

Rebuilding international convergence

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Report of an international meeting organized by several international networks on the occasion of the World Social Forum

Introduction

Last January, the World Social Forum organized a virtual forum, in the tradition of events organized since 2001. On this occasion, Dialogue Global, along with other international networks, held two days of debates to explore the issue. How can we revive the process that began 20 years ago and whose current impact is rather minimal? What are the priorities for alter-globalization movements around the world? What can we work on together?

These questions and many others illustrate the enormous challenge facing the current anti-globalization movement, confronted with the “crisis of crises”, including the disastrous management of the pandemic. This “crisis of crises” (health, economic, social, political and ecological) hits the populations hard (unemployment, deterioration of health infrastructure, etc.) for the benefit of a handful of very large entrepreneurs, including the GAFAM disasters. It also affects popular movements that are jostled from one emergency to another and in a deleterious context where states and oligarchies are deepening the turn towards authoritarianism, under the pretext of the urgency of the pandemic. In this context, we can clearly see that the neoliberal phase which has raged for several decades is being restructured under the banner of austerity, creating among the people a feeling of fear and helplessness, hence a kind of Even more virulent, excluding and polarizing “neoliberalism 2.0”.

However, all is not so gloomy because in many places people are saying no to this turn. At the community level, many initiatives have been launched to respond to emergencies, demonstrating the resilience and creativity of this popular civil society that resists and proposes. Mass movements continue to challenge the authorities and even succeed in defeating the ultra-right offensives that are being observed, including in the United States, Bolivia and elsewhere.

In the document that follows, you will find a collectively developed summary of the discussions that involved around 100 people from seven networks.

- Global Working Group Beyond Development <https://beyonddevelopment.net/>
- Global Dialogue for Systemic Alternatives <https://globaldialogue.online/en/>
- Grassroots to Global <https://www.grassroots2global.org/>
- Global Green New Deal <https://www.globalgnd.org/>
- Progressive International <https://progressive.international/>
- Global Tapestry of Alternatives <https://globaltapestryofalternatives.org/>
- Towards a New World Social Forum <https://www.foranewwsf.org/>

Think, listen, explore

We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. - Martin Luther King

1. In search of convergence

We come from diverse organizations and networks. We start from different experiences with different visions. However, we have seen that there is an opening for convergence. This is what we explored and which indeed allowed us to confirm the initial intuition. Basically, we are fighting capitalism in neoliberal and extractivist forms. We participate in these fights by privileging the local level, while seeking to establish links at the global level. We are not stuck in a narrow ideological framework. We are keen to learn, to explore and to spread new ideas in a collaborative way.

Strengths and weaknesses

In the near past, we had a common and visible enemy, around the global system set up by the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank and the G7; however, a new phase is taking shape today, where this enemy is becoming fragmented and even divided. The common enemy remains globalized capitalism, which is embodied in several oligarchies competing with each other in a project that is becoming more and more authoritarian.

Faced with this, we hesitate. We are generally stronger in the great battle of ideas, but much less so when it comes to identifying strategies and action plans. Our organizations, which generally like the idea of working cooperatively, often each stay in their own silo. It's like watching the shish kebab without paying attention to the various pieces it supports!

For several years, the World Social Forum (WSF) has been an effective place for debates and experiments, without necessarily leading to a common orientation. The WSF became less relevant, tending to "NGO-ize" while significant parts of the alter-globalization movement further fragmented. In the course of several struggles, there have been tendencies to be satisfied with mobilizing certain fringes (students and the unemployed graduates, leaving the working classes and peasants behind)

Opportunities

Even if the action of movements around the world occurs in a fragmented way, there are still initiatives to unite. Note for example the work of convergence done by Via Campesina. In several major global movements of recent years (Occupy, Indignados, "Arab and African Springs"), networks of resistance have persisted.

Several themes emerge around which we can create convergences: radical democracy, ecosocialism, ecofeminism, the need for relations of friendship and cooperation between movements and parties (without the desire to dominate each other).

One way or another, the current pandemic could be an "opportunity." The semi-paralysis of many state entities and even of the capitalist system reveals deep fractures and dead ends in which the 1% (the oligarchy) finds itself, to the point that even the very rich are threatened by the great "crisis of crises" that we are faced with today. The idea that we need "systemic change" is gaining ground.

To catalyze true systemic change, we will need to pull together like never before. We must reinvent our movements, cultivate a new internationalism, where solidarity and collaboration challenge separation and competition.

What we can do

How can we transform the foreshadowing practices at the grassroots level, to nurture and define what can be a process and a project for the left?

Without creating complex bureaucratic processes, we must devote more time to coordination while acting in a more democratic and accountable manner.

We must accept diversity, against fear of the other, oversized egos, conceit and not listen. As Gandhi said, we must be the world we are fighting for. We need to practice “creative disobedience” to create alternatives.

It is possible to overcome our multiple fragmentation (thematic, geographic, generational, etc.). We can start by building intersectional agendas on strategic issues, such as access to vaccines. With our current communication tools, we can reach the most remote village in the world.

In our global network, we must pay more attention to communities and indigenous peoples. They can tell the story of their 500 years of fighting the attempted destruction of the planet. For example, the “Green New deal” is a participatory and collective process to identify and shape the main interventions, ideas and demands. It can serve as a metaphor, not to define a single framework, but to open up space for a plurality of alternatives.

The process of building convergences is not an “event”. It requires rigorous organizational support focused on creating alternative and popular education oriented visions, which means translating long term visions into short term action oriented strategies. We must reinvent our movements, cultivate a new internationalism, where solidarity and collaboration challenge separation and competition.

Progressive networks can be “foreshadowing”, exploring through our local projects and actions and on a small scale what they might become if they occupied a larger place in society.

2. Explore new methodologies

Strengths and weaknesses

We talk to people, we listen: what do they want? What can we do ? . We learn to make decisions together. We focus on the process. We have our ideas, but we are working on how we decide and get along with each other. We want to be human to each other.

We are careful, everyone has to participate in the decisions, and then in the end one person takes responsibility. It's not perfect, but it's good enough to keep going.

We try to avoid depression or even conspiracy theories. We know how to take breaks, pull ourselves together, put ourselves together. We accept not to find THE solution. We sometimes unlearn (from our mistakes) and we sometimes learn (from our success).

Can we fight back? Our responses are always multidimensional. We avoid being “specialists” (as in capitalist, heteronormative, racist, predatory thought). We need to tackle multiple levels of domination at the same time.

The structures of domination run deep. People are oppressed not only by violence (coercion), but also by imbibing mainstream ideas, believing that the crisis is the result of essentialist scarcity. On the contrary, the world is full of everything, including the earth. We can claim to take care of ourselves, to build ourselves, to serve ourselves.

We believe in the power, the wisdom of nature and the building of earth-based and earth-oriented initiatives, aimed at generating a society in which decision-making, resource exchange and communication have as base the relationship and well-being at the heart.

We are faced with a system favoring greenwashing, with superficial or false solutions (“renewable energies” for example). We must expose false solutions that aim to maintain the status quo. The rights of indigenous peoples are now recognized, but recognition rarely translates into action.

We were not able to seize the opportunity for change in the global financial crisis because we were not ready to propose a global transformation.

Our political systems perpetuate a system of domination that sacrifices people and the planet to personal and corporate greed. Underlying this is a deep, historical cultural trauma that affects us all, from the most powerful to the less powerful.

In the Latin American experience, when we try to create an alternative, we are forced to keep resisting! It is not possible to open up a space to articulate an alternative if we do not resist police brutality, expulsion, co-optation.

What to do ?

- Scaling, exhibiting, opposing, proposing transitional projects with a long-term perspective (inspired by Gramsci).
- Speak with the heart, speak the truth. Listen with heart, care, and attention, without thinking about what the other person is going to say to you. Feel the love and connection. Building together. To be present, to let go. Being here is important.
- To avoid the institutionalization of networks of networks, do not reproduce the same hierarchies. Building on trust and listening to each other. Go back to what was originally done in indigenous communities. Start with the ground, at the base. Develop cognitive skills.
- Fight for reforms, but without strengthening the system. Create an atmosphere of mutual respect. Imagine radical reforms that could lead to a revolution.
- Think critically about tools, transcend linguistic divides. Build defensive movements capable of confronting local instances of power. Build on the deep trust that emanates from in-depth conversations. Build collective toolboxes.
- Reflect together on articulated and permanent training processes, local and global

3. Work together

In this last session, we put on the table some ideas or avenues from which we could experiment together converging terrains.

- In Glasgow, Scotland, the annual environmental conference, the COP, will take place next autumn. On this occasion, social and environmental movements will come together to demand far-reaching changes in policies that, until now, barely touch the scale of the climate challenge and the destruction of biodiversity [1]. It is very likely that the Glasgow gathering will bring together several thousand people, in parallel with hundreds of mobilisations around the world. In Montreal in particular, a vast coalition of young people and social movements is planning large-scale militant actions.
- We are thinking of producing together (the seven networks) a manifesto which would bring together a diagnosis of the situation and a draft of an alternative vision. In this work, we will put forward a decolonial perspective, breaking with our current world built on predatory capitalism and colonialism.
- Faced with the pandemic, communities everywhere have shown resilience, but also creativity, to think about and build alternative lifestyles that express other relationships with non-human life and nature. We are planning to produce a series of studies and monographs on this topic.
- We want to continue to follow the process of building international networks which should lead

to several interventions :

- A Davos Counter-Forum to take place in Singapore.
- The World Social Forum in Mexico City in early 2022.
- We can also participate in the World Amazon Forum which will take place in Belém (Brazil) in 2022.
- Finally, we want to work together to participate in mobilizations against the catastrophic management of COVID-19 by capitalist states, and on citizen initiatives that develop strategies of struggle, resistance and innovative reconstruction.

Not to conclude

The sessions organized by the network of networks made it possible to establish contacts, and beyond mutual recognition, “a deep desire for local to global convergences which renew the critical thinking that the WSF has lost in the process of road, ”according to Ashish Kothari.

Our attachment to the importance of rigor in the work of critical thinking is intrinsically linked to the importance we place on plurality and diversity. Diversity is a source of strength, not the cause of further divisions and competition.

To develop this awakened convergence, nothing better than to engage in collective actions around joint campaigns, collective declarations, media work and communication. It involves being creative, understanding the changes in society, able to also develop our own methodologies and our own communication tools, trying to make us more autonomous in the face of big systems that are both facilitating and debilitating.

Pierre Beaudet

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Footnotes

[1] <https://heartpolitics.squarespace.com>