

Eyes on the Prize:

Achieving Human Rights Through Movements, Networks and Citizen Power

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Funders play a critical role in the increasingly urgent project of strengthening the capacity of global and local citizen movements to actively engage in the design and implementation of international instruments and standards. In particular, the coming three to five years will be a pivotal time for citizen movements for human rights and human dignity throughout the world. A range of international standard-setting and policy-making processes that will determine the future of livelihoods, human rights, climate change and democracy will require proactive monitoring and engagement from citizen groups, movements and civil society at all levels. These include:



Source: Social Watch (www.socialwatch.org)

- The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20), including the process of developing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and related talks at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
- Global and national processes related to the United Nations High Level Panel to define a Post-2015 development framework to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
- The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), specifically linking the ICPD Beyond 2014 process to the UN Development Agenda
- Beijing Platforms of Action review and implementation and potentially a 5th World Conference on Women, with the development of the post 2015 MDG Framework
- The policies and processes of the cluster of powerful economic entities that include the G20, World Trade Organization (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, among others

Those seeking to advance human rights at the local and national levels who ignore these global processes do so at their peril. At one end of the spectrum, the MDGs, Beijing Platform for Action and Agenda 21 are important global processes that establish norms, principles, and standards that are important though often non-binding. At the other end of the spectrum, institutions of economic governance like the G20, the IMF, and the World Bank have the capacity to set policies and binding conditionalities. Their policies, in turn, determine a national government's ability, in terms of policy and resources, to implement the social, economic, ecological and gender equity priorities of its citizens.

Building Power to Advance Women's Rights

The recently concluded 57th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) -- the global policymaking body for women's rights -- offers a number of relevant insights into how citizen movements can and must influence major global actors and processes. Some states sought to turn back advances on women's rights by decades: the Holy See, Russia, Syria, Egypt, Iran acted in coordination to disallow the mention of a broad range of sexual and reproductive rights and violence against women,

human rights defenders and sexual minorities. Were it not for the civil society actors who thronged the hallways outside the negotiations and flocked to sessions during the parallel Non-Governmental Organization CSW Forum, the efforts of some state and non-state actors to undermine gender justice globally would have gone unchallenged.

These fights to preserve and advance human rights are only possible when citizens have the resources and capacity to mobilize locally, nationally, regionally and globally. This capacity to develop relationships, data, and strategy to engage negotiating bodies like the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and mobilize to prevent efforts to overturn already achieved global consensus is fundamental in today's high stakes environment.

Now that the CSW has produced a global outcome document, these same groups along with their national and local counterparts need the capacity to continue their mobilization and advocacy efforts to ensure that governments are held accountable to the agreements.

If the women's rights movement is to consolidate its gains globally and at the country level, the movement will need the capacity to deepen and expand mobilization to ensure accountability around existing and new commitments.

Globalizing Economic Rights, Democracy and Self-Determination

Another example of the importance of citizen engagement with global standard setting is the debate around global economic and financial frameworks. While global standards related to human rights, gender equity and poverty eradication are often voluntary, the same cannot be said for those global standards that exist to promote global commerce. The globalization of what amounts to the "rights of global commerce" has been enshrined by an unprecedented growth in law, policy and institutions like the G20, the WTO, and the IMF, among others. What distinguishes the economic players from everyone else is a sophisticated global framework of compliance and enforcement mechanisms.

These mechanisms often supercede place-based interests and domestic law and policy related to food security, livelihoods, housing, women's rights, self-determination, climate, biodiversity and other basic needs and rights outlined across a range of human rights, environmental and development treaties.

Action directed at transforming the global economic system is particularly urgent right now as we enter a period where the rules of global governance, economy, finance, and development are being re-written on many different fronts. One example of how these economic fora can and do shape the struggle for human rights is the recent G20 announcement that global infrastructure development is going to be a central plank of its global "development" strategy. This commitment to expand mega-projects has major implications for every funder, organizer, analyst, and movement concerned with human rights, livelihoods, climate, women's rights, ecological sustainability and democracy.

Strengthening the capacity of citizen movements to engage these processes in meaningful ways is crucial in a political context in which the rhetoric of economic austerity has drowned out citizen's voices seeking rights-based approaches in both global and domestic policy spheres.

The Arab Spring, Occupy, the Indignados and longstanding movements for workers' rights, climate justice, women's rights, and democracy are struggling to consolidate their movements, find new footing and appropriate sources of support in this increasingly volatile and hostile environment.

Four Key Strategies Funders Can Support

Here are four strategic points of entry for funders to build and strengthen citizen movements to engage in international policy and processes over the next several years. Funders can support efforts to:

1. Build the capacity of civil society organizations to advocate for the implementation of existing and new commitments, e.g. gender justice (outcome agreements of CSW and CEDAW) and follow-up to the Rio +20 Conference, including the alignment of national laws with these global compacts.
2. Create the conditions for established and emerging leadership to forge strategic partnerships to ensure that human rights are institutionalized in structures at all levels. Focus on making inclusion central to key global negotiating fora and plans of action. One example is to support citizen monitoring of UNFCCC, Post-2015 and multi-lateral institutions by funding strategic alliances that prioritize the voices and visions of marginalized populations and communities and utilize a human rights lens. This could range from general support funding to funding for skill-building for marginalized communities to participate fully in decision-making at all levels to support for policy development to grassroots convenings to develop solidarity, shared knowledge, and strategies.
3. “Follow the Money” and “Unrig the Rules.” Civil society groups are coalescing around the importance of new and sustainable sources of revenue to support a range of human rights, social justice and development priorities. In addition to tax justice campaigns and the Financial Transactions Tax (FTT) on the revenue side, funders can help citizen movements create a multiplier effect by supporting groups working to develop innovations in law and policy that give citizens the tools to monitor and hold corporations, governments and multi-lateral institutions accountable.
4. Learn from the successes and failures of major global initiatives like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in order to develop innovative, human rights-centered Post-2015 commitments and strategies for action and accountability.

Funders are often asked to make false choices – women’s rights vs. economic development; global vs. local; grassroots organizing vs. policy advocacy, and the list goes on. It does not serve our interests to de-link the climate justice debate strategy from a structural analysis of the global economic drivers of climate change and the disproportionately negative impacts on the poor, women and women’s rights. Separating the Post-2015 Framework development or the Arms Trade Treaty negotiations from enforceable commitments to address gender justice undermines the hard fought progress that citizen movements have made.

Funders have the opportunity to act as indispensable partners in laying the groundwork that will determine the sustainability of human rights movements. Strong citizen movements that have the capacity to “connect the dots” across sectors, borders, policy silos and geopolitical divides are key to building power, systems, and structures that advance human rights for the long haul.