that previously drove many assistance efforts. Such narrowing is often accompanied by an acceptance that social safety nets, provided through CSOs, are the best that we can hope to offer.
- **Pressure on budgets** is already leading to changes in international aid and is likely to lead to a rethinking of future programmes as present planning periods end.
- **A lack of strategic focus and long-term goals** is evident in official and NGO aid agencies. Long term 'development' is assumed (especially by official donors) to be covered elsewhere in private sector-led finance and growth.

There is no single story to the current trends, but the conference gives us an opportunity to take stock, to better understand what is happening, and what the implications are for civil society. It is often difficult to take the time to do this in our daily working lives. Getting a sense of different perspectives should allow for a broader assessment of the challenges and opportunities, as well as enabling us to consider new operational practices and collaborations to reinforce social justice.

The aim is to look forward; we want to gain further insight into the changes taking place, and understand what this means for our own work and for the future direction of civil society.

Perspectives from the new frontier

A lot to live up to? Civil society in South Africa

Nomvula Dlamini, Executive Director of CDRA, gave the conference a South African perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing civil society in her country.

Although it played a widely acknowledged energising role in the liberation movement in 1994, civil society is in a more equivocal state today. Ms Dlamini highlighted what she saw as the priorities concerning civil society in the immediate future: the need to go beyond free elections to a truly 'democratised democracy'; and to address the inequalities brought about by economic growth. Growth and democracy may have put South Africa on the world stage but they will not solve the problems of relative poverty and climate change which confront the country today.

There is a need to revitalise the energies of civil society, to break free from patterns of uncritical thinking that government funding can bring about. If they want to be more than just service delivery agents for the state or the market, CSOs need to actively seek out opportunities for renewal. Only then can the country contribute to meaningful change.

Great potential and missed opportunities: civil society in India

Dr Rajesh Tandon, President of PRIA, began by analysing some of the implications of twelve years of economic growth upon civil society in India. On the one hand, official development aid has dried up; on the other, large amounts of funding are potentially available to NGOs if they are able to compete for it on the open market (with international consultancy firms and others).

Dr Tandon pointed to a generational divide between civil society activists. Many of those who began working following the period of emergency government feel that it is impossible to effect large-scale change, whereas the young people involved in activism are not constrained by history in the same way.

The government and the private sector have both become more involved in social development, but India has not progressed in terms of the Human Development Index (HDI). Despite massive growth in the country, civil society has yet to think beyond national boundaries and fully grasp the global implications of this for its role. Dr Tandon concluded with a call for civil society to develop partnerships for global solidarity within the region.

No new frontier? Civil society in continuum

Dr Michael Edwards, a distinguished Senior Fellow at Demos and a Visiting Fellow at Columbia Law School, emphasised that we must not be too quick to herald current events as representing a watershed for civil society.

The one generalisation that did hold is that civil society is continually reshaping itself in response to the forces around it – forces that are finely balanced in the present landscape.

As to what the future holds, Dr Edwards urged circumspection: the rise of Brazil and China challenges traditional models of growth; the advent of new technology enables different kinds of civic action to take place; climate change and the untenable consumption patterns of the rich will constrain future policy choices in ways not yet fully understood. The new social movements in the past year raise the possibility for genuine societal transformation.

However, Dr Edwards urged these new movements should not be over-romanticised, nor should we exalt the technology that seemingly enabled them to organise. The cultural and ideological differences that divide societies have become more and not less acute with growth.

The task of CSOs is to focus on the emerging middle ground between the challenges and opportunities, to help bridge the gap between ‘thick’ problems and the too ‘thin’ solutions provided by much of the development community.

A continuum of turmoil?

Dr Carlos Braga from the World Bank posed the question: are the changes we’re seeing temporary, or are we in a new type of environment? He urged that we jettison the ‘Niagara Falls paradigm’ – we cannot assume that the torrential ‘waterfall’ of current transition will eventually return us to a calm equilibrium. Rather, he argued, we in civil society are likely to experience a highly turbulent period in the short to mid-term, a period in which flexibility and adaptability will be key.



Dr Carlos Braga

Old certainties are dissolving rapidly; in the 1940s industrialised countries made up 80% of world GDP, the developing world now accounts for more than half of global output. There are further implications for sustained growth of countries such as China, India and Brazil. Dr Braga warned against relying too heavily on growth indicators from the recent past, and against trusting linear projections to predict the future. He pointed out that at the time of Elvis Presley’s death in 1977, there were 40 Elvis impersonators in the US; by 2000 there were 40,000. If we were to take this increase as a likely indicator of future growth, then within fifteen years approximately one in four Americans would be plying their trade as an Elvis.

The rise of the BRICs has posed a challenge to traditional growth models. In terms of aid, South–South interaction is likely to be an important forum for future discussion. In Dr Braga’s experience, countries in sub-Saharan Africa are more interested in learning from the examples of Brazil and Mexico than from Europe. Such changes represent a threat to the monopoly of traditional donors.

Dr Braga also pointed out the entrance of new actors may alter future models of organisation, and postulated that we might see more groups organising around specific objectives (such as the eradication of malaria, for example). He claimed that economic crisis is nothing new, but that the sovereign debt crises in Europe do pose a novel problem for the governments concerned. In the near future, official development assistance will likely decline, and financial pressures will place increasing emphasis on results-based agendas.

Working groups: Digging deeper into some major themes

Participants split into themed groups to engage in a focussed conversation identifying challenges and opportunities in the given areas. The following points emerged from the groups.

1. Civil society and the private sector

Key aspects/challenges:

- Operating in a market-driven way (i.e. more than just dealing with the private sector): values; transferability of private sector strategies.
- Dynamics of the relationship between the private sector and CSOs: funding (philanthropy); and co-partnering
- Role of civil society in holding the private sector to account: influencing; and whistle-blowing
- Growing role of social enterprise. Where do you define yourself in relation to the state, market, and civil society?

Opportunities:

- Knowledge opportunity: understanding the nexus between civil society, the private sector, and government; clarifying your organisation's position in the nexus
- Mitigating the negative impact of private sector involvement: sustainable social accreditation
- If we hold the private sector to account we need to be held to account ourselves
- Provoking us to look with 'fresh eyes' at our own processes, practices and values.

2. Civil society and the global context

Key themes:

- Role of INGOs and how to engage best with the world and work in partnerships.
 - How are we best structured?
 - What are our criteria for success?
 - How do we remain relevant?
- What are the big issues in the world that we need to engage with?
 - We should focus on the promotion of equity and justice.
 - There is a role for organisations based on caring to demonstrate an alternative model.
 - We must ensure that we know the context in which we engage.

Opportunities:

- New alliances and networks, encompassing new groups and new energy
- Building and sharing new knowledge and ideas
- Regaining civil society's independence (possibly entails reduced government funding).

Challenges:

- Understanding how we define success: can be linked to an assumption of growth; tends to be understood from donor and not recipient perspective
- Success at local level might see NGOs getting smaller but some success at global level relies on being big
- How (or whether) to engage with the angry youth?

3. Emerging societies, economic growth and 'post-aid'

Challenges:

- Inequality and poverty remain despite economic growth
- Threat to/competition with Europe
- New multilateralism
- Engagement in service delivery can reduce civil society independence
- Government restrictions on CSOs
- How to break the superiority complex? Export of expert systems
- How to find funds for South–South collaborations.



Opportunities:

- Working with the government on social programmes
- Focusing on excluded, marginalised groups
- Break moulds, new approaches from new players
- CSOs can play a role in governance.
- Importance of remittances to support poorer countries
- Opportunity for learning.

4. New support for civil society

Key aspects:

- Transformative engagement: facilitation; space; listening and learning; connecting, both South–South and across levels
- Link to aid – uncomfortable coexistence
- Facilitation
- Major challenge – its intangible nature.

Opportunities:

- Measure results scientifically, demonstrating value for money. Evidence base?

Overview of the presentations of the working groups

- Context: things have changed over the past 20 years. Extrapolating contexts of the past is not the best way to look forward.
- Relevance: is what we've been doing going to be relevant in a new context? For whom is it relevant?
- Framing: should we reframe ourselves? Citizenship is becoming more important, and there are different ways of framing new relationships. We should move away from the three 'sector' trap towards a more nuanced analysis.
- Modeling: the intermediation model is under stress from various sides. So we have to relook at the model. What political economy model will take us forward? What parts of civil society/social development will move civil society forward? What principle?

Where will the above take us in future? Where is the knowledge gap?

The challenge to democracy and the social contract

The conversation in this group highlighted some of the key issues perceived to be threatening the traditional concept of the social contract in a democratic system.

In Europe the increasing vesting of national power in a supranational body (the EU) means that the social contract is no longer something that exists between the individual and the nation state, but instead is between the individual and a multi-centred state.

Paul Thornton (INTRAC Associate) made the point that we as citizens are also involved in a number of 'economic contracts' – increasingly economic power does not lie in the same place as political power.

Ingrid Srinath (CIVICUS) said moreover that what we have witnessed in the past few decades is nothing less than the 'hostile takeover' of governments by private economic interests. The group then moved on to discuss the relationship between the market capitalist model of economic growth and democracy.

Alan Fowler (INTRAC Associate) asserted that recent events in Europe have demonstrated how economic growth can undermine democracy. As a mechanism for negotiating between the different (and often incompatible) 'imagined futures' of its citizenry, democracy in its current form is not an effective tool. More than this, the consumption which has characterised western capitalism in the recent past has ceased to be effective as a guarantor of stability, as evidenced by the global financial crises of the past few years.

Ingrid Srinath pointed out that these crises are simultaneously opportunities for civil society – the massive loss of trust that we have seen from citizens towards governments/the media/security organs etc surely necessitates a mediating role for civil society?

Paul Thornton argued against demonising capitalists and politicians – what we are seeing, he said, is a broader decline of inter-personal trust across communities and societies.

Marwa El-Ansary (Oxfam GB) disagreed to some extent: in the Arab Spring and Occupy movements of the past year we have seen that values like 'democracy' and 'civil liberties' do retain importance to the extent that people will spontaneously organise around them.

Alan Fowler attempted a synthesis of the discussion: the group has pinpointed the deficit of social trust, the paralysis of democracy and the instability and iniquity of market capitalism – the logical corollary of this is that we need to get back to micropolitics, to 'discussions around the kitchen table' and to genuinely debate these existing paradigms. This is not the job of civil society but of people actively engaging with each other and with the state – that is to say it is a question of *citizenship*. The three-sector division (i.e. state/market/third sector) is too simplistic an analytical tool to help us here.

James Crowley (Accenture) remarked that the emergence of the mass social movements in the past year independent of civil society was not necessarily a signal of failure. Perhaps we in civil society need to accept that these movements came about without our help, and to see them as positive developments regardless of this fact.

Marwa El-Ansary agreed, but added that the job is only just beginning and the task of civil society is to support people and movements striving for fundamental human values.

20th anniversary lectures – continuing importance of civil society

New constraints, new sources of potential

Ingrid Srinath (CIVICUS) began by remarking that the year had been one in which the prospects for civil society had fluctuated wildly. Answers to the question ‘how are you?’ ranged from terrified pessimism to euphoric optimism.

The ‘war on terror’ over the past decade has seen governments systematically rolling back some of the freedoms and space which civil society previously enjoyed. We have witnessed a corresponding scaling back of ambitions; the sweeping aims of the Earth Charter and the Millennium Declaration have been passed over in favour of short-term impacts.

Three decades of market fundamentalism have seen rapid and alarming increases in inequality, the marginalisation of large groups of people, as well as the takeover of governance by private interests (business, religious or military). Worse than this, was the takeover of mindsets by *homo economicus* and subsequent monetisation of everything of value (as well as the attendant paralogism that if something can’t be monetised and measured then it *can’t* be of value).



Ingrid Srinath

We have moved from conceiving of society as a collection of citizens with mutual needs, to a mass of consumers with competing appetites. The ‘feeding frenzy’ of the recent past can be likened to a social order based on Gandhi’s seven social sins: ‘wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, worship without sacrifice, politics without principles.’ The result of this frenzy was financial collapse in 2008.

However the response of civil society to the seemingly self-evident unviability of the capitalist system did not prevent governments from determining that banks that were ‘too big to fail’ would take precedence over citizens who were ‘too small to count’. CSOs of all types have seen their funding hit, but those whose outputs are not easily measured (such as rights-based advocacy groups) have been disproportionately affected by such cuts.

The financial crisis has created a situation where countries with a track record of speaking up for democratic values are less likely to do so if it conflicts with their geo-strategic interests. If you are a country that controls access to capital, markets and especially energy, you are more likely to get a ‘free pass’ from western governments than you were two years ago. During 2009 and 2010 CIVICUS recorded that 90 countries passed laws that constrained civil society freedoms in some way. We have seen a global trend towards criminalising dissent.

Compounding and exacerbating many of these issues is ‘the paralysis in global governance’. Ms Srinath employed the concept of ‘G0’: the developed world is increasingly focussing on domestic priorities, the US is ‘out to lunch’ until 2013 at least, European countries are primarily concerned with their own internal problems. China, India and South Africa want to be at the ‘global table’ but are not ready or willing to take up any global leadership responsibilities.

By the end of 2010 civil society had witnessed a decade of war on terror, the impacts of the financial crisis, failure of the anti-war protests, the dissolution of Copenhagen into nothingness. However recent events have reminded us of the truth of Lenin’s statement ‘sometimes decades pass and nothing happens; and sometimes weeks pass and decades happen’.

The last twelve months have seen four dictators ousted from office, a new country founded in Africa, near nuclear annihilation in Japan, earthquakes, floods and hurricanes on unprecedented

scales, citizen movements from Tunisia to Egypt to Delhi to Chile to Israel to the UK to Wall Street – the common slogan of these movements is ‘enough!’

Young people and the middle classes have been politicised or re-politicised on a mass scale, those formerly characterised as the ‘me’ generation are now those leading civil society. Their achievement has been to establish a consensus on the loss of faith in institutions: government, business, media, and the political class. The result is the opening up of genuine debate around the basic framework of societies (neoliberalism, market fundamentalism, or democracy, however defined). These movements have renewed our faith that citizen mobilisation can effect change.

They are also resisting the imposition by stealth of new social contracts, whereby governments have decided that their duty is to provide only a minimum of protection against social deprivation, a modicum of security and a competitive arena for the market. New movements are calling governments to actually negotiate these new contracts.

Ms Srinath concluded by highlighting five trends that CIVICUS have identified:

- Civil society space is volatile and changing.
- State-civil society relationships are limited and mostly unsatisfactory.
- The financial and human resource challenges for CSOs are continuing and, in some cases, worsening.
- We’re not doing a great job at practicing the values we preach.
- We are most successful when operating in networks and coalitions; we don’t do that enough, especially making links between local and national, and national and global, levels.

There is a mindset among INGOs and national NGOs where they have become embedded in power structures to the extent that they have lost touch with people on the ground. If we are to ensure transformative change, rather than a fleeting series of mass protests, an investment needs to be made in building connections between the more organised and the less organised. The message from the grassroots to the organised, traditional forms of civil society is: ‘we are going to do this with or without you. You have two choices: help us or get out of the way!’

Capacity for what? The role of civil society in the modern world

Dr Rajesh Tandon’s speech focused on the ‘core business’ of civil society.

The foundation of INTRAC was contemporaneous with the fall of the Soviet Union and the triumph of free markets, democracy and civil society. Organisational labels were changed from ‘non-profit’, ‘voluntary’, ‘non-governmental’, and ‘development’ – to ‘civil society’. When INTRAC was born, civil society was reborn and the discourse around the topic was energetic.

Civil society was often defined in contradistinction to the state – it was *for* the movement of people and *against* authoritarian regimes, single party rule and military dictatorship. Throughout the 1990s the amount of official development assistance transmitted through the NGO/civil society fraternity increased dramatically. Budgets for aid grew dramatically, and by the late 1990s the balance of funding was from the state rather than from the public.

INTRAC arose to build the capacity of INGOs around important areas – strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, organisational development. But, we are now living in a different world.

Dr Tandon asked, ‘what does capacity building imply in this day and age?’ We are living in a world where free market capitalism and to some extent democracy are failing. Moreover, they’re failing in the very societies in which they were born.

Many CSOs are experiencing a sense of disconnection from the civic energy, perceivable in new social movements. Reconnection with these movements, ‘with our own roots’, is a priority. What does ‘reconnection’ mean? Abandonment of what we know? No, it means its reapplication

through a different lens. The struggle for transformation is already taking place. If this struggle is taking place in our back yards, then our sights cannot be set 10,000 miles away.

Basic community organisation was a feature of the developmental landscape in the 1970s and 80s but we have lost touch with it since. What is civil society's core message? It is solidarity with humanity, common causes, and universal justice. Around these values different forms of civil society gather, some formal, some informal – but CSOs should be striving to create a sense of a common movement and linkages, using its capacity to build networks and coalitions between informal and formal groupings.



Rajesh Tandon (PRIA)

So what will INTRAC's 30th anniversary look like? A vision: set in East London or South Birmingham, full of community leaders, some unemployed and on welfare, some trade union organisers; they'll be discussing how they've been able to acquire capacity to do an exposé on the budget of municipal government, how they've been able to engage young drug users to become involved in sport, or how they've set up a cooperative in the local community.

Will this scenario lead INTRAC to doom? No, business as usual will lead us to doom. Nurturing capacities in communities is an important building block for both well-being and democratic practice. All kinds of capacity development will be required moving forward, but they may well be dramatically different from the kinds we have today. For us to achieve this we need to do some 'unlearning' (which can be painful) – we need to support each other in this process.

To ten years of unlearning, solidarity and capacity enhancement!

New social movements: Chile, London and Egypt

Egypt: revolution and civil society

Marwa El-Ansary (Oxfam GB employee and Egyptian activist) provided the conference with a dual perspective on one of the key events of 2011: she was personally involved in the 25 January revolution in Egypt as an activist, and also works in the region for Oxfam.

Ms El-Ansary emphasised that the Arab Spring is only the beginning of the transformation process: some countries are in a post-revolution setting (Egypt and Tunisia), some are still in transition (Yemen and Syria), some are subject to a ripple effect (Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories) and some are experiencing fledgling democracy (Libya).



Marwa El-Ansary

Space for civil society engagement is a cornerstone in any democratic transformation. In Egypt, Yemen, and perhaps Israel, there is a danger that civil society actors are being sidelined from the reform agenda. Arab women have been at the forefront of change but are facing the threat of marginalisation, especially with the rise of Islamist movements.

Historically, space for civil society to speak out has been limited throughout the region. You might think that revolution would have changed this – however this has not been the case. For example, over the summer of 2011, Egypt saw much anti-foreign funder rhetoric directed against certain civil society groups. In Israel legislation has been passed that restricts the ability of human rights groups to protest against violations and to receive foreign funding.

On 25 January people took to the streets. They initially sought not 'regime change' but the fulfilment of basic demands: constitutional reform and the end to the emergency law. Marwa spoke of a few hundred people becoming a few thousand in the space of just hundreds of metres on the way to Tahrir Square. What followed was history; people used their voices to bring about change and to bring down a tyrant. Egypt changed overnight: a country with no people power, no networks in terms of social movements or genuine civil society groups suddenly became the country harbouring the largest organised peoples' network in the region.

Youth groups organised themselves, and campaigned for reform (political, social and economic) after Mubarak. However, enthusiasm and hopes have been stifled following the revolution. The military council and army are increasingly seen as an obstacle to reform. When people took to the streets again on 18 November, the same pattern occurred: spontaneous organisation of people demanding political change, the authorities retaliating with excessive force and brutality, the numbers of protesters swelling as a result. Such mobilisation creates new networks, the emergence of young leaders, and raised stakes as demands for political change grow in scope and intensity. This pattern was replicated in Libya, Syria and Yemen.

Ms El-Ansary urged circumspection in assessing the rise of Islamic movements – especially if they come to power as a genuine expression of democracy. What the Arab world proved in the last year is that the existing world order was unsustainable, and that change was inevitable. Coalitions, groups, CSOs, organised social movements will always be at the centre of change. This is an opportunity not to be missed – we need to think about how we can interact with these new groups.

Chile: the student movement as national conscience

Anabel Cruz (Instituto de Comunicacion y Desarrollo) spoke about the Chilean student movement, something she described as a 'social and political earthquake'. Chile is known for being a successful economic model (no.21 in the OECD last year): it has experienced two decades of democracy following seventeen years of dictatorship. Why has this movement emerged in a country where there are good levels of social welfare?

The student movement has brought about changes in civil society, social mobilisation, and political representation. The revolt is against the highly segregated Chilean education system (a preserved relic from the dictatorship). The system is authoritarian, unjust and highly unequal – those who can pay can get a good education. As the president said in 2011, 'education is not a right, it is a consumable good.'

Since April the students in Chile have been mobilised, and the leaders of the movement are young and often female (Camila Valleja is the charismatic leader). The movement has the overwhelming support of the Chilean population – 89% according to recent reports.

Chile has recently witnessed the biggest demonstrations since the dictatorship. Ms Cruz spoke of multiple calls to action; the movement is not just about massive demonstrations, but about flash mobs, circus groups and spontaneous gatherings all over the country. Virtual networks and transnational links have been characteristic of this mobilisation.

The movement has also been innovatory; it has expressed itself through theatre and musical culture, as well as more traditional demonstrations. Established media has not attempted to portray this, but has tended to highlight only violence and repression.

Traditional civil society groups have been surprised and paralysed by the movement. The attitude of the students has been akin to Ingrid's injunction: 'help us or move out of the way'. Students have returned to classes but kept allocated 'protected hours' during which they can mobilise. Ms Cruz emphasised that civil society needs to understand, to follow and to learn from the experiences of the past year.

The last twelve months have shown the power of people to organise themselves, be it in the Arab Spring or the Occupy movement – the voiceless have gained a voice. The organisation of people around a common agenda is achievable. The challenge for civil society is to capitalise on this self-organisation and help these movements produce lasting change.

United Kingdom: ‘f*** this!’ – rallying against the status quo

Neil Howard (Occupy movement at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London) sought to emphasise the novelty of the Occupy movement: although he’s been involved with other CSOs over the past ten years, he’s never been involved in something like this. Neil spoke of a pervasive sense of ‘f*** this’ echoed from a wide spectrum of people engaged in the occupation, a feeling of disaffection with the status quo, of injustice (particularly generationally).

He identified four key areas in which the status quo is perceived to be failing:

- **Economic:** neoliberalism is in a state of crisis. In the UK the financial climate is particularly affecting the young: one in five young people don’t have a job. There is a feeling that the government has mortgaged the educational futures of the youth, cutting the educational maintenance allowance and increasing university fees.
- **Politics:** Neil spoke of the optimism around the Liberal Democrats prior to the last general election: their appeal was to young people and their promise was for change. However, these promises were swiftly broken. Politics seems divorced from most ordinary discussions happening in society. This is manifest in the fact that the political and economic systems were on the brink of collapse in 2008, and yet the brunt of the crisis has not been borne by those responsible for causing it.
- **Media:** mainstream media’s reputation is low, there is perceived ideological capture of even nominally independent institutions (such as the BBC) and a failure to grapple with critical questions of political economy. The result is a rejection of mainstream media, and a turning towards social and alternative media.
- **Civil society:** Occupy is an organic movement, self-organised due to a perception of an absence of existing structures to achieve such organisation. Civil society’s failure is exemplified in the ‘cannibalising’ behaviour of the Church of England. Occupy asked ‘what would Jesus do?’, yet to begin with, the more conservative elements in the Church distanced themselves from the cry of disaffection that the movement represented. Neil spoke of the perception that civil society had been co-opted as a service provider under the auspices of neoliberalism; it is not the radical voice that it once was.

In the Occupy gatherings the *process* is in many ways as important as the *ends*. Responding to the four failures above, what emerged in the movement were new forms of economy, political participation, and media. Neil has been personally involved with the educational side of the movement, a mixture of direct action protest (illegal assembly and discussion) and creating a space in which knowledge providers and knowledge receivers can come together.

Praxis is key – bringing people together to engage in the kinds of dialogue and participation that most young people haven’t been involved with beyond their school or their football team.

The next stage is to build a network of facilitators, educators, activists, scholars, schools and youth groups to build upon a widespread latent feeling of disaffection and rage (we saw expressions of this in the student protests and in London riots of this year). The aim is to harness this energy to specific political ends.

Open space groups: resources and future directions for civil society

Participants proposed discussion topics around what they saw as the key issues currently facing civil society. They then split into groups based on the topics and attempted to arrive at ways of taking their thinking forward in these key areas.

What is the new role for INGOs?

Simon Usher (Plan International) asked if we really understand how INGOs 'add value' – it's not always been easy to see in recent events (for example, during the Arab Spring). The 'international' element implies the role of acting as a connecting agent between civil society agents in different countries under differing governments and being a critical voice in areas where local CSOs cannot. These functions are not 'new'.

This suggests that the question is not *what* INGOs do, but *how* they do it. What are the organisational structures needed to remain relevant? The point here is that *the success of INGOs might not be measured by them getting bigger*. We need to ask how success is measured in the eyes of our stakeholders. A 'successful' INGO is one that communicates its success in terms of its principles and values, *this* should be their aim in the future.

Global responses to global problems

Mike Bird (Wiego) and **Neil Howard** (Occupy movement) addressed what they saw as two major interrelated problems: the increasing prevalence of global, transnational problems and the inadequate response of the neoliberal model. The neoliberal state has failed to regulate industry (leading to ecological problems) and is failing as a service provider. This, they argued, stemmed from exalting the market as the guiding rationale of both politics and civil society.

The response:

- Civil society needs to become more political – even at the cost of sacrificing funding.
- The free market doesn't solve enough problems for enough people. For instance, the unregulated commodity futures market in Chicago has a huge influence on how much food producers get paid. Civil society's job is to campaign on these problems as a first step towards dissolving them.
- Gaining an understanding of how global forces can affect people in localities all over the world is key. To effect this civil society should enhance its ties with grassroots organising (by facilitating learning exchanges and providing legal advice).
- Markets need to be put back in their place – civil society's role in becoming more political is to bolster governments in better regulating markets.

The mantra of civil society should be: 'markets for people, not people for markets'.

How do INGOs engage with informal movements?

Francois Lenfant (Cordaid) argued:

- If INGOs are true to their roots, they *have* to engage with new social movements. INGOs need to return to their core values and emphasise action as well as thinking.
- Engagement with new movements should enable INGOs to see where there is an overlap of values. Such engagement will also reenergise the work of INGOs and help build trust on the part of the new movements.
- The aim should be to develop collective agendas, with defined roles for INGOs and for other movements. This kind of work will build capacity for constructive conflict within organisations – a positive for organisational development.

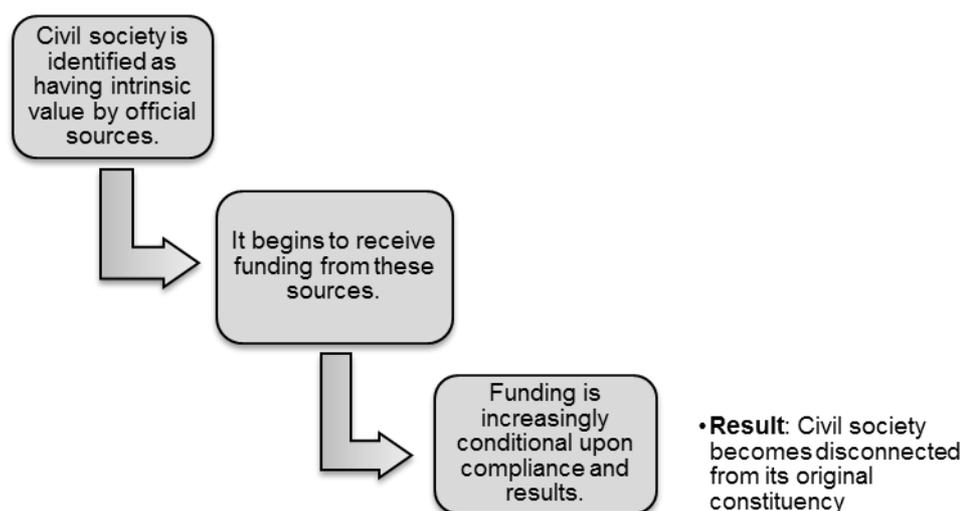
Gaps in the debate / What to do after the revolution?

Priya Lall (INTRAC)

- There are many people who are not represented by social movements – those who are time-poor, in poverty, disabled etc are all marginalised groups who need civic action and yet are likely to find it difficult to engage in active campaigning.
- After large scale civic action associated with revolutions, minority groups are often marginalised. In many former Soviet countries, INGOs have left because donors no longer see these countries as crucial.
- In Kyrgyzstan the 2005 revolution (with relatively little bloodshed) led to a burst of energy and celebration. After this however, there has been a return to conflict and a shrinking space for civic action – leaving minority groups especially vulnerable.

Beyond results

James Taylor (CDRA) and **Ton Meijers** (Oxfam Novib) traced what they saw as the degeneration of civil society:



Civil society is now at a low point and needs to reconnect. This might be achieved through:

- Formulating a self-assessment tool that measure civil society health and vitality.
- Increasing public awareness of the value of civil society (using new technologies).
- Spend at least as much time measuring what we believe counts, as we do measuring for the results industry.

Evaluation and closing remarks

Roy Trivedy summarised the conference proceedings, 'everything we've heard over the past two days emphasises complexity and insecurity.'

To the question of whether we are at a critical moment, Roy opined that it is likely that civil society will continue to evolve and develop, but we may well be at a critical period in terms of thinking about the way that we in the formal sector work.

INTRAC has created a safe space at this conference in which we can think freely and have taboo-breaking conversations. As to the future: a conference is only as good as the actions that follow it. We have a choice: be part of the changes that we are seeing, or not. It's fine to have a grand theory and vision, but we also need to demonstrate these through our actions.

Rod MacLeod's summary of issues raised

- How 'political' is our understanding of civil society?
- Is the three-sector model (the state, the market, civil society) obsolete?
- How will the change in the economic balance of power affect civil society's work, now that the question is about distribution more than about out and out shortages?
- What will the significance be of the social movements of the past year: the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement and the Chilean students' movement?
- How can established civil society engage with more informal movements?
- How do we adapt to the changing aid system: to increasing 'results-based' agendas and to new donors?
- Government spending cuts bring into sharper focus questions around civil society as state service providers; under what conditions we should accept funding?

'Everything we've heard over the past two days emphasises complexity and insecurity.'

Roy Trivedy, Department for International Development

There are many questions and few clear answers. Is the problem how to strengthen civil society, or how to make society more civic? Take a spirit of joyful rage back to the office and 'get on with it!'

Brian Pratt's closing remarks

Given the huge range of topics covered at the conference, it is not possible to come up with simple answers as to how we face the future.

- Brian endorsed Carlos Braga's metaphor; we may be going through 'the rapids' for the next twenty years or so.
- There's a generational challenge, the youth in the west can no longer expect to have the property or the pension that their parents enjoyed.
- We are at the end of consensus politics in Europe; large global and national challenges mean that political differences are sure to re-emerge.
- Are INGOs still fit for purpose in this changing world?
- Are CSOs engaged enough with their own societies?
- What is the role of civil society in middle-income countries? Though absolute wealth is increasing, structural inequality remains endemic.
- Civil society organisations need to have the space and the drive to innovate.
- One of the key challenges is to protect civil society from the government; from repression *but also* from co-optation and ties to funding.
- We need to remember that self-funded civil society groups are of significant size, scope and value.

Hopes and fears for the future

Chiku Malunga (CADECO) recalled a recent meeting with an elderly INGO director who had told him 'in your lifetime, or those of your children, development will not come to Africa. The leaders have deserted civil society and until the people take responsibility and stand up for themselves, we cannot expect to see lasting change in the next 100 years.' This meeting produced what Chiku referred to as a 'deep metaphysical shock'.

However, Chiku spoke about the positive message he had taken from Rajesh Tandon's speech – what civil society needs to do is to return to *community organisation* to build linkages and establish a sense of solidarity and a common movement. Working with people to create the space for them to take hold of their own future – this is a positive worth fighting for. If we must do this in a climate where resources are dwindling, well, 'a hunter with only one arrow does not shoot with a careless aim.'

View videos from the conference at: www.youtube.com/user/INTRACUK/videos