

**SEMI-ANNUAL CONFERENCE
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Blame it on Rio? Reflections and Opportunities from the 2012 Earth Summit

Tuesday, July 17, 2012
3:30-5:00 pm

Session Organizer:

- The Libra Foundation

Facilitator:

- Joe Foti, Senior Associate, The Access Initiative, World Resources Institute

Panelists:

- Maria Antonieta Alcalde, Deputy Director of Public Affairs, International Planned Parenthood Federation/Western Hemisphere
- Nikhil Aziz, Executive Director, Grassroots International

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This session provided a space to reflect on the outcomes (or lack thereof) of the summit. Joe Foti of The Access Initiative and the World Resources Institute provided a brief overview of the conference and its formal and informal goals, principles, and themes. Alcalde situated reproductive rights campaigns within the conference and Aziz discussed the roles and relationships of activists, donors, and politicians in the context of the summit and in the broader human rights arena as a whole.

Some key issues touched upon included:

- The missed opportunities
- The integration of a human rights framework into the conference
- The compendium of commitments
- The access to information initiative led by The Access Initiative among others and why it is necessary for democracy
- New rights identified such as the right to water

Maria Antonieta Alcalde, International Planned Parenthood:

Alcalde expressed mixed feelings from the perspective of Planned Parenthood (PP). The topic was so big and broad, and so many actors brought different agendas that it was difficult to come up with something comprehensive. On the other hand, she noted that participation was essential and that women were underrepresented; although there were more present than in years prior. She also noted that it is one of the few spaces where politicians, grassroots activists, and NGOS come together. Still, many economists and environmentalists questioned PP's

presence there, asking: What do human rights and reproductive rights have to do with sustainable development? She noted that we cannot have sustainable development without equal access to family planning.

Some key gains that PP noted in the final agreements:

- Commitment to full implementation of ICPD including sex and reproductive rights and the protection and promotion of all human rights
- Provision of universal access to reproductive rights
- Reduction of maternal and child mortality
- Strengthening of health systems
- Commitment to women's equal participation

Some Gaps noted:

- No reference to reproductive rights

Challenges

- Narrow focus that defines development as poverty reduction; human rights are a luxury under this framework
- Too many processes going on at the same time
- Lack of clarity

Maria concluded that we need to do a better job of bringing together the human rights and development agendas in both the discourse and in technical terms (such as goals and targets).

Joe Foti, Access Initiative and World Resources Institute:

The Access Initiative was present at the summit to promote free access to information for a strengthened democracy. He highlighted principle 10, which provides a way for governments, civil society organizations, and international organizations to work together to implement practical solutions to provide the public with access to information, participation, and justice for environmentally sustainable decisions. Foti stated that it is necessary to improve national and subnational implementation of principle 10 and obtain legally binding international frameworks and citizen initiated compliance.

Foti noted:

- Need for solid commitments
- 3 options to promote free access: expansion of existing convention, regional conventions, or the launching of a global convention
- celebrated Chile's commitment to launch a convention process
- 10 countries signed on to a declaration passed to increase information access

Nikhil Aziz, Grassroots International

Nikhil discussed the limits and potential of the summit.

He noted:

- People were feeling it was a wasted opportunity, but it depends on to whom you were talking
- EU said they didn't get everything they wanted, but for some THAT was a good thing

- Nigeran activist says they were fighting for crumbs; original principles barely made it into the official document
- 3 “new” areas within this: green economy, enhanced role of UN environmental agency (UNEP)
- Lack of agreements on technological transfer
- Role of UNEP:
 - Is one of main promoters of green economy; problematic but also more democratic compared to G20 or G8 where there is some more participation from developing countries
- No binding mechanism for sustainable development goal: its lack could make them difficult to enforce, but on the other hand there is space where civil society can have some role in defining them

Nikhil ended with a question: Are we all wasting our time getting grantees out there? He answered no because if there weren't that many people then things would have been worse. Also, in all of these spaces there are always opportunities. Collectively grantees can take advantage of those spaces/divisions. He added that there are new and exciting movements coming together on one global campaign.

Question: There are a lot of different processes going on. I wonder how we as civil society prioritize and how we as funders can work in harmony?

Comment from Joe: From my particular network, the South Africa commitment and the Indonesian forest agreement were all part of three demands supposed to go into a compendium. In this case it worked out for the best. Going forward, we are going to focus on the official convention process. In terms of environmental and development issues, we all talked about procedural rights and having good strong, language because they are content-less without that. Civil society can use help learning to articulate that and learning to become a bridge between procedural and substantive rights.

Question: I'm not clear what the core HR issues are in development? I think the role of human rights is not quite the same as a political role. I understand the transparency side, but I'm not clear in the rest of it where you think the core human rights issues are. Do you see a division between human rights and politics?

Comment from Maria: There is no division. We need to do a better job of setting the framework because that which we do have is jeopardized by the fragmentation.

Comment from Nikhil: Some of us funders see ourselves as both. We don't make a distinction in that sense. In the political, you cannot take the political (with a small p) out of anything. It is not so much of an issue.

Question: Maria, having learned what you learned, what would be some of the concrete next steps?

Comment from Maria:

Specifically for Rio, we have to be on top of those processes. We want the next agenda to be concrete. We know governments want that because it's easy to track so it's very likely we will have something like that. We also need to have the capacity to involve ourselves in processes around the world. We need a better discourse to connect the human rights framework with the development discourse. We also need better tools to connect human rights to the technical discourse to determine which indicators we can use to measure. In terms of next steps, following the UN—which is challenging because it's a technical thing—is important to be able to include civil society.

Question: Several of you have said “the civil society space,” so then what about the UN? Will the UN ever make a difference? Or is it a failed institution? Why aren't we making that space in a different way?

Comment from Nikhil: It's important because it's still the closest thing we have in terms of democratic participation.

Comment from Maria: It's far from being ideal but it has opened the potential to influence international policy like never before. It is very empowering to be able to communicate with high-level officials. That experience allowed me to come back and do a different type of advocacy. The US is the place where people hate the UN the most and I think more work needs to be done to make people here understand the importance of the UN.

Comment from Joe: Civil society crystallizes around official processes so I don't think we are going to stop going. We failed in a big way trying to fight to be like the government than doing things governments can't do: like holding governments accountable.

Question: Throughout the day, we were talking about the need to break down the artificial silos between our sectors. And we know that there are seamless areas of work that have multiple dimensions to them, however we DO have sectors so we have to address very clearly what exactly the human rights dimensions are, and what exactly an HR approach really looks like. We at the NGO is have to be explicit about what those issues are. You said that one of the most exciting things was the idea of the campaign. We haven't done well with developing a global campaign and clear goals. Can we talk about what that might look like and what the next steps are?

Comment from Nikhil: It's very early but there is some talk of bringing together different movements together to talk about how the financialization of nature is going to have an affect on all of these different sectors. There has been some talk of a meeting in India.

Question: What is your opinion about funding gaps? Where should funding be directed?

Comment from Nikhil: It is important to keep in mind that a lot this collaboration happens organically and our role is to facilitate that, not to lead it. For funders to direct that would be disastrous.

Comment from Maria: It depends where you want to put the emphasis. If its on social mobilization then access to information is very important. So to have someone put something together in a very simple, easy way. In terms of political change, we don't have the tools to be a

part of the technical discussions. Next is accountability. We need the mechanisms to make governments accountable.

Comment from Joe: We need resources to hold governments accountable and citizen initiated compliance mechanisms. He adds that history tells us it is good to have multiple justice mechanisms.

Question/Comment: We haven't been talking about corporate power. The trouble is the intersection with corporate power.

Comment from Nikhil: A dangerous trend is the increasing influence of corporations.