

UNCED

and the Greening of Brazilian NGOs

Reuters/Bettmann



Above: French oceanographer Jacques Cousteau (left) chats with then-U.S. Senator Albert Gore during a break at the 1992 UNCED conference held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Both delivered speeches to nongovernmental organization (NGO) leaders who had gathered at the Global Forum. Background: Visitors stroll through NGO exhibits at the forum, near Flamengo Beach.

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Lessons learned in the flowering of Brazil's civil society help set the stage for the appearance of a planetary civil society.

Lourdes M.C. Grzybowski

For two weeks in early June 1992, it seemed that Marshall McLuhan's global village had sprung to life in Rio de Janeiro, bringing together in one place people who lived continents apart in distance and, technologically, centuries apart in time. The occasion was the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). Its sense of urgency was unmistakable amid the sirens of official motorcades speeding from the airport into the city, and from hotels to convention sites, as an unprecedented number of heads of state and their entourages gathered to negotiate the future of the ailing planet.

UNCED was a quintessential media event. Some 9,000 members of the press were assigned to cover it. Television crews, journalists, and photographers from around the world tried, often in vain, to make sense for audiences back home of the seemingly inexhaustible carnival of images being generated—diplomats wearing designer suits and armed with cellular phones; Amazonian tribal leaders wearing the pin feathers of exotic birds; the Dalai Lama, with disarming simplicity, preaching world unity; "green" technicians displaying solar ovens; Japanese businessmen touting potable water systems for developing countries; celebrities from Jacques Cousteau to Jane Fonda; and the copper-leaved

"tree of life," standing as an environmental beacon for a healthier planet, to which people from North and South brought messages of hope penned in their own languages.

A year later, it is this confusing welter of images that lingers in the minds of many UNCED participants and observers. For people who were not there, the event has already receded in memory, as if nothing, or not much of anything lasting, had happened. Certainly the full story is not told in the official protocols that were signed, amended, or rejected by presidents and prime ministers at the Rio Centro conference center. Nor is it told in the formal, seven-minute speeches each of those leaders delivered to the others and, through the accredited press, to their countries and the world. It can be argued that the real trailblazers in making environmentally sustainable development feasible were to be found among the people crowding the 35 large, green-and-white tents set up along Rio's picturesque Flamengo Beach, at the Global Forum.

The forum was billed as the largest gathering of "planetary civil society" in history, bringing together representatives from more than 9,000 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and social movements, ranging from Amazonian rubbertappers and aboriginal fishermen to environmental activists from North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. For 14 days, these activists met to finalize position papers at open meetings for presentation to government officials at the Rio Centro conference center, some 30 miles away on the outskirts of the city.

The international press generally seemed puzzled by events at the NGO gathering—perhaps understandably so—given the diversity of participants and the fact that decisions were reached, in what must have seemed an ad hoc fashion, after hours of exhausting and impassioned discussion over seemingly arcane details. Yet many observers, including then head of the U.S. Environmental

Protection Agency William K. Reilly, could not help noticing that what was happening in "this place is much more interesting than Rio Centro." Wandering among the 600 booths set up by NGOs to inform others of their work or attending the many panels that explored how environmental and developmental issues overlap and interact, even casual visitors could not help being impressed by the energy

opportunity to learn of the vital role NGOs were playing in their own society and a yardstick to measure how much they had grown during the short time of their existence. Charles Reilly's article later in this journal (see page 25) will focus on the key mediating role NGOs are playing throughout the hemisphere in making sustainable development a reality. The remainder of this introductory article

will explore beneath the tip of the Global Forum iceberg to try to show the vital role NGOs are playing in the slow yet significant transformation of Brazilian society.

Mapping Brazil's NGO Universe

Three major types of Brazilian NGOs were represented at UNCED: membership organizations (MOs) such as neighborhood associations and trade unions; social movements such as the previously cited rubbertappers' Conselho Nacional de Seringueiros (CNS) and groups associated with the drive for women's rights; and grassroots support organizations (GSOs) that provide training and technical assistance to MOs. Most of the key NGOs involved in planning, organizing, and providing logis-

tical support for the Global Forum were GSOs.

The seeds for this array of NGOs were planted in Brazil during the early 1960s, when the Catholic Church began to respond to the imperatives of Pope John XXIII's call "for Vatican Council II to reformulate the theological and social mission of the Church" (Annis, 1987). Many of Brazil's leading bishops participated in the four-year Council, and joined with activist priests, nuns, and lay-workers to encourage the formation of what would become an estimated 100,000 *comunidades eclesiais de base*, or Christian community base groups, to organize the poor. The "pedagogy



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Forum participants visit the "tree of life," where citizens of all nations left messages, written in their native languages, expressing their hopes and pledges for creating an ecologically conscious world.

of the participants and the ingenuity with which many of them were tackling problems at the grassroots level.

Most of the media overlooked these events, concentrating on the conflicts and compromises that were being hammered out by states at the official conference and relegating coverage of the Global Forum to filler and color commentary. This was not the case for the Brazilian media, which reported frequently from the Flamengo site, and for good cause since Brazilian NGOs were at the forefront of planning, organizing, and providing logistical support for the forum. In a real sense, UNCED provided the Brazilian people with the

of the oppressed" developed by one of those layworkers, Paulo Freire, a young professor at the Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, spawned a literacy training movement for the adult poor. The methodology used group dynamics to awaken *conscientização*, empowering illiterates to examine the society around them and take charge of their own lives. Although the literacy movement was dismantled and the ferment at the grassroots was "contained" by the military coup of 1964, it continued to send out roots in all directions that eventually surfaced in the 1970s.

By the mid-1970s, the first GSOs had emerged to provide the countless small producers' associations, rural cooperatives, and neighborhood associations with specialized training, technical assistance, and pedagogical materials, and to help communities better organize themselves. The widening gap between rich and poor and the military government's inability/unwillingness to address the problems of marginalized populations led other socially concerned professionals and intellectuals to form more-specialized GSOs to help devise alternative methodologies and public policies to replace the top-down, state-centric model of development. The founders of these GSOs were usually charismatic figures who had been community activists protected by the Church during the era of intense military repression; academics who had tired of the bureaucratic constraints and stifling formality of the university; and political party activists who had outgrown ideological orthodoxies and sectarian practices. Many of these activists returned from exile as Brazil's fledgling civil society broadened its wings and the drive for re-democratization gathered momentum. They received core financial support from international donors, including the Inter-American Foundation, that were concerned with getting assistance directly to the poor.

This organizational process accelerated during the early 1980s, when the national economy faltered and the failure of the government to deliver social services and protect jobs and incomes became apparent to a broad cross-section of society. In 1982, the first of a series of transitional elec-



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Above: A street educator from a grassroots support organization (GSO) in Recife listens to homeless children discuss the perils they face each day living on the streets. Brazil's GSOs have helped pass local and national laws securing children's rights and ensuring citizen participation in policy decisions regarding children's programs. Opposite page: A student in a nonformal education program in Olinda, Pernambuco State, prepares a lesson before class begins. Adult literacy programs have been crucial social laboratories for forging the methodology and commitment of Brazil's GSOs.

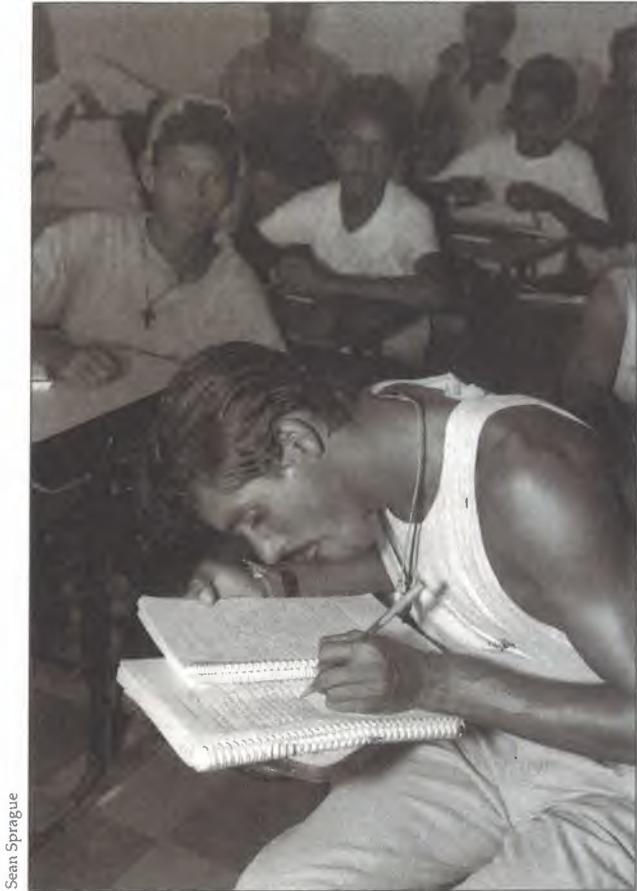
tions for governors was held that would pave the way for renewed civilian rule. As in many other countries throughout Latin America, including Chile (Loveman, 1991), the NGO movement was inextricably intertwined with increased democratization, helping to catalyze the process while acquiring new roots and branches of its own as the tree of civil society grew larger (Breslin, 1991).

Perhaps Brazilian GSOs' most impressive achievement came with the drafting and adoption of the new national Constitution in 1988. GSOs closely monitored the legislative process, provided expert counsel to groups proposing amendments, and educated the local communities they worked with in the intricacies of constituent participation. They played a key role in forming citizen's committees in cities, towns, and urban *favelas* throughout the nation, and in generating 122 grassroots petitions that garnered more than 12 million signatures. They organized bus and truck caravans to bring the previously disfranchised to the national capital

of Brasília. For the first time in Brazil's history, marginalized minorities such as Afro-Brazilians, street children, rural laborers, indigenous peoples, and housemaids participated in the legislative process by testifying before subcommittees and literally jamming the hallways of Congress. The result was the adoption of unprecedented constitutional provisions and the reform of state and municipal laws to guarantee greater citizen participation in government at all levels of public life.

Two groundbreaking studies published in 1988 and 1992 by the Instituto de Estudos da Religião (ISER) chart the proliferation of GSOs that had come into existence by the time constitutional democracy was restored. ISER's researchers identified 1,041 GSOs, 85 percent of them created during the previous 15 years.

Reflecting the country's traditional pattern of regional power and influence, most were located in the southern half of the country. The Southeast, alone, accounted for 53 percent, including the vast majority of GSOs



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with a national programmatic focus, most applied-research institutions, and even most Indian rights organizations. The second largest concentration of GSOs—27 percent—was based in the Northeast.

The social entrepreneurs who had founded these organizations had two things in common: the desire to create an autonomous institutional space that would allow them to provide effective services directly to the poor, and the establishment of core professional skills and innovative methodologies that would lead to new approaches and replicable solutions to the seemingly most intractable community development problems. The 1991 ISER survey of 125 leading GSOs revealed their growing capacity to do just that.

A growing number of them managed an annual budget in excess of \$1 million, although 78 percent of them reported operating revenues under \$500,000. Most of the funds came from international donors, primarily from church agencies, private foundations, and a few government

agencies located in Germany, Holland, the United States, England, and Canada (listed by order of importance in providing aid). Although still dependent on outside funding, surveyed GSOs indicated that their relationships with donors have evolved past the simple flow of resources to include meetings to share strategies and other attempts at institutional partnership. Nearly three-quarters of the sample reported interactive participation with one or more donors, and 86 percent of these found the experiences to be "positive."

The increasing sophistication of GSOs in managing these relationships and designing and carrying out their own development agendas was

reflected in their staffing. Most, as previously indicated, had begun as "one-man bands," but now have core staffs that average 21 persons. Nearly all were led by well-educated professionals, with 87 percent having college degrees and 39 percent, graduate degrees.

This increased institutional capability, amplified by the networking efforts described in the next section of this article, has begun to bring Brazilian GSOs to the attention of leading development donors. Even large multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank have come to realize that these entities play a key catalytic role in ensuring effective and sustainable development at the local level.

Praxis, Public Policy, and Networking

"GSOs may be small, but they advocate action on far-reaching agendas," proclaims the 1991 ISER study. More

than half the survey sample defined their role as contributing toward implementation of "alternative" development projects, and more than a third were working to expand the scope of grassroots efforts by elaborating "alternative" public policies. This prompted the authors of the report to conclude that, yes, "GSOs are small, private organizations, but they behave as if they were big and public."

What makes them so effective is this unique ability to span the micro-to-macro continuum of local project implementation and public policy advocacy. The key to both skills is the close connection GSOs maintain with the base groups they work with. The ambitious vision of Paulo Freire has not been realized in the fashion he foresaw, but many of his working concepts have become everyday tools for GSO practitioners. Among them is the notion of *praxis*, the belief that development theories are conditional. They are not valid in some abstract sense, but only when firmly grounded in the social reality they seek to change. That is, development methodologies are effective only when they emerge through dialogue with the people and communities who must carry them out. This belief in participation infuses the methodology of even research institutions like ISER, whose studies of and work with marginalized groups such as prostitutes and street children are full of unexpected insights precisely because they do not treat the subjects of their surveys simply as objects.

Years of experience working intently at the grassroots have produced a host of capable GSOs that have gained the legitimacy and expertise needed to design and implement participatory, innovative, and low-cost community development programs. Today, GSOs provide services in many areas, including popular education, community-based health care, legal assistance, environmentally sound agricultural technologies, video production and dissemination, public policy analysis, urban microenterprise assistance, and AIDS education, among others.

Broadly speaking, GSOs implement these services through one or more of a series of six interrelated activities. Examples of successful efforts in each abound, including the following:



Sean Sprague



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Brazilian GSOs which promote sustainable agriculture increasingly realize that small-scale farmers need ways to boost family incomes without damaging the long-range productivity of their land. Above: A small-scale aquaculturist, who received technical assistance from Centro Josué de Castro (CJC), feeds fish in his hatchery outside Recife. Opposite page: CJC also helped small farmers in this village in Pernambuco start a beekeeping enterprise to produce and market honey. Left: Without such support, and the tenure to reap the future rewards of their hard work, landless farmers like these in Belém cannot afford to worry about tomorrow. They slash and burn rainforest in order to plant crops that will feed their families today.

(1) *Applied Research.* The recent study by the Instituto Brasileiro de Análises Sociais e Econômicas (IBASE) of widespread violence against street children—much of it perpetrated by death squads—has attracted international attention through a collaborative effort with Amnesty International and is sparking corrective government action at the local and national levels.

(2) *Grassroots Organizing.* The Federação de Órgãos de Assistência Social e Educacional (FASE), through 17 offices nationwide, has helped spawn and continues to provide organizational assistance to thousands of com-

munity organizations such as slum dwellers' associations, rural cooperatives, and women's support groups.

(3) *Training and Technical Assistance.* The 20 GSOs that make up the network Programa de Tecnologia Alternativa (PTA) provide ongoing training and technical assistance to small-scale rural producers' organizations throughout Brazil in such areas as land management, organic fertilizers, biological pest controls, low-cost pig raising techniques, and collective marketing.

(4) *Information Sharing.* The Instituto de Estudos Sócio-Econômicos (INESC)

closely monitors legislative proceedings in the National Congress and reports its findings regularly to a nationwide network of hundreds of NGOs on such topics as agricultural policies, human rights, and the environment.

(5) *Public Policy Advocacy.* The national campaign led by the Associação Brasileira Interdisciplinar da AIDS (ABIA) to inform the public about the high incidence of AIDS among hemophiliacs who received transfusions spurred the Brazilian Congress to enact legislation abolishing the retail trade in blood and its derivatives and regulating existing blood banks



(Daniel and Ramos, 1989). These measures have resulted in a marked decrease in the spread of the HIV virus through the blood supply.

(6) *Coalition Building.* Several major GSOs played a key role in organizing and leading the broad-based "Movimento Pela Ética no Política," which contributed decisively to the impeachment of President Fernando Collor de Mello for wide-scale corruption in late 1992. This unprecedented civic campaign, which brought together over 800 NGOs, labor unions, professional associations, and church groups, marked the first time that GSOs flexed their political muscle on the national stage.

What nearly all of these activities have in common is networking—linking base groups and GSOs together to have an impact on regional and national problems. The first networking initiatives appeared at the local and regional levels—especially in the Northeast and Southeast—as GSOs began to sponsor informal meetings and seminars to share experiences and discuss the technical

aspects of their work. The first truly national meeting occurred in 1985, when representatives from nearly 30 prominent GSOs convened in Rio de Janeiro to discuss strategies for networking and the formation of common policy agendas. Since then, several national meetings have been held to assess growing relations with the government; discuss the impact of foreign debt on the poor; and analyze international aid trends now that the end of the Cold War might reduce support for development efforts in the South. Today, many of Brazil's larger cities—such as Rio de Janeiro, Recife, and Porto Alegre—have permanent networks of GSOs called "Forums de ONG" that meet regularly, and permanent national coalitions have formed around thematic areas such as urban development and agrarian policies.

The most important networking effort to date occurred in Rio de Janeiro in August 1991, when 125 leading GSOs joined together to form the Associação Brasileira de ONG (ABONG). ABONG brings together

under one umbrella GSOs and a few social movements that work in such diverse areas as popular education, urban development, human rights, and sustainable agriculture. The founding charter of ABONG expresses its intent to affirm "the common identity of GSOs committed to the democratization of Brazilian society and whose resolve was forged through a tradition of providing support and services to grassroots movements." The principal objectives of the Associação are to promote greater discussion and networking among GSOs around shared development themes and strategies; to inform the Brazilian public of the nature and mission of GSOs; to represent the interests of GSOs before the state; and, finally, to promote greater international cooperation.

This final objective is not an anomaly but reflects a growing trend within the GSO sector. Also in August of 1991 in Rio, nine leading Brazilian nonprofits, under the sponsorship of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), brought together



More than 600 booths were set up at the Global Forum, offering videos, tapes, books, and displays that highlighted innovative development and environmental projects designed by grassroots groups from all over the world. Here, representatives from several NGOs pause to discuss the day's activities outside the booth of the Instituto de Estudos da Religião (ISER), a Brazilian research GSO. ISER was a catalyst in organizing UNCED's closing vigil that brought leaders of 25 religious denominations together to share their common concern for preserving the planet's diversity of life and culture.

representatives from more than 160 local NGOs, 40 international donor agencies, and 35 NGOs from Latin America, Asia, and Europe. The "1º Encontro Internacional de ONG e o Sistema de Agências das Nações Unidas" conference was an important milestone in creating awareness among Brazilian GSOs of how their development strategies and problems were mirrored internationally, and gave them the opportunity to engage large multilateral agencies such as UNDP in frank discussions of specific policies and methodologies. A second, current initiative is being undertaken by several leading Brazilian GSOs in partnership with the Brazil Network, a U.S.-based coalition of human rights advocates, church leaders, academics, and environmentalists. The "partnership program" involves a year-long internship for Brazilian GSO staff in

Washington, D.C.; electronic information exchange; and close consultation to develop common strategies on issues such as race relations, violence against street children, and bilateral trade relations.

Both of these international networking initiatives also carried potential long-term benefits. Brazilian GSOs, unlike some of their counterparts in Chile who forged close ties with the new democratic government of President Aylwin, have jealously guarded their institutional autonomy vis-à-vis the state in order to pursue the activist social agendas they formed in partnership with community-based movements. GSOs in Brazil promote grassroots democracy by teaching citizenship and encouraging the poor to exercise their rights as full citizens. As a result, they have become effective watchmen for civil

society, monitoring government actions and mobilizing public opinion to ensure public-sector accountability. With the specter of authoritarian rule continuing to shadow the country while structural economic problems threaten fragile democratic institutions, maintaining the vitality and energy of civil society provides the best hope for Brazil's future. Ties with the Brazil Network will allow Brazilian GSOs to share parallel experiences with community-based movements in the United States, the birthplace, as Alexis de Tocqueville observed in the 1830s, of the world's first national civil society.

As for the UNDP conference in 1991, the experience that was gathered there helped set the stage for the role Brazilian GSOs would play at UNCED the following year.



Fernando Miceli

Above: This poster affirming the importance of women's participation in ecodesvelopment was displayed outside the Planeta Fêmea, the tent for women's groups at the Global Forum. Right: A participant from Africa at her booth outside Planeta Fêmea. Women from the North and the South worked together to prepare two groundbreaking treaties that were presented to government leaders during UNCED. The treaties stressed women's rights to control their own lives and demanded equal roles in shaping public policy at the local, national, and international levels.



Fernando Miceli

Setting-Up Stage for the Global Forum

In retrospect it seems obvious that the sterling performance of Brazilian GSOs in support of the Global forum at UNCED was made possible by the negotiating skills and wide range of contacts developed during years of national networking. The forum, then, became a benchmark for measuring the maturation of Brazil's GSO sector and a stimulus for promoting a new and higher level of sectoral consolidation.

Realizing the difficulty of the logistical task before them, a core group of several dozen key GSOs organized the Brazilian Forum for UNCED (FORUM) in 1990, and convened its

first assembly in São Paulo. A coordinating body of 26 major GSOs was elected, and an executive committee of 6 NGOs was selected to oversee fundraising, organize planning sessions, and coordinate day-to-day functions. A national office was opened in Rio de Janeiro, and Jean Pierre Leroy from Brazil's oldest and largest GSO, the Federação de Órgãos de Assistência Social e Educacional (FASE), was appointed executive secretary. During the next two years, eight national organization-building assemblies were held, with IAF support, in various regions of the country.

Given the sector's geographic, programmatic, and political diversity, the task of unifying Brazil's NGOs for UNCED was understandably challenging. Friction between the more-established, development-oriented GSOs and the recently created and more-militant environmental groups generated heated debates and often intense jockeying for power. Disputes were complicated not only by attempts to resolve the decades-old conflict between developmental and environmental concerns, but also from competition generated by the allure of scarce development dollars. Gradually, a consensus emerged, which was reflected in the book *Meio Ambiente e Desenvolvimento: Uma Visão das ONG e*

dos Movimentos Sociais Brasileiros, published on the eve of UNCED. This book was undersigned by all 1,300 NGOs that eventually joined the FORUM. In the process of forging and articulating a grassroots perspective on the state of the environment and development in Brazil, these NGOs confronted and resolved among themselves many of the issues that would arise later at the Global Forum, preparing Brazilian groups for a leading role in many of the international policy debates that followed.

Once UNCED was under way, the FORUM's first task was to help make sure that the logistics for the Global Forum, which was officially recognized and supported by the United Nations and had an operating budget of \$12 million, ran smoothly. Tony Gross of the Centro Ecumênico de Documentação e Informação (CEDI) represented Brazilian NGOs as the Global Forum's cochair. During the 14-day event, some 25,000 NGO representatives—including environmentalists, religious leaders, appropriate-technology entrepreneurs, grassroots community leaders, scientists, and politicians—from 167 countries passed through the street carnival of tents and outdoor arenas set up at Flamengo Beach. They were joined on any given day by an average of

10,000 citizens from Rio. Over 500 workshops, seminars, press conferences, and exhibitions were held, and music performances were scheduled nightly. Although a budgetary crisis literally threatened to pull the plug on translation services and electronic equipment halfway through the Forum, it was averted, and the general consensus was that the Brazilians had done a remarkable job in assuring a smoothly run operation.

The Brazil FORUM's second leadership task was to host the International NGO Forum, which was the largest NGO gathering within the Global Forum itself. Nearly 3,200 representatives from an estimated 1,200 NGOs participated in this effort by environmental and developmental NGOs to craft common strategies and speak in a unified voice before the official United Nations conference. During the 14 days in Rio, international NGOs hammered out 39 "treaties," or consensual documents, in five major areas: global environmental issues, international economic policies, agriculture and food distribution, the situation of indigenous peoples, and NGO cooperation.

Many of the position papers were essentially agreed upon in advance, through negotiations at four UNCED Preparatory Committee Meetings (PREPCOMs) held in Nairobi, Geneva, and New York City during the preceding two years. Although the quality and consistency of these documents vary, depending on the complexity of the problems and the progress made at the PREPCOMs, they are significant for the wide range of their signatories. The basic frameworks for "Population, Environment, and Development" and the "Treaty of NGO Women in Search of a Healthy and Just Planet," for instance, were drafted by a committee of 55 women leaders, from 31 countries, who had

been appointed during a world congress in Miami in November 1991.

A key role throughout this process was played by IBASE. IBASE linked its computer network, AlterNex, with several others overseas to form a temporary international communications system called FreeNet. This vast electronic web connected more than 17,000 groups worldwide through e-mail and teleconferencing during both the preparatory phase of UNCED and the conference itself.



Kathryn Smith Pyle

Employees of IBASE at their computer center in Rio. IBASE set up an international computer network during UNCED called FreeNet that allowed groups worldwide to participate in conference activities without being physically present.

The 40 computer terminals set up at the Global Forum and at Rio Centro permitted their 1,000 users to compose treaty amendments, scan issue-specific conferences and databases for pertinent information, and send action alerts to their home offices. Even NGOs physically unrepresented at UNCED were able to critique and sign-on electronically through FreeNet to the various treaties.

During the policy debates themselves, the Brazilian NGOs contributed decisive organizational and conceptual leadership in several specific areas, particularly women's issues, urban development, and the management of tropical rainforests. Described by organizers as the single most important international gathering of women since the 1985 United Nations Women's Conference in

Nairobi, the sessions at the Planeta Fêmea tent in Flamengo Beach generated intense debate and unprecedented consensus on several historically divisive issues. Proceedings were convened under the sponsorship of two GSOs and cochaired by their representatives, Rosika Darcy de Oliveira of the Instituto de Ação Cultural (IDAC) in Rio and Bella Abzug of the U.S.-based Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO). The most important treaty ratified here broke through previous polarizations between North and South and between advocates of population control and poverty alleviation. It recognized that poverty, birth rates, and environmental issues were interrelated; stressed the reproductive rights of women; and called for an increase in preventive and health education programs for women.

The Instituto de Estudos, Formação e Assessoria em Políticas Sociais (PÓLIS) of São Paulo chaired the International Forum on Urban Reform. Six round-table discus-

sions brought together renowned city planners, neighborhood organizers, and union leaders from around the globe to spotlight the fact that although much of the environmental debate has focused on rural issues, many of the most-pressing problems are urban generated. The treaty they helped craft makes a clearly reasoned case for replacing the traditional models of development that have produced widespread impoverishment and air, water, and waste pollution in cities worldwide with a new, more-humane, and sustainable model. The 140 NGOs from 29 countries that signed the treaty pledged to work for greater local democratic participation in the formation and implementation of urban development models, and to work together to document and compare common problems, disseminate inno-

vative methodologies, and coordinate advocacy of public policy reforms.

Finally, Mary Allegretti, head of the Instituto de Estudos Ambientais e Amazônicos (IEA) and one of the initial recipients of the IAF's Dante B. Fascell Inter-American Fellowship Award, convened a panel that brought together rubbertappers leaders of the CNS, scientists, development specialists, and donor agency representatives to debate the effectiveness of "extractive reserves" in halting destruction of tropical rainforests. The IEA and the rubbertappers have pioneered this concept, which guarantees preservation of pristine forest while allowing the people who live there—Native Americans, rubbertappers, and river dwellers—to market its bountiful harvest of rubber, nuts, fruits, plants, and game.

While agreeing that the model needs to be strengthened through improved marketing arrangements for renewable forest products, the panel acknowledged that final judgment did not rest on short-term economics alone, since the reserves help protect fragile ecological systems vital to the long-term welfare of the region, the nation, and perhaps even the world. The discussion of how IEA and CNS have collaborated to build strong local organizations, acquire technical expertise, forge strategic institutional alliances domestically and internationally, and persuade the government to establish 14 reserves covering 3.1 million hectares and benefiting 9,000 poor rural families showed that development and the environment could complement one another. It also reinforced ISER's conclusion that Brazil's GSOs are singularly positioned to forge strategic alliances across institutional and ideological boundaries.

A New Day for Brazil and the Earth?

The closing event of the Global Forum was the Night for the Earth, an interfaith vigil attended by leaders from 25 religious traditions, ranging from Hinduism, Judaism, and Bahai to Afro-Brazilian Spiritism. The Dalai Lama of Tibet shared the stage with the head of the Brazilian Catholic

Bishops' Council and the president of the World Lutheran Federation, among others. An estimated 35,000 people participated, worshiping and celebrating together in a festival of music, dance, and the arts. The vigil was organized by ISER, and the painstaking planning and coordination required to mediate conflicting theological doctrines and religious customs was a tribute to the ability of an independent and autonomous GSO to create a space in which so many different kinds of people could share a common purpose.

The press and filmmakers were on hand to cover it. The visuals were full of pomp and flair, and the presence of so many different sacred symbols was inspiring, conveying a sense of unity rather than the cacophony one might expect from so many varied voices. But what did it mean? Had anything lasting happened?

These, of course, are the same questions that have been asked of UNCED itself. Although it is too early to tell what lasting impact the largest assemblage of governments and NGOs in history will have on the state of our ailing planet and its people, one thing is clear. UNCED was a watershed event for NGOs and particularly Brazilian GSOs. Hosting the Global Forum enabled Brazilian GSOs to hone organizational skills, strengthen the bonds of networking, and achieve deserved recognition among the public at large. UNCED represented a new stage in their development: the much-awaited debut of institutions born under an authoritarian regime and accustomed to playing a backstage role for grassroots movements.

As Herbert de Souza (Betinho), president of IBASE and renowned national civic leader, stated in his essay "NGOs in the Decade of the 1990s": "GSOs face the challenge of emerging from the wings to stand at the forefront and advocate the duty of active citizenship. They must clearly affirm who they are, why they struggle, what they propose as they make the shift from micro to macro, from the private to the public, from resistance to proposal making, from identification of problems to formulation of their solutions."

There is no doubt that Brazilian GSOs are undergoing a historic transi-

tion. They are shifting from small, alternative, social-change entrepreneurs toward consolidation into large, specialized institutions having an increasingly important voice in the formation of national public policy. UNCED not only allowed Brazilian GSOs to demonstrate their new maturity under the glare of an unprecedented international spotlight, but previewed the leading role GSOs will play in the development and further democratization of Brazilian society. ♦

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