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Panel on Engagement with civil society in support of the Right to Development

Speech of Murad Akincilar, CETIM's International delegate

As CETIM, we consider that more CSOs, including ours, need to develop a community-based approach, empowering the participation from below in order to encourage the overall involvement of citizens in support of the RTD. This approach should be connected with the reality of the dispossessed social groups so that the basics of active, free and meaningful participation are guaranteed.

We cannot close our eyes to the fact that the main obstacle is a combination of the patterns of domination over the civil society organizations. What is limiting the community-based participation is the increasing infringements on their freedom of association, assembly and expression, in short, the “shrinking space for civil society”.

The participation capacity of CSOs in many countries is fragilized by the “deterioration of the working environment for NGOs and CSOs” as well as “insidious actions to limit civil society freedoms” especially since the pandemic and global recession. The same period is stamped by drastically growing inequalities.

So, let's clearly identify the main obstacle to the promotion and realization of the RTD: The political, financial and social forces that not only shrink the space for the CSOs and independent social movements but also create insidious obstacles by excluding, criminalizing and marginalizing the social movements. These are the same forces which are delaying the realizations of RTD, benefiting from the growing inequalities and fragilizing the social protection systems.

There is a need to admit a considerable delay in ordinary citizens' influence over policy making and accountability mechanisms created and practised by CSOs since the 1990's.

This is one of the reasons why the people-centered participation was out of phase with the actual appliance of the sustainable development goals. We, unfortunately, had to inherit a similar pattern of exclusion and delay of the social movements and authentic CSOs in the implementation of RTD.

Today we need to redefine, encourage and realize real synergies in order to create common grounds with diverse advocacy/emancipation spheres.

We think there is a way out of this marginalization of the citizens in public debate. The self-determined development promoted by the independent social movements must become an operating principle in promoting the RTD before the local, national and international mechanisms.

In this respect, let me define some characteristics of good practises regarding social movements active on the ground:

1. They adopt an awareness about the fact that the mainstream CSOs do not represent even the smallest sections of the civil society in most countries.
2. They are aware of the intersectionality of the environment, gender and labor movements agenda.
3. They conduct capacity building processes independently from governmental framing, economic-corporate powers and political instrumentalization.
4. They practise deeply rooted social action. They are mobilizing the disadvantaged layers of society, by elaborating diverse pathways for further protection of the elements of RTD.
5. They create local regional and international networks to defend elements of RTD and then coordinate the efforts.
6. They are in active defence of human right defenders from repression and intimidation.
7. They encourage CSO professionals to go into the field, close the gap between the organizations' routine work and the daily survival of the concerned communities struggling for their economic and social survival.

Finally,

I will present three examples of “best practices”, all of them defending the core dimensions of the RTD – without, however, conceptualizing this right.

Chipko movement has stopped tree felling in India and has generated pressure for a natural resource policy that is more sensitive to people's needs and ecological requirements. In a grassroot level that is a woman-led organization which is closely linked to the decolonization struggle for self-determination on natural resources.

In Eastern Mediterranean region, around Eagean sea, 52 eco-feminist, labour and environmental organizations created a socio-political bloc *emekoloji* (labourecology) to create a common ground against neoliberal working conditions worsened by the destruction of local eco-systems. This region has suffered from poor working conditions for years, in addition to low wages, inadequate occupational health and safety measures as well as high rate of fatal accidents. This is a clear example of trade unions struggling for the protection of eco-systems and eco-feminist organizations defending decent working conditions and developing policies against occupational diseases.

MST landless peasant movement was at the forefront of the self-determined survival strategies in Brazil, in defence of water, food and land sovereignty combining objectives in favor of indigenous political ecologies. This movement is combining gender, sexual, and intersectional feminist justice with battles against racism and other modes of exclusion seeking a radical break with the legacies and continuities of colonial policies.

In 2022, as CSO professionals, social movement activists and RTD experts, more than didactic discourses, diplomatic activities and lobbying methods, we need real involvement to rebuild networks of organizations/movements through an involvement on the ground with citizens and local communities.

Thank you for your attention.

1st of November 2022.