

TERRAVIVA

The Independent Newspaper of the Polycentric World Social Forum. Karachi, 24-29 March 2006



'Our lives are not for sale'

Resistance was the word of the day at WSF. Against economic policies that suffocate the poor and destroy life, against oppression and discrimination against women and minorities, against wars and hatred imposed on peoples from the centres of power. Pages 3-5



Civil Society Must Oppose, but Also Propose

As thousands of activists attend the three World Social Forum (WSF) events in Mali, Venezuela and Pakistan, there are those both within and outside the WSF process that are asking, What global solutions is the WSF generating?

While the WSF has consciously sought to create a space for dialogue and engagement and not to produce agreement on specific policy positions, the Forum does provide a useful opportunity for different civil society actors to find common ground, engage in joint strategizing, and plan joint activities for the future. The launching last year of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP) in Porto Alegre was a conscious decision by GCAP organizers to align this effort with the broad and positive message of the WSF that "Another World is Possible". There was no expectation, though, that all WSF delegates would agree with all the policy positions it advocated.

To those critics who have tried to dismiss the WSF as "the anti-globalisation forum" it is important to point out that in essence what the Forum represents is a voice of concern and criticism about the deeply inequitable and painful social and economic realities that ordinary citizens are facing in both rich and poor countries

today. In a relatively short period of time, the WSF has come to represent a yearly occasion where civil society can draw attention to some of the enduring and new injustices that citizens around the world face, from conditions relating to growing militarization, the deepening democratic deficit, inequalities in global governance, to growing human rights violations. This is a just and important contribution.

The WSF has come to represent a loose network of forces around the world advocating social, economic, and political justice. To dismiss it as simply an "anti-globalisation" movement is to ignore, among other things, the fact that it is one of the most globalised movements in the history of this planet.

While generating agreement on specific policy positions in the delegates' numerous areas of focus would be extremely difficult for the WSF decision-making structures, particularly given the diversity of views within the Forum, I think there is a balance that might be found in highlighting the propositional elements in the WSF message. The Forum's critique of the current global political and economic order clearly contains kernels of proposals for change.

Although it would be a mistake to strait-jacket all WSF delegates into an arti-

To those critics who have tried to dismiss the WSF as "the anti-globalisation forum" it is important to point out that in essence what the Forum represents is a voice of concern and criticism about the deeply inequitable and painful social and economic realities that ordinary citizens are facing in both rich and poor countries today.

cially-constructed consensus on policy positions, it is important that the Forum correct the myth that there are no major policy directions that most WSF delegates share and advocate — both within and outside of the WSF.

For example, on the question of the debt crisis facing many countries in the South, there is already a broad consensus on a fairly clear set of recommendations. While there might be specific differences between various participating organizations, both

within a particular WSF coalition and amongst WSF delegates, finding a way to more forcefully communicate areas of considerable agreement is a viable possibility. The leading coalitions in the different sectors can take the lead in advancing these positions in the run-up to, during, and after the WSF events, whether through high-profile media conferences or other specific activities organized around the WSF.

It is also important to learn from other civil society gatherings that put themselves under pressure to agree on a communique and a set of resolutions. We have often seen how a sense of unity is dissipated by an overwhelming focus on deciding which specific words should go into a resolution — a process that hobbles creativity and innovation. Keeping demands for change at a broader level — whether regarding the environment, gender, or prosecution of the so-called "War on Terrorism" — might be worth pursuing, while recognizing of course areas of difference. Such a move would silence those who argue that the WSF crowd knows how to complain about what is wrong with the world but is incapable of saying what should be done to make it more just, equitable, and sustainable.

The World Economic Forum, with considerably greater resources and far more access to the media, is of course in an advantageous position in terms of getting its messages out via most mainstream media networks. However, given that one of the driving motivations of the WSF was to serve as a counterpoint for the WEF, it becomes critically important that in the battle of ideas, vision, and perspectives on what world we want to create for future generations, the WSF serves as an enabling space which can present alternatives that reach the hearts and minds of people who are not yet actively involved in the commendable efforts to ensure global justice.

Kumi Naidoo is Secretary-General of Civicus: World Alliance For Citizen Participation



TERRAVIVA



TerraViva is an independent publication of IPS-Inter Press Service news agency. The opinions expressed in TerraViva do not necessarily reflect the editorial views of IPS or the official position of any of its sponsors. IPS gratefully acknowledges the generous support of Action Aid, iBase and Novib/Oxfam for the production of TerraViva.

Publisher
Mario Lubetkin

Chief Editor
Johanna Son

Reporters
Zofeen Ebrahim
Sumera Naqvi
Stanislaus Jude Chan
Sara Hasan
Zubair Ibrahim
Bikash Sangraula
Frances Suselo

Translators
Zubair Ibrahim
Maria Laura Mazza

Photographers
Mohammad Ahmed
Fuhz

Managing Editor
Alejandro Kirk

Editor
Alecia McKenzie

Layout and Design
Cristina Pozzobon (Editor)
Rosana Pozzobon
Wasim Sidiqi
Muhammad Ali

Webmaster
Marcelo Boedo



Protest against IMF and World Bank policies yesterday

they have no land to stand on.”

Representatives from pro-poor groups in the region see the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the IMF as the culprits behind the poverty and unemployment in the region. They see a need for a concerted fight from the minorities to resist this global machine — that for the sake of economic efficiency — is turning everything, including schools, hospitals, water, electricity and forests, into a commodity for those who can pay.

Thus, the fisherfolk in Sindh fight the Pakistani government that sells fishing territories to big businessmen, a multinational company that buys them, packs them and distributes them, and the consumers who purchase the fish and fish products in posh bazaars.

“With big companies buying fishing territories, there is nothing left for the small fishermen,” says Adam Gandro, Chairman Keenjhar Fishermen Welfare Society.

The onslaught of globalisation also threatens to weaken the voices of minorities fighting for their language and culture, and Dalits fighting for their rights to equality as human beings. The Pakistani government is interested in the Kalabagh dam, and not at all in recognising Siraiki as the fifth nation in Pakistan.

“We are moving ahead in the wrong direction,” says Ashok Bharati, convenor of the World Dignity Forum. “Natural resources and public utilities belong to the people. It is their property.”

A lot that happens in cabinet meetings and in government offices never comes under the scanner. However, in India pro-poor activists have had small victories in their fight for transparency. Thanks to lobbying from civil society, legislation has been formulated in India allowing every citizen to access any kind of public interest information from government offices. Officials face a fine if they do not disclose information.

“We lobbied for this after realising that it is important for the people to know what the government does in the name of the poor, and where the money that comes for the poor goes,” says Preeti Sampat, an activist from Rajasthan, India who works on the poor’s right to information.

Knowing more about the way our governments work might be one way to stop them from making decisions that serve a few at the expense of the majority.

Communities

RESIST

Developing country governments face increasing pressure from western powers, the World Bank and the IMF to hand control over natural resources to the private sector. These policies displace the poor, but at WSF Karachi, they refuse to be sidelined.

‘Ugly’ Development

By Bikash Sangraula

Whether it is against the megadam to be built over the Narmada River in India or the Kalabagh dam between Sindh and Punjab provinces in Pakistan, communities who share a legacy of oppression, social exclusion and economic deprivation vow to resist this aggressive brand of development.

This development comes at the expense of fisher communities and often also entails eviction of tens of thousands of people living in settlements on the banks of the rivers and their tributaries. And the beneficiaries? Who else but the rich?

In the end, copious water runs from their taps and their houses are lit with electricity. Most of them are never aware of the human costs of the facilities that come their way.

According to a country survey on India by World Commission on Dams India, at least 75 percent of some 40 million people displaced for large dams in India over the past five decades have never been resettled.

“With globalisation, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and western powers are forcing developing countries to go for big projects and hand over public utilities to the private sector,” said Subhashini Ali, leader of Communist Party of India (Marxist).

While the widening of economic inequities between the rich and poor countries is already there, the drive to privatise services that traditionally were the mandate of governments increases economic inequities within developing countries, she argued at the plenary on People’s Resistance Movements at Sports Complex Stadium Monday.

The drive to privatise is underway in South Asia at a time when the whole region is going through a period of grave democratic crises. It is easy these days in countries like Pakistan, Nepal, Burma, and even in India to silence voices raised against megadevelopment projects initiated at the cost of the poor.

With the region in turmoil, governments are all the more vulnerable and therefore all too willing to win the confidence of the rich and the powerful, both within and without, by going for infrastructure that have adverse effects on small populations that cannot speak up for themselves.

“Bureaucracy sleeps over this problem,” says Waqar Awan, leader of All Pakistan Katchi Abadi Alliance. “Those evicted from their settlements spend a few years running after false promises. In the end,

Court Finds Many Sins against

Women

A tribunal at the WSF looks into wars against globalisation and women, and women's role in resisting these wars.

By Sumera S Naqvi

From sex selection, erosion of food security, the commodification of women in a globalised economy, a plethora of 'sins' against women was discussed at the World Court of Women on Resistance to Wars, Wars of Globalisation and Wars against Women at the WSF.

Wahu Kaara, a representative of the African Social Forum and one of the judges at the session, invigorated a sleepy audience on Mar. 26 by announcing that the "life economy is the flipside of the market economy guarded by military force, that has continued to sustain our art and nobody should take that from us. Our life is not for sale."

Throughout the day, speakers presented cases from Indonesia, Iraq, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Palestine, Sri Lanka and other countries in the session organised by the Asian Women's Human Rights Council (AWHRC).

The speakers touched upon the issues of the Dalits, Muslim minorities living in India's Gujarat state, the victimisation of Iraqi and Afghani women, Palestinian women in prisons, migration and displacement of workers, and others.

The jury, or the "voices of wisdom" as the AWHRC called them (and which Tunisian human rights activist Corinne Kumar said were "not biased"), included eminent judges from Pakistan, Majida Rizvi and Nasir Zahid; Indonesian social worker Ita Nadia; Wahu Kaara; and Brazil's



Greetings wall at KMC: mostly women

Moema Miranda, coordinator of iBase.

Gloria D'Silva pointed out that Sri Lankan women have become dangerously complacent in allowing crimes like incest, and trafficking to continue, adding that Sri Lanka's former female president and vice president have not been instrumental in fighting off such crimes.

Donna Fernandes from India protested strongly against the atrocity of killing girls in the name of sex selection and the preference for male offspring. "The doctors are the perpetrators of this crime as they accept huge amounts of money to not only carry out tests that tell the sex of the unborn child but also abort the unborn female fetus," she said.

The medical testers have devised a code language of + and - where the + signifies positivity, a boy, while the - shows negativity, a girl, she added. The dowry, which plays an important part in the "construction of marriage" in the lives of women, is a million dollar industry today.

Globalisation has also affected many

"Diversity is the beauty of life, a gift of god. The empires have divided us when diversity should bring us closer."

aspects of people's lives today, from production systems all the way to technology, protests and social action.

Globalisation has had an impact on the distribution and production of food, picking it out of the hands of the growers and denying them their right in profits. "Food sovereignty has been taken over by food security," said Vanaja Prashad from India. "The world has witnessed increasing control over natural resources like land, water and biological wealth of the people, denying them of their right and marginalising them of their source of sustenance."

Speakers also focused on the emergence of the Internet as part of globalisation that took human minds into the sphere of virtuality in politics, culture, resistance, protest, and other areas.

"The E-revolution takes place when you sit on the Net, make a protest over an issue and come off the computer. So resistance has become more virtual," said Rubina Saigol, adding that only states are seen as victims but history has shown that violence emanates from the state itself.

"Terrorism is just used as a method to explain a conflict which could be between state and a particular party or cross border," she said.

In the final verdict of the panelists, Justice Nasir Zahid observed that lack of education was one of the root causes of women's oppression. "They have to be empowered to stop dependency on men," he said.

Moema's parting words, meanwhile, suggested reconciliation. "Diversity is the beauty of life, a gift of god. The empires have divided us when diversity should bring us closer."

Fuhz



A Kirk

Twin Weapons of Change

By Frances Suselo

The audience clapped in sympathy, clearly impressed as performer Salman Younis wept real tears on cue to demonstrate the pain and anguish that people with HIV/AIDS go through when their society, friends and family reject them.

The Pakistani youth belongs to Adolescent Activists Network (AAN), a theatre group that promotes HIV/AIDS and hepatitis awareness and prevention. In a street performance in Urdu at the World Social Forum, the group showed that HIV/AIDS is not transmitted through physical contact, and that acceptance is what those who live with it need most.

The performance forms part of the movement by activists to use culture, the arts and the media to get their message across.

Hector Nihal, director of the AIDS Awareness Society (AAS), said that a street performance with songs and dances is much more effective because many Pakistanis are still uneducated and illiterate and cannot read pamphlets and booklets about HIV/AIDS.

“A street performance is also a more interactive tool to get our message

across,” he said. The sensitivity of the topic also means that a street performance is more down-to-earth and is less intimidating than a full-scale conference to the average Pakistani.

Raha Asif Habib, president of the Initiator Human Development Foundation, took a different approach. He simply displayed black and white pictures of Karachi street children taken by Sayed Salman Mukhtar, a university graduate, on a huge expanse of wall.

“We couldn’t afford a seminar,” Habib said when asked why his organisation chose to hold a picture exhibition instead of the usual conference. “Plus, it is only the media that supports us,” he added, explaining that it is solely through the media that the issue of street children gets its fair share of limelight amid the cacophony of other voices.

Girls, however, are seen in less than 10 percent of the pictures, a glaringly small presence. “This is an interesting issue due to gender bias,” said Habib. “There are also girl street children, but most of them are only on the streets for two to three days because they are usually kidnapped by the mafia and sold into prostitution.”

Habib emphasised that 90 percent of the

Arts for advocacy cuts across audiences and classes, providing information, education and yes, entertainment, at the WSF.



Frances Suselo

CONFLICTING VIEWS

When Politics and Religion Mix

Roop Chintamani

“Our Holy Prophet fought wars, and there was politics in Islam since the very beginning. How can you separate it now?” With that question, Mohammad Saeed Kalmati Baloch opened a debate on whether, and how, religion can be separated from the state.

Added a listener at the Sunday plenary discussion on politics and religion: “Pakistan was created on the basis of Islam, Islam and politics have always gone together, we can’t change that.”

But several performances addressed areas where religion and culture curtailed rights. A shadow theatre

street children despise religious institutions and idealise gangsters, conditions that make them ripe for becoming social misfits and prone to violence. “These street children usually make up groups of up to 25 people, with one of them being the leader, who usually then adopts an Indian movie star’s name,” he said.

“Ninety-six percent of these children come from male-dominated households, and they are exposed to violence at a very young age,” Habib added. Violence (be it domestic violence, ‘madrasah’ – or school – violence, or forced labour) is the major reason why these children hit the streets.

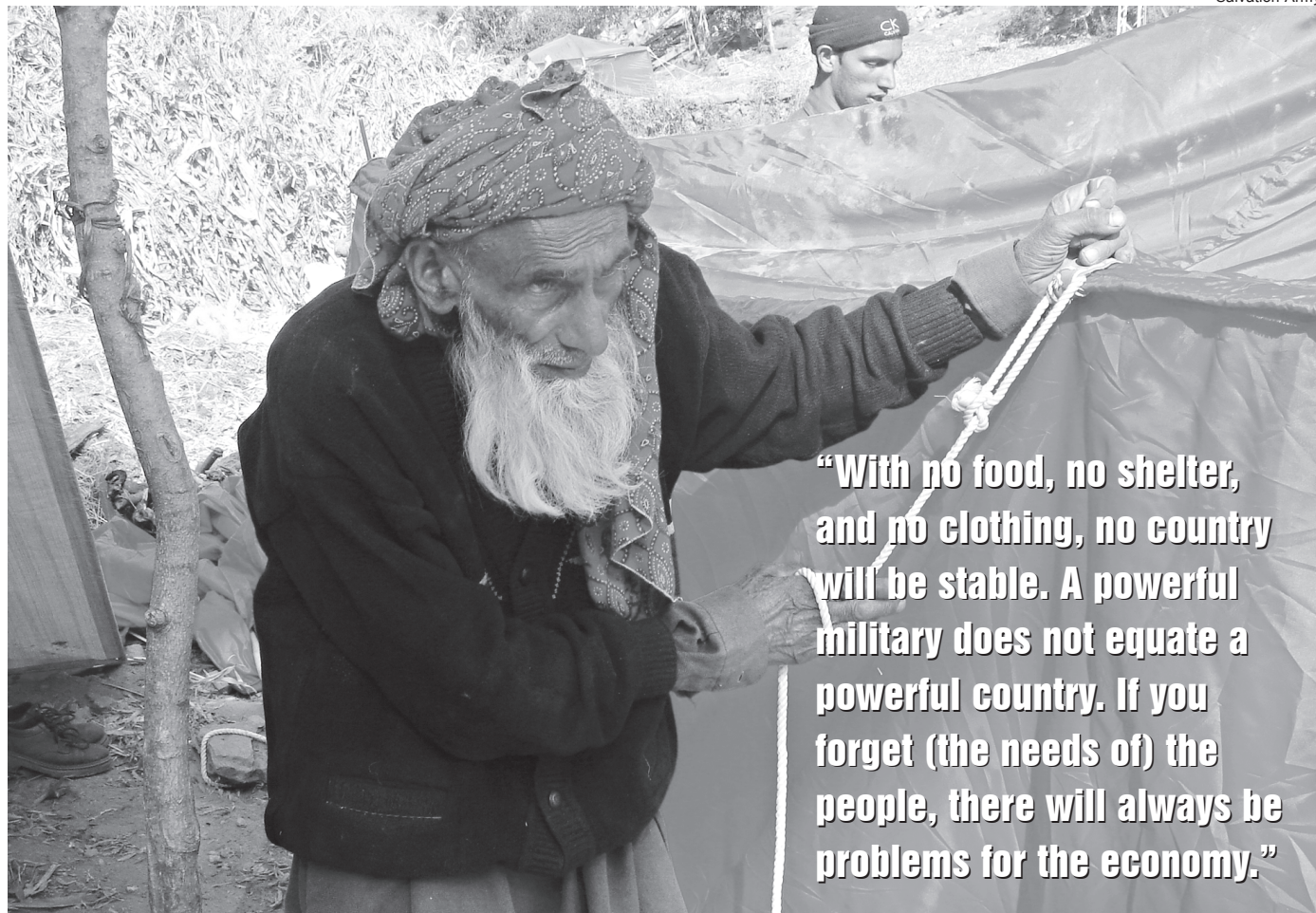
Violence against women was the highlight of another play, performed by the Pirbhat Theatre group of the Pirbhat Women’s Development Society.

In the performance, Afshan Khan’s character is a victim of honour killing, brutally slain by her own brother. There is also a comically ignorant ‘mullah’ ranting and raving against women, drawing laughter from the audience.

“We want to change society,” Khan said. “We want gender balance and equality. We want more jobs and more freedom.”

show by the Aagahi group, called “To my son whom I could not give birth to”, portrayed the life of a woman and spoke of all the ills committed by society against her. “This treatment of women is usually seen in marriages arranged by family”, said Farooq Ayaz, who holds a degree in sociology, “People in our society are averse to the idea of love marriages due to the teachings of the clergy, who consider a sin.”

A Palestinian group headed by Jamal Jumma gave a message of resistance through poetry and music. As all danced and clapped to the rhythm, it proved that another world was truly possible if only we played our part right.



“With no food, no shelter, and no clothing, no country will be stable. A powerful military does not equate a powerful country. If you forget (the needs of) the people, there will always be problems for the economy.”

Disasters like the October 2005 in Kashmir, cannot be prevented. But the damage they wreak can be eased by better preparation, investment in resources and skills.

Shaken to Act on Disaster Management

By Stanislaus Jude Chan

First, the good news: the number of people affected by disasters around the world last year dropped to around 146 million, a remarkable improvement from the annual average of 258 million recorded over the past decade.

But the bad news: close to 90 percent of victims are in Asia.

Discussing the role of the state, civil society, and international organisations in the management of natural disaster in Asia, the varied audience comprising participants from some

58 countries at the WSF Karachi 2006 were in one accord.

Shaken by issues surrounding disaster management, participants agree that while natural disasters cannot be prevented, predicting and preparing for these catastrophes as well as ready support from various government agencies, NGOs, and the international community working together would dramatically reduce death tolls — and alleviate people’s suffering.

Mazhar Ali is from Pakistan, where tens of thousands of lives were lost as a massive 7.6 earthquake on Oct. 8, 2005 ravaged the North West Fron-

tier Province, flattening some 15,000 under-developed villages in its wake.

“We are very thankful to the individual institutions, countries and volunteers who helped in the relief work. But the country itself must be prepared and must bear the main burden (of the disaster),” he says.

Like many others TerraViva spoke to at the WSF, Mazhar feels that too much of the country’s GDP is spent on military development, while neglecting the people’s needs in areas such as health-care, education and preparation for dealing with occurrences of natural disasters.

“The basic needs of each human being must be met before a country can survive,” Mazhar adds. “With no food, no shelter, and no clothing, no country will be stable. A powerful military does not equate a powerful country. If you forget (the needs of) the people, there will always be problems for the economy.”

While some argue the respective governments need to do more, help from other nations has been pouring in for disaster-plagued countries struggling to get back on its feet.

“Peace should not be hoarded,” says Azrin Zizal, a member of the NGO Peace Malaysia, which has helped in numerous humanitarian relief efforts in the region, including providing aid to disaster victims in Batagram and Balakot. “It should be the duty and obligation of countries that are stable and already well-off to share and help those in countries wrecked by natural disasters.”

Yet others feel that more international aid can be available for disaster management.

Sho Kasuga, from earthquake-prone Japan, is con-

vinced that countries like Japan, with its economic and technological strengths, coupled with experience in managing earthquake crises, is able to provide more support for its Asian neighbours.

An ardent believer of the merits of social forums – WSF Karachi 2006 is the fourth such event he is attending – and is assisting in efforts to bring the social forum to Kyoto, Japan.

Such cross-cultural activities, he says, are an excellent space to “express opinion through literature, dancing and music” as well as communication and exchange of ideas.

“Japan has enough knowledge about earthquakes and can do something to help,” Kasuga says. “But there is a very weak civil society movement there. I want to learn from the World Social Forum in Karachi to start something in Japan and help more people.”

Disaster management followers have just received some good news. The China Meteorological Administration (CMA) and China Space Administration (CNSA) gifted high-quality satellite data, products, services and applications to seven Asia-Pacific countries including Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iran, Mongolia, Pakistan, Peru and Thailand.

The meteorological satellites will prove invaluable to meteorological research and disaster mitigation for the region. The system has been used in China since last year for monitoring climate change, weather forecasting, disaster and environmental monitoring.

Mazhar is hopeful that, with large-scale events like the WSF providing an “effective platform” for dialogue between people with “different races and different gods”, any problem can be alleviated, albeit only through a long-term, sustained effort by all parties.

“Definitely it will make a change,” he says. “By listening to each other and understanding each others’ problems, I’m very hopeful of the changes that will come.”