

Reviews: Reports and Books

Report on the Fifth Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Cancun, Mexico, 10-14 September 2003

At the fourth ministerial meeting of the WTO held in Doha in November 2001, a new trade round, the Doha Round, was launched. This Round mandated that special attention be given to the development needs of poorer members. The fifth ministerial conference represented a mid-term review. Cancun was designed to be a stocktaking exercise, noting the progress that had been made towards carrying out the work programme agreed at Doha and an opportunity for members to recommit to concluding the negotiations launched in 2001 by the agreed date of 1 January 2005.

The Doha Round offered developing countries the prospect of significant benefits from expected new agreements on a range of issues. In the months between Doha and Cancun this optimism had receded as repeatedly deadlines on the key areas, agriculture, TRIPS (trade related intellectual property rights) and health, special and differential treatment and implementation were all missed. As September 2003 drew closer, the difficulties facing the WTO in its attempts to negotiate the Doha agenda were blatant. Lack of political will among developed countries, lack of capacity in developing countries, the size and complexity of the agenda combined to put the brakes on progress.

This goes some way to explaining the absence of a first draft text for Cancun. Under his own "personal responsibility", the Chair of the General Council, Carlos Perez del Castillo did issue the first draft just over a fortnight before the ministerial. Releasing the text so close to the Conference, did prescribe discussions on its contents in national capitals and in Geneva, while at the same time providing inadequate space for narrowing

the chasm it provoked between developed and developing countries.

North-South polarisation within the WTO has been a feature of previous conferences. However, the Doha experience had instilled a strong belief amongst the more powerful members that mechanisms such as extending negotiations and small group meetings, particularly through the Green Room process, could surmount difficulties in reaching agreement. However, a new-found resolve and sense of unity among developing countries was very much a hallmark of the Cancun Ministerial, the solidity of which was underestimated by the developed countries.

The formation of the G21 led by Brazil was far more significant than the EU or the US had realised when the group jointly submitted a paper on agriculture in Geneva before the ministerial. Rather than working with a new trade alliance which included China and India amongst its members, the EU and US dwelt on the divisions between the trading interests of the G21 and predicted its imminent collapse. Two other groups forged solid negotiating alliances: the G32 for Strategic Producers and a Special Safeguard Mechanism, demands for special measures to protect vulnerable farmers and the G90 consisting of less developed countries (LDCs), the African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and African Union members. These groups overlapped and worked together, showing unprecedented strength of unity in their readiness to withstand the usual divide and rule pressures from the developed countries.

Initiatives such as COMESA's officials' brief for the Cancun Ministerial Conference titled "Africa and the World Trade Organisation" clarified Africa's common interest and strategy for getting the best possible result for the continent from the negotiations. It noted that "Africa can be heard if it speaks out, and does so loudly and clearly and with a common voice. This means the adoption of common positions that are presented in the meetings on the issues that come up for discussion. The common positions should be adopted after a process of preparation and discussion, so that their adoption is a declaration of the common interests of the various countries to be jointly pursued and defended".

The absence of a guide to process and procedures for the conduct of the ministerial, agreed by the members, was a significant error. For although the immediate issues which triggered the failure of the ministerial were the Singapore issues, agriculture, market access and the treatment of the cotton issue, the problem goes much deeper and involves the whole question

of the lack of transparency and democracy in the WTO's decision-making process.

The non-inclusive process evident in the preparations for Cancun, e.g. mini-ministerial meetings, was perpetuated throughout the ministerial. At the opening ceremony, the Conference chairperson, Mr Derbez, set the tone for the conduct of the ministerial when he informed delegates that he had appointed five "friends of the chair" to aid progress on the five main areas under negotiation. Pursuing business in this way when members have highlighted the need for chairpersons at ministerial conferences to be identified by explicit consensus in the preparatory process in Geneva served to undermine members' confidence, particularly that of developing country members, in the impartiality of nominees.

It was on the basis of the reports from these "five friends of the chair" and the separate cotton discussions which the Director-General had taken a lead on, that Mr Derbez released a revised draft ministerial text in the early afternoon of the penultimate day. Differing little from the Chair of the General Council's pre-Cancun text, the revised text had the effect of igniting an already explosive situation. The text failed to address the issue of export subsidies and no ceiling was placed on rich country agricultural subsidies. Secondly, despite the clear and loudly expressed opposition by the majority of developing countries to commencing negotiations on the Singapore issues, the text set out a timetable for negotiations on investment, and launched immediate negotiations on transparency in government procurement and trade facilitation. Thirdly, a non-linear formula obligating faster industrial liberalisation in developing countries presented a vista of "industrial graveyards" in the poorest countries. However, the spark in the text was the treatment of the cotton initiative. Expectations amongst the overwhelming majority of members that the issue would be conclusively dealt with were dashed. The text closely followed the US position on the issue, mixing up the cotton issue with the industrial tariffs in textiles and clothing, ignoring the compensation demand and suggested the answer for West African farmers was diversification out of cotton production, rather than curbing US dumping.

With divisions aggravated and a day remaining before the official close of the ministerial, exclusive Green Room type meetings came to the fore. Achieving resolution within such a short timeframe through a process which was fundamentally mistrusted by the majority of members was unrealistic. Accordingly, before the final Green Room meeting, when the

AU/ACP/LDC group were given an opportunity to consider the possible reappraisal of the Singapore issues, speakers repeatedly commented on the lack of a transparent process to explain how or where it was agreed that Singapore issues would be the focal issue for resolution. The majority of members had repeatedly expressed their opposition to these issues. Developing countries were in Cancun to discuss development issues, agriculture, market access, issues that were clearly identified as the priority areas in the Doha Work Programme.

Since Cancun, it is clear that the new alliances forged by developing countries have not dissolved. The future of the WTO is very much dependent upon acceptance of this reality. Accordingly, it is imperative that the way in which ministerial meetings are prepared and conducted are reformed so that the process is no longer captive to the interests of a powerful minority of members.

Michael O'Brien

Development Methods and Approaches, Critical Reflections: A Development in Practice Reader

Deborah Eade (Editor), Oxford, Oxfam GB, 2003, pp. 290, npg

This reader is a thematic collection of papers published in the international journal *Development in Practice* in past years. Edited by Deborah Eade and including a thought provoking introduction by Jo Rowlands, this Reader explores some of the tensions between value-based approaches to development and the methods and tools used by aid agencies to plan and implement development interventions.

Approaches, Rowlands reminds us, are not neutral. Approaches can be “empowering, participatory, gender-equitable, people-centred, inclusionary” or they can be the reverse, i.e. “disempowering, top-down, male-biased, formulaic, exclusionary”. Or, they can be and often are “a combination of these”. Approaches are based on a set of values, beliefs and attitudes. They provide a guiding framework which might be transformative in terms of power relations and resource allocation or conservative of the *status quo*. Methods on the other hand are the “step-by-step specifics of how an approach is put into practice”. Problems can arise when the method is not compatible with the values, beliefs or attitudes on which the approach that is being used ultimately rests.

This tension between values, approaches and methods is explored in the essay by G. Power, M. Maury and S. Maury.¹ The authors argue that while non-governmental organisations (NGOs) generally adopt a values-driven approach to development based on empowerment and community-based self development, their organisational structure and practice are seldom in alignment with these development principles. Organisations therefore experience what the authors call “an alien-hand syndrome”, i.e. “an organisational learning disorder which involves a disconnection between organisation intentions and actions”. The authors believe that NGOs must recognise and correct the power asymmetries embedded within them and bring their practices in line with their core values. Bottom-up organisational learning (BUL) is proposed as a normative

framework of approaches and methods for NGOs willing to confront the alien-hand syndrome and become downwardly accountable. BUL is “a process of comprehensively (re)orienting operations to the concrete realities of people living in poverty and injustice”. It implies allowing those realities to form the basis of not only programme designs but also management policies, plans, budgets and fundraising methods and targets. It asks organisations to analyse and change their internal structures, systems and culture.

The operationalisation of BUL requires first and foremost a commitment by NGOs to learn how they learn. The concept of organisational learning is explored in a number of essays included in this reader. D. Ellerman in his provoking piece² analyses some of the major blockages to organisational learning, chief among them being the tendency of organisations to espouse “certain truths or messages instead of being engaged in an open-ended search for knowledge”. Organisational learning can best take place if genuine debate, open discussion and collision of ideas are fostered instead of being suppressed in favour of an outward show of allegiance to official views. Adopting an open learning model will help agencies move from “standard knowledge dissemination or transmission-belt methodology towards knowledge-based capacity building”. Agencies should refrain from trying to teach or impose a certain representation or view on the local partners and communities. Agencies should display “non-dogmatism, cognitive humility, tolerance, egolessness or Socratic ignorance”. Rather than teaching, agencies should engage in capacity building and facilitating the partner’s own learning process.

The concept and practice of capacity building is discussed by A. Kaplan in his essay included in this Reader.³ After highlighting the key elements of organisational life (a conceptual framework, organisational attitude, vision and strategy, organisational structure, skills and competencies, material resources), the author stresses that while the latter are visible, tangible and measurable, the former are more invisible, yet they are the aspects that by and large determine organisational functioning. Most capacity building interventions focus on the visible and tangible and propose static blueprints for organisational development. Paradigm shifts are required, according to the author, so as to move from the tangible to the intangible and from a static approach to the ability to read the developmental phase at which a particular organisation may be and then devise an appropriate response.

The implications in terms of practice are considerable. This radical approach implies that practitioners need to develop abilities and resourcefulness rather than “being trained in past solutions, in fixed mindsets, and trained behaviours which replicate particular patterns and understandings”. Practitioners should see themselves as “artists of the invisible, continually having to deal with ambiguity and paradox, uncertainty in the turbulence of change, new and unique situations”. W. Postma⁴ compares capacity to the wind, something that conveys direction, velocity, energy but also something that we will not be able to fully grasp, understand or predict. Hence, methods and tools of capacity building need to “capture the imagination of an organisation’s members, lending focus to their dreams, and building energy and momentum for seeing these dreams realised”.

P. Plowman⁵ strongly criticises approaches to organisational change informed solely by organisational development (OD) theory and practice.⁶ According to Plowman, “OD theory and practice have traditionally been gender blind. ... They fail to address the impact of unequal gender relations both within organisations and in their programmes”. While much of the thinking on gender has been in relation to planning and programming, it is increasingly clear that there is a need to bring a gender analysis into the organisation itself. Plowman proposes the adoption of a gender approach to organisational change. Starting from an analysis of the external environment, the analysis will then shift from the bigger picture to the level of the organisation to look at issues such as organisational culture, systems, structures and programmes. Because the gender approach is based on an analysis of power relations and distribution, it opens up a new and radical way of analysing organisations and provides an opportunity to bring to the surface other kinds of inequality. Concrete experiences and lessons learned in mainstreaming gender within organisations and in programming are drawn in the essays by P. L. Howard⁷ and B. Thomas-Slayter and G. Sodikoff.⁸ They both stress the importance of viewing stakeholders as active agents of change, using participatory methodologies and focusing on process and not just outcomes.

Participatory methodologies with particular reference to rapid rural appraisal and participatory rural appraisal (RRA/PRA) are then analysed. Of particular interest is the essay by T. Mompati and G. Prinsen,⁹ which highlights the challenges that ethnicity poses to participatory methodologies and the piece by

E. Ngunjiri¹⁰ who warns us that participatory methodologies “as double-edged swords, ... can be used to destroy or to build the capacities of those upon whom they are used”.

Considerable progress has been made over the past two decades to raise standards in the development field. This Reader is a key resource for practitioners and researchers interested in understanding and improving the quality of development interventions.

The underlying theme is that development processes should enhance the power of people to act collectively to make change happen. Approaches and methods need to harness human resourcefulness, intelligence and creativity in ways that bring the achievement of human rights and social justice closer to reality. Rowlands warns us that “methods need to be applied in the context of a clear approach, based on values and purpose, if they are not to become rigid and reinforcing of existing relations. But even when clearly placed within a thought-through approach, methods and tools may fail or be counter-productive if they are used without skill, or are implemented by people with different purposes and intent”.

Sara Franch

Footnotes

- ¹ “Operationalising bottom-up learning in international NGOs: barriers and alternatives”
- ² “Should development agencies have official views?”
- ³ “Capacity building: shifting the paradigms of practice”
- ⁴ “Capacity building: the making of a curry”
- ⁵ “Organisational change from two perspectives: gender and organisational development”
- ⁶ OD has been developed as an approach to assist organisations to improve how they function and to help them be more effective and efficient.
- ⁷ “Beyond the ‘grim resisters’: towards more effective gender mainstreaming through stakeholder participation”
- ⁸ “Sustainable investments: women’s contributions to natural resource management projects in Africa”
- ⁹ “Ethnicity and participatory development methods in Botswana: some participants are to be seen and not heard”
- ¹⁰ “Participatory methodologies: double-edged swords”

Peacebuilding : A Caritas Training Manual, Vatican City, Caritas Internationalis, 2002, 256pp, paperback, png

The concept of pro-actively building peace in communities and societies is something to which many people and organisations aspire. Far too often situations in the developing world are bound up in, and are complicated by, chronic conflict. Where a base of peace can be laid down the door is opened for tackling the myriad of other problems which beset such communities. A starting point can be found in *Peacebuilding: A Caritas Training Manual* with contributions from a wide range of writers and contributors.

The first section introduces peacebuilding and includes an overview of the Manual which sets out to provide a practical and useful resource for people who work in the area. The scope covers everything from basic ideas in peacebuilding to the provision of a full training programme. Two main themes run throughout – relationships and process. The focus on relationships in peacebuilding means that trust can be built on small incremental changes that respect the abilities which each person brings and ensures that a participatory process is the only way it will work. It is emphasised that peace is inextricably linked to social justice and for peace to be lasting, injustices must be addressed.

The modules in the second section range from the logistics of running a training course, through dealing with reconciliation, the skills of conflict resolution and communication, to programme design and evaluation. The section on religious perspectives on reconciliation, though brief, is particularly interesting and deals with the many differences as well as similarities in approach between Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism. Using metaphor to explain difficult topics can be very powerful and one example from the Manual is to liken conflict to fire through five stages – gathering materials for the fire (potential conflict), fire begins burning (confrontation), bonfire (crisis), coals (potential for further conflict), fire out (regeneration). For each stage of the metaphor tasks can be identified. For example, in the first stage potentially inflammable situations can be addressed by activities such as tackling prejudice, conflict resolution training and advocacy.

This section also includes five operating principles for peacebuilding and an exploration of various personal styles in responding to conflict. Potentially one of the most useful sections is the peacebuilding evaluation and assessment framework.

The third section is devoted to the detailed practicalities of training and includes advice and background information on planning a workshop, training adults, trainer motivation, facilitation, group dynamics and finally evaluating the training. The Manual finishes with a list of references, further resources and a number of regional case studies.

There is an attempt to distil and present ideas in a digestible fashion and this is achieved very well - the sections are carefully organised, there are plenty of diagrams and photographs, role plays/handouts and other training interventions abound, while the use of two tone and large format make it highly user-friendly. Anyone with an interest in this topic will find something of value here. Those working on peacebuilding programmes, or programmes with an element of peacebuilding in them, will find it a very helpful resource and much of the material can be used directly from the Manual in a training course. Nevertheless a caveat is sounded - the matters dealt with are complex and simply learning the basics will not suffice. Rather, effective peacebuilding is a lifelong and challenging pursuit.

The mediation model described is based in a North American context and perhaps the one missed opportunity in the Manual was to highlight more the nature of traditional indigenous conflict resolution approaches. Mention is made of *gacaca* in Rwanda and there is a case study, *Rapid Response in Wajir*, dealing with the elders' role in resolving a dispute. There are also some references in the regional case studies. However, there is much of use to learn from indigenous mediation and, given the involvement of John Paul Lederach as a contributor, this subject could have received much fuller treatment which would further enrich the Manual's contents.

All in all this is a terrific resource book for a difficult area and one which it is to be hoped will be well used.

Brendan Schütte

Copies of "Peacebuilding" are available from Trócaire Resource Centres or through the Caritas Internationalis website:

www.caritas.org