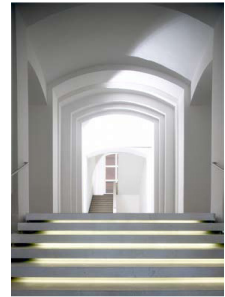


Berlin Civil Society Center

2009 CHAIRS & CEOS MEETING

9 March 2009



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 05 and 06 March 2009 the global Chairs and CEOs of twelve of the leading civil society organisations gathered in Berlin for their second annual meeting addressing two

Key Issues

Global Economic Crisis: The workshop wanted to explore how to deal with the crisis, both in supporting the poor and the most vulnerable and in positioning our own organisations.

CSOs' Global Governance: Building on last year's discussion, the workshop wanted to identify key requirements for enhanced effectiveness at global and local levels and develop concrete steps towards more effective governance systems.

Participants

Action Aid International
Amnesty International
CARE International
ChildFund Alliance
CBM
Greenpeace International
International Save the Children Alliance
Oxfam International
Plan International
terre des hommes International Federation
Transparency International
World Vision International

Key Note Speaker

Martin Khor, Executive Director, the South Centre

Global Economic Crisis

Martin Khor presented a number of deeply worrying data showing both the breadth and depth of the economic crisis. We are observing "the beginning of the beginning" of the crisis and poor countries will be hit especially hard. Net capital flows to developing countries have fallen by 80%, foreign currency reserves are dropping dramatically and the refinancing of debt is threatened. Another debt crisis is on the horizon and a new round of debt relief may be required. The return of commodity agreements, stabilising the price of key export goods of developing countries, would be a major step in helping these countries overcome the crisis.

For civil society organisations (CSOs), it is crucial to prepare for a major and long lasting crisis. Some predictions expect an increase in the number of poor people globally by up to 1 billion. Supporting many more people globally while their own income basis is under severe threat will put civil society organisations under enormous pressure to increase their efficiency and effectiveness. CSOs need to increase their programme delivery capacities and become stronger advocates for global policy changes.

The collapse of the global finance system, the resulting increase in unemployment and poverty, and climate change cannot be fixed with “business as usual”. In-depth policy change is required, and global CSOs should play a major role in the respective discussions. Cooperation among CSOs in developing and spreading their key advocacy messages is crucial.

Given the increasing strain on their capacities, civil society organisations need to manage fewer resources more effectively:

- They need to develop risk management plans, including worst-case scenarios.
- More transparency and better accountability throughout the organisation are key.
- CSOs need to implement tighter cost controls, secure better cooperation internally among their national affiliates and externally with other CSOs, and share services more effectively.
- If downsizing is required it should not hamper future development. Downsizing should make the organisation fitter for the future, reinforce its strategic focus, and implement necessary changes which may be more difficult to effect in better times.
- Required changes have to be geared towards a clear purpose in line with the organisation’s mission. Leadership and communication are crucial success factors of any change process.
- CSOs should improve the effectiveness of their own global governance.

As a consequence of the crisis, expectations of donors, activists, partners, beneficiaries and the public at large will probably change and require CSOs to rethink their own roles and reposition themselves. CSOs have an agenda of hope based on clear humanitarian values: in the major crisis we are facing today, they need to show credible leadership: they should embrace change and they should take a lead in supporting their key stakeholders in embracing and navigating necessary or unavoidable change.

CSOs’ Global Governance

As a first step in order to improve the effectiveness of their global governance, CSOs need to define the optimal distribution of work between the local, national and global levels. In doing this, a number of key factors need in depth-consideration:

- The “global strategy versus local efficiency” dilemma of identifying a consistent global strategy allowing appropriate local decisions.
- The growing need for consistency of the global brand.
- The insufficiency of existing governance and management structures, established for cooperation between the national and global levels, which do not provide an appropriate basis for today’s digital communication and cooperation between local actors organised in global networks.

- The need to agree on global quality standards and the transparency and accountability required to secure their implementation.
- Decision-making by the most affected and the most competent rather than exclusively by the ones who provide the resources.
- Learning from local knowledge: permanently review the global perspective against the backdrop of local realities.

When designing the optimal governance model for a federated organisation, we should start from the desirable optimum and not from the status quo: today, most international CSOs are defined - and sometimes paralysed - by the antagonism between national and global actors, while developments are increasingly shaped by global networks of groups and individuals who are acting locally. Internet-based fundraising and communication will not be restricted by national borders and demand global governance and management. Efficiency gains to be reaped by a global approach to human resources, finance and IT management will need a globally consistent direction. And truly global challenges like the economic crisis, climate change, global migration, terrorism etc. will demand global strategies. In devising the most adequate management and governance approaches for this changing environment, CSOs should review the new, light, highly flexible and organically developing leadership structures generated by the needs and opportunities of digital communication. At least in an interim period, traditional challenges like national legal and tax requirements cannot be ignored. Governing and managing in this highly complex and rapidly changing global environment needs strategic and courageous leadership.

Some of the concrete challenges which organisations present at the meeting are wrestling with include:

- Agreeing global priorities and securing their implementation at national level.
- Setting and enforcing governance best practice globally.
- Securing personnel development, integrity and continuity of volunteer Boards.
- Maintaining coherence between governance and management, both at global and national levels.

Concluding the governance discussion, there was a widely shared understanding that we have to overcome the antagonism between the global and national levels in our organisations, and work together on new governance and management models which are more appropriate for running the social networks of the future. At this stage, it is crucial to bring leaders of national affiliates into the discussion. The Berlin Civil Society Center offers to dedicate one part of the Global Skill Share in October to this topic.

Outlook

Next year's Chairs and CEOs meeting should:

- Broadly encompass the same group of participants, plus 2 to 3 organisations from the South (Islamic Relief, BRAC, etc)
- Look at cultural aspects in the work of our global organisations
- Entail a "Peer Advice" session
- Include some more external perspectives, especially from the corporate sector.