



INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR  
THIRD-SECTOR RESEARCH



## "Transforming Civil Society, Citizenship and Governance: The Third Sector in an Era of Global (Dis)Order"

Graduate School in Humanities, University of Cape Town,

Cape Town, South Africa

July 7-10, 2002

*ISTR Fifth International Conference*

### **Fifth International Conference and 10th Anniversary**

*The following article appeared in the July-September 2002 issue of Inside ISTR.*

Celebration in Cape Town, South Africa ISTR celebrated both the Fifth International Conference and the Society's 10th Anniversary in Cape Town, South Africa in July. Approximately 340 participants from 52 countries joined together at the University of Cape Town to explore the conference theme, "Transforming Civil Society, Citizenship, and Governance: The Third Sector in an Era of Global (Dis) Order." Our local host, The University of Cape Town Graduate School in Humanities, provided an excellent conference venue and wonderful African hospitality throughout our visit.

The opening night reception with African cuisine, music, and dancing was a highlight of the conference. The next evening's reception was hosted by the Mayor of Cape Town. In a sumptuous setting, the reception was addressed briefly by Virginia Hodgkinson, ISTR board president, and Danny de la Cruz, the Speaker of the City Council of Cape Town. Dr. Hodgkinson spoke of the significance of having the city of Cape Town host the conference. She focused on the long history of civil society organizations in Cape Town and its importance for the process of peaceful change in 1994. Her address was followed by an inspiring talk by Mr. de la Cruz who focused his attention on the importance of the Third Sector in the new millennium and the age of globalization. He explained how important it was for developing communicative spaces in which civil society, business, and government could work together. He warned that the future of the next generation depended on building trust. His talk also referred to the role of the people of Cape Town in building the character of South Africa's civil society and expressed his gratitude to ISTR for bringing their 10th anniversary conference to the city. In doing so, he explained, ISTR was honoring the city, for which he was grateful.

### **Professional Development Workshops**

The conference began with a series of well-attended workshops that explored a wide range of topics. The session "The Third Sector in South Africa" explored the emergence of social movements in post-apartheid South Africa. The focus of the session was on the socio-economic issues around which communities were organizing, e.g., the crisis that is emerging in service delivery within the context of neoliberal economics. The panel discussion included speakers from the Anti-Eviction Campaign, a community movement emanating from Khayelitsha, Cape Town; Ben Cashdan, a film maker who has produced many documentaries capturing community struggles in post-apartheid South Africa; and Dr. Ashwin Desai, a sociologist from Durban, South Africa.

The session "Civil Society and New Panafricanism" coincided with the meeting of African heads of state to say goodbye to the OAU and welcome the AU. This transition dominated the workshop debate. The participants concentrated on identifying the positive aspects of NEPAD, the importance of civil society engagement in the AU process, and the problems of democracy and good governance.

The workshop "Civil Society in States of Disorder and Conflict" addressed two main issues: What is the meaning of "order" and "disorder" in different contexts? And is there a universal construction for "disorder?" Discussion focused on the most common "types of disorder" (natural, political, economic), and the unpredictability of its outcomes. When

analyzing the role of civil society in these kinds of situations, many participants stressed that civil society is not homogeneous, but is composed of various segments.

## **Plenary Sessions**

The conference featured three plenary sessions, beginning with a revised keynote by Ruth C.L. Cardoso, who was unfortunately not able to attend. ISTR Secretary, Rosa Maria Fischer, introduced Mrs. Cardoso, who sent her paper and a video presentation to introduce the theme of her address. Dorothy Gordon, ISTR board member, graciously agreed to step in and provide a summary of the paper's main points. In addition, Kumi Naidoo of Civicus and Manuel Chiriboga of Asociación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Promoción (ALOP) added their perspectives following the presentation.

Dr. Cardoso's presentation focused on the global fight against AIDS and centered on the Brazilian experience. She selected the AIDS issue, "First of all, because the AIDS pandemic is a mirror that reflects not only the many dimensions of the globalization process but also the paths leading to the building of a more democratic world order. The second reason lies in the fact that the global fight against AIDS is giving rise to new forms of transnational alliances involving a variety of public and private actors: civil society organizations, community associations, governments, UN agencies, the media, churches, scientific groups, cultural and spiritual leaders, AIDS patients, and activists. These emerging transnational associations, promoted by participatory and responsible citizenry may evolve into a powerful trend towards reframing world governance and laying the foundations for a stronger global civil society. The third reason has to do with the role played by leading developing countries such as Brazil and South Africa in the international debate about the right of access to life-saving drugs."

Dr. Cardoso's address concluded, "Humankind's fight against AIDS confirms two key notions. First, a vibrant Third Sector is a key asset for development and democracy at both the national and international levels. Second, the strengthening of connections and collaborative relationships among the three sectors of society around action agendas of common interest is one of the most promising trends toward more democratic forms of governance. Global civil society is both the cause and the consequence of these converging processes."

The second plenary session was an Open Forum devoted to a panel review and participant commentary on the "light" and the "dark" sides of civic society in a rapidly globalizing world. Facilitated by Kumi Naidoo, panel presentations were provided by: Brian O'Connell, USA; Ben Gidron, Israel; Masayuki Desguchi, Japan; Lalit Kumar, India; Marilyn Taylor, UK; Mark Lyons, Australia; Dorothy Gordon, Ghana; and Soledad Teixidó, Chile. From their diverse locations, perspectives and experiences, each panelist was asked to highlight the positive and negative dimensions of contemporary civil society. Then, participants provided their own views and comments as well as posing questions to the panelists and to each other. By way of closure, Alan Fowler was asked to provide a summary of the major issues addressed, which appears below.

### **Summary of the plenary session**

*One consistent observation was that "disorder" is not necessarily destructive. It can be a stage or transition to an improved situation. Disorder must therefore be assessed in context and not treated negatively a priori.*

*The presentations and participant commentaries highlighted a key paradox in global development. On the one hand, there is hope and optimism as democracy spreads, barriers are broken down, mobility increases, and technology brings citizens closer together, improving the lives of many, if not all. Simultaneously, on the other hand, there is increasing anxiety as disparities in wealth grow within and between countries, as intra-national conflicts remain unresolved, as globalization disrupts economies, as well as provoking a variety of "fundamentalist" responses to an emerging mono-polar world order and xenophobic reactions to multi-culturalism and "otherness."*

*This paradox feeds into what many saw as the ambiguous nature of civil society. This realm of collective action and citizen power contains and shows both destructive and creative, and disruptive and stabilizing, possibilities. Civil society is neither unequivocally good, nor intrinsically malevolent. Both potentials exist alongside each other, each feeding and being fed by contending forces from near and afar.*

*The panel presentations and participant responses discussed and reflected on how the contemporary interaction between paradox and ambiguity are playing themselves out in terms of impacts and responses. Three areas of civil society as agents of global (dis)order came to the fore.*

### *1. Impacts on civil society*

*Contemporary international conditions are influencing civil society in three noticeable ways. First, they are giving rise to fragmentation within states, manifested, for example, in the assertion of sub-national identities allied to claims for greater recognition of their presence and interests. Second, prevailing norms and values are being shifted from (tenuous) “harmony in diversity” towards intolerance and agitation against those who are “different,” such as foreign immigrants in Europe. Third, civil society organizations are being asked to more clearly state where they stand in terms of “uncivil” behavior. Dividing lines are being drawn more sharply between those who are “in” and those who, through terror, violent or aggressive civil disobedience and threats to public order, are “out.” But, again, to take a stand, disruption emanating from civil society has to be understood in terms of its specificities, origins, and possibilities for alternative courses of action.*

### *2. Political exploitation*

*The situation sketched above is being politically exploited in a number of ways. One is through control and use of language and media manipulation. Common is the pejorative labeling and demonizing of those with a different point of view. Further, impediments towards a state’s natural orientation towards control are being undermined. Restrictions on the freedom of information, electronic surveillance, invasion of privacy, and erosion of civic rights are all justified on the grounds of protecting public security without adequate checks, balances, and public oversight on how this is done. Allied to these trends are more strenuous efforts—through “partnership” and participation—to co-opt civil society into a single developmental world-view, so marginalizing contending opinions and options. Finally, maintenance of social order is less and less able to rely on conventions, leading to a growing reliance on coercion, allied to expanded instruments for state surveillance and control.*

### *3. Civil society responses*

*Civil society organizations are not simply passive agents to the above processes and behaviors. Within the same polity are civil society groups as victims, protagonists, or mediators of disorder and conflict. At different levels and scales of social organization, civil society is enhancing its own and other people’s capacity to cope with uncertainty and stress. Where they exist, diasporas are being mobilized to provide mutual support. In this and in many other areas, modern information technology is being employed by civil society to create fluid, flexible, and rapid responses to shifting conditions, concerns and injustices. Mobilization is also gaining ground in terms of challenging the rules of the game by which governments and international institutions work and, for example, seek participation based on assumptions about civil society as service providers, not claimants, and legitimate sources of dissent. In addition, often out of the limelight, civil society organizations, particularly religious organizations, play a mediating role between conflicting parties. But, this is not blinding civil society to self-criticism and acceptance of its own contribution to injustice and instability.*

### *Research perspectives*

*How the above factors emerge and play themselves out varies enormously across the world. However, from a research perspective, the diversity of conditions generating instability and disorder are an advantage because they can help shine an empirical light on the deeper nature of civil configurations, forces, and behaviors. Critical enquiry can help illuminate the extent to which contention and the urge to challenge the status quo are, in fact, necessary pathways to and foundations for a more just and equitable world order. Such enquiry will help broaden the foundations for a grounded global theory of civil society.*

The final plenary session explored the current state of “Civil Society in South Africa.” The session was moderated by Nomboniso Gasa of the Centre for Civil Society of the University of Natal. Panelists included: Mark Swilling of the Spier Leadership Institute, Phiroshaw Camay of the Cooperative for Research and Education (CORE), and Mzwanele Mayekiso of the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Mark Swilling provided an overview of the size and scope of the nonprofit sector which has grown dramatically in the post-apartheid era. The sector is now a 9.3 billion Rand industry which, compared to other countries worldwide, is larger than average. Of the approximate 100,000 non-profit organizations in the country, 53% are informal, community based organizations. This is important point to note since these organizations are not the recipients of aid, yet they are at the cutting edge of the struggle against poverty and aids. Moreover, the bulk of funding to the nonprofit sector comes from government. Local corporations contribute some R3 billion per annum, while external sources contribute another R1 billion per annum.

Mzwanele Mayekiso's paper addressed "South Africa's Enduring Urban Crisis: Change and Continuity in Relations between the Local State and Social Movements in Johannesburg from Late Apartheid to Democracy." Professor Mayekiso discussed the dilemma faced by community based organizations which were established during the apartheid era and working in opposition to the government. With the change in government to a democracy, many of these organizations have disbanded as they were not able to deal with a democratic system and change their orientation. His contention is that these remaining organizations are vital to building a strong civil society, but in reality are not up to the task at hand.

Phiroshaw Camay discussed the South African Civil Society within the context of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index. The study led by the Cooperative for Research and Education (CORE) and the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) summarized civil society practitioners views of the sector, its operations and effectiveness, and its relations with the state. Unsurprisingly, funding was identified by these practitioners as the major problems confronting non-profit organisations in South Africa.

### **ISTR's 10th Anniversary**

ISTR celebrated its 10th anniversary with a General Meeting on Tuesday, July 9th and the publication of a document looking at the Society's past, its current progress, and future prospects. The booklet was distributed to all conference participants and its chapters provide both a historical perspective and future directions. The contents include: ISTR: The First Ten Years; *Voluntas*: The Early Years; *Voluntas*: The Middle Years to the Present; Intellectual Challenges During the First Phase of ISTR's Development; Creating a Platform to Negotiate Meaning; and Epilogue: Looking Forward.

The Society's two past presidents, Benjamin Gidron and Antonin Wagner, shared thoughts about the Society and made observations about the first decade. Rupert Taylor, the editor of *Voluntas*, commented on the healthy status of this unique journal that is truly international in scope. Rupert also encouraged participants to submit conference papers for future issues. Margery Daniels, executive director, provided statistics demonstrating the organization's tremendous growth and development which has led to an exciting journey of association building.

Virginia Hodgkinson, current board president, provided a content analysis of the research gathered by the Society since 1994. A review of the disciplinary mix, geographic mix, the countries studied, and topics studied was the focus of her presentation. Among the changes she noted over the ten year period was a broader mix of disciplines and topics. She observed that there were more comparative studies in both ISTR papers and *Voluntas*. Furthermore, in the past few years, research from scholars in Asia, Latin America, and Africa increased, compared to a decade ago. The full paper, "The State of the Society," will be published in the March 2003 issue of *Voluntas*.

### **Paper, Panel, and Poster Sessions**

The program included 43 paper and panel sessions. Poster sessions were well received with 18 posters displayed during the entire conference. The posters proved to be an effective way to share research and the time period devoted to poster presentations provided opportunities for researchers to discuss their work. The paper sessions ranged across topics such as "Social Enterprise and Intersectorial Alliances," "Dynamics and Impact of Transnational Civil Society," "Practice-Research Engagement Methods and Dilemmas," and "New Directions in Comparative Third Sector Theorizing." A cross-section of the conference abstracts can be found on the ISTR website and many of the papers presented in Cape Town will be reviewed for Volume 3 of the Conference Working Papers Series.

### **Conference Evaluation**

The evaluations were helpful in providing feedback and suggestions for future conferences. Many participants seemed to appreciate the conference's diverse workshops and discussions, the quality of the presentations, the range of countries represented, the opportunity for collaboration, and Cape Town's hospitality. We hope that the participants agree with the following evaluation – "It was a superb and memorable event. Long live ISTR! Keep continuing the good work."

While the feedback suggests that the conference was a success, there is always room for improvement. The suggestions for improvement centered mostly on the conference's structure and organization. Many of the comments also addressed the delicate balance maintained between academics and practitioners, theory and empirical presentations, and the interaction between locals and visitors. Also, some hope to see a closing session next time to end the conference in an upbeat manner. The Conference Academic Committee and the ISTR Board will discuss these, and more, comments and suggestions. We thank our Cape Town hosts for their extraordinary efforts and the wonderful community of colleagues celebrating this dynamic academic and social experience. ISTR now looks ahead to an even more successful Sixth International Conference in Toronto, Canada in July 2004.