

Published in *Globalization: Myth and Reality*, Concept Publishers, New Delhi, 2004.

## **CIVIL SOCIETY AND REGIONALISM IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION**

**SUNIL SONDHI**  
**University of Delhi**  
Email: [sunilson@bol.net.in](mailto:sunilson@bol.net.in)

### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this article is to present a critical view of the growth of regionalism in the Asia and the Pacific basin and of how civil society is building countervailing powers to challenge the new state-market nexus. The current international political economy presents a need and opportunity for what the People's Plan for the 21st Century has called a "transborder participatory democracy" (Muto 1993).*

*Participatory democracy is a system of decision making about public affairs in which citizens are directly involved, it is the original type of democracy found in ancient Athens (Held 1995). Transborder participatory democracy envisages broader social relationships beyond national borders, it is also beyond linking already nationally constituted civil societies. It is about making the people themselves visible, it is a process-oriented approach of attaining global civil governance (Ichiyo 1993). In the Asian region, the presence of geo-economic and geopolitical structures poses the necessity and possibility of a regional civil society which is pushing regional/transnational democratisation through participation.*

*This article seeks to articulate the "underside" of regional integration efforts in Asia and the Pacific and how groups in civil society are reacting to the emerging regional arrangements. Because regionalism should not only be measured in terms of the actual integration of economic fundamentals (trade, production and net capital flow) but also in terms of sociological factors, it will also look at how organised people view themselves in relation to this phenomenon.*

*For its second part, the article discusses the dynamism of currently existing civil society network in the region, but it will also go beyond the normative appreciative treatment prevalent in current readings about the subject. Social movements are oftentimes inclined to view their position as the representative view of the majority, this article will try to raise concerns about civil society's representativeness and effectiveness in articulating the different vocalities in Asia and the Pacific.*

## **Introduction**

In recent years, dramatic international changes have ushered in transformations in the economic, political and socio-cultural arrangements of forces and structures. These events revolutionised the economic and trade relations, production and communications. They also reshaped relationships between capitalist powers, and shifted ideological paradigms. World systems scholars starting from Polanyi, Wallerstein, Keohane, and Robertson, just to name a few, argued that globalisation dates as far back at the onset of modernisation although recent breakthroughs in the communication and information technology have succeeded in bringing it in the realm of culture and consciousness. Today's complex interdependence has redefined the notion of hegemonic power considering the new character of its influence over sovereignty, autonomy and accountability of states (Keohane and Nye 1989).

The early part of the 90s saw a pattern of a tri-polar political-economic structure defined by trade competition and cooperation. The increased wealth and influence of Pacific Asia as well as the emerging relationships among major capitalist powers in Northern America and Western Europe introduced a new geo-economic perspective called regionalism. The movement started with the European decision to integrate their economies after the German reunification. The long stalemate in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations and the US' need to reposition itself to address the increasing economic strength of Asia and Europe prompted the formation of the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA). The ascent of Pacific Asia as a new epicentre of capital accumulation, the growth of inter-regional trade which started in the 80's and Japan's move to increase trade relations and mechanisms of influence to other Asian countries encouraged a form of regional cooperation.

The conceptual and theoretical implications of the occurrence of at first seemingly incompatible processes of wealth accumulation ignited debates regarding the eventual 21st Century world system. Considering the inference associated with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the eventual establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) regime in the early 90s, macrostructural debates over whether what will prevail will be a multilateral, interdependent system with close cooperation among capitalist powers, or a regional bloc scenario consisting of trade and investment blocs in North America, Europe and Asia occupied the attention of policy makers and scholars. Now that things are moving on, it is becoming clear that the two tendencies are not mutually exclusive, since nation states in their bid to retain critical participation in the global economy are now adopting a mixture of domestically oriented, regionally directed and globally aligned industries. In Asia, the different regional economic integration efforts however were affected by the financial crisis that hit the region starting in 1997. Current talks among stakeholders are taking on a different tune at the beginning of the new Century.

For those seeking for alternatives to the current development model, socialism's loss of appeal and the many difficulties experienced by countries which adopted the model

brought to the fore the need for a new alternative vision that could address the multiplying negative effects of the new world order. For civil society organisations, beside following closely the unfolding developments on economic and international relations, an equally important concern is how to protect and strengthen the normative and ethical alternatives that were already established by past state-society engagements. Specifically in Asia, how could the democratic space obtained by social movements through their long and hard fought struggles against colonialism and dictatorship be expanded and reach a cross-border dimension so as to challenge the negative implications of the processes of globalisation and regionalism? In the seemingly overwhelming measures by dominant economies against their poorer trade partners, how could the marginalising consequences of unregulated market operations be addressed and poverty alleviation realised?

As nation-states lost their power to protect their national economy, economic decisions were transferred to transnational structures which operate under the baton of a global, complexly organised and exclusionary logic of the market. The "reterritorialised" political and economic relations of states (de Sousa Santos 1995) transferred control of decision-making processes concerning wealth creation and distribution beyond national borders. For civil society, the enhanced power wielded by capital, firms and information networks poses more difficult problems, since work in these three domains needs more capacity building efforts from their part. Because the traditional focus of civil society in the past has been its engagement with the state in the struggle to democratise control over national and local resources, the "transnationalisation of state" (Cox 1987) and the seemingly irreversible drive toward economic interdependence determined by internationally mobile capital have redefined the arena of struggle. This change requires a new set of political and socio-economic strategies on the part of the new social movements and non-governmental development organisations which this paper refers to in its discussions about civil society.

Gill's synthesis of Cox and Braudel's understanding of the world order involved an investigation of relatively persistent pattern of ideas, institutions and material forces which form historical structures which dominates particular societies or civilisational forms in both space and time. Reproduction of reality rests on the understanding of the dialectics of social structures. Space and time must be understood in relation to value and power. As the earlier proponents of the approach like Gramsci and Polanyi effectively showed, understanding the contradictions of social structures provide social actors with instruments to transform society.

In the book "Empire and Emancipation", Nederveen Pieterse discussed that the dialectic of resistance in opposing domination, calls upon resources that are or appear to be the opposite of the dominant imperial ones... yet, if the emancipatory movement is to succeed in its objectives, it must also, to an extent, bring itself to the level of its opponent. It necessitates measures which he further proposed like the appropriation of the opponent's technology, and selective emulation of its mode of organisation and strategy. These justify the now common call in the movements for alternative to "talk the talk and walk the walk". Also, Pieterse mentioned that together, domination and emancipation, empire and liberation constitute a force field in which they increasingly interpenetrate one another, and in the course of this backstage negotiation the actual process of humanisation of social relations takes shape. This approach challenged civil society to come up with a cohesive

counter-hegemonic plan that could equip it with viable mechanisms in its engagement with the emerging more complex geopolitical and geoeconomic struggle that necessitated what Gramsci called "war of position" (Forgacs 1988) in the local, national and global levels.

### **The Pacific Century and the Asian Crisis**

The modernisation of Asia was one of the most important and dynamic developments in the last three decades of the 20th Century. Two factors contributed to this: first was the spectacular economic performance of Japan, the tiger economies in East Asia and key members of the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), which was largely attributed to the NIC (newly industrialised country) model of development and the structural power of the internationally mobile capital during the last twenty years; second was the transition to a market economy by China and Indochina.

The dialectical process between the reconstruction of a regional identity and strengthening of links (see Gamble and Payne 1996), as well as the demand for openness of national economies to the global economy pushed for the different efforts of building regional economic integration. Recent trends in both investment and trade flows are strengthening this push making regional trade bloc formation inevitable. A regional trading bloc can be defined as an association of states that reduces intraregional barriers to trade, investment and human capital (Bergsten and Noland 1995).

Regionalism should be viewed in relation to the question of hegemony. In what is emerging to be a post-hegemonic world order, the Gramscian concept of equating hegemony with the foundation and establishment of a system with relatively universal appeal, with mechanisms which permit the institutionalisation of conflict and the weighting of subordinate interests in a transnational political settlement is still very much valid. As shown by the different Asian regional initiatives namely the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), the East Asia Economic Group, and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the hegemony over regional politics and economic arrangement along a specific line is a struggle between state strategies which are seeking to define the regional project.

The economic expansion of Asia as Arrighi (1996) and Frank (1994) argued, should be viewed as a return to a world system that saw an important role of Asia in what they call Sinocentric tribute-trade system. Today, Asia's emerging political, economic and cultural influence is based on foundations which are different from the dominant Anglo-American model. In East Asia, strong states engineered the shape of their economies (Chowdhury and Islam, 1993). The development strategies and the adoption of the NIC development model of the neighbouring countries are factors that shape the flows of trade and investment in the region and this redefined the development context for the rest of developing countries. After the financial crisis, the framework for Regionalism suffered a conundrum and became a problem-solving exercise that failed to generate a sound solution. Growth, chartered through the "Asian way of capitalism" characterised by state intervention and protectionism, was put into review and became a launching pad for critiques against corruption.

In the interregnum between the old and the new, dynamic Asia is connected by the lingering stories of poverty in peripheral areas found both in the developed and developing

economies. The 1998 Poverty Report of the UNDP estimated that Asia and the Pacific region has 83% of its people in the international poverty line or having an income of \$1 per day. More than ever, it is still relevant to raise questions whether or not development is taking place, what kind of development, and towards what direction is it leading. The growing list of the underprivileged that is being sacrificed in the altar of economic growth is steadily increasing. Cheap labour continues to be the major attraction for investors, low wages and the denial of workers' rights for security and welfare (CETRI 1982, Thomas 1995) are still prevalent. Mobile capital is undermining the habitat of indigenous people and their communities, causing their displacement to make way for mines and factories leading to environmental pillage that strip and destroys sources of livelihoods. Between 1981 and 1990, more than 3 million hectares of tropical forest were lost in South East Asia and the Pacific (UNDP 1995:25).

Effects of export-led strategies and Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in poor countries in Asia as in the rest of the developing world, brought about crisis in social reproduction and an intensified commodification of the everyday life. The transfer of power to private capital effect reforms that caused the diminished redistributive capacity of the state resulting to decreased allotment to public expenditures. These transferred the burden of providing basic needs to the family which in turn gives extra load to women who do two-thirds of all the work in Third World societies (Gill 1995:92). The gains achieved by women in the transformed gender relations were eroded by the impact of adjustment and transition because they then have to work harder to fulfil their multiple roles as mothers, household managers, community workers and producer of goods and services (UNDP 1995:41), reinforcing the inequality between gender. This could be highly observed in Asia's poor enclaves.

The buzz in various international political economic circles in early 1990s was that the 21st century would be the Pacific century. Asia being the most dynamic and major destination of important foreign direct investments, as well as a market not to be missed, started the scramble for other economic power to gain a foothold to its markets through regional integration schemes. It is still the most dynamic and exciting market now but much has changed because of the crisis. The aspiring economic tigers lost their fangs while the economic model was stripped of its luster. Among the crisis' fatal victims are the various projects of regional formation, most of which are now grasping for breath.

### **The ASEAN Free Trade Area**

The ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), compared to the other projects, is still the most cohesive among the various regional projects but it was now being described as a sunset organisation by no less than the Singaporean Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar in his talks in the international circles. AFTA is an accelerated formation of the Association of South East Asian Nations or ASEAN. ASEAN is now composed of the six original members (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand), plus Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar which joined the formation before the closing of the 20th century. The original ASEAN is a regional organisation established by Southeast Asia's

pre-democracy autocrats following the end of the Vietnam War. It played an important role for the region's political cooperation since its establishment in 1967.

As originally envisioned, ASEAN would have been the vehicle to accomplish limited trade liberalisation through coordinated regional industrial import substitution (Mendl 1995:106). Several building blocs were established to build up the region's industrial capacities, among which include: the Preferential Trading Agreement (PTA), the ASEAN Industrial Projects (AIP), the ASEAN Industrial Complementation Scheme (AIC), and the ASEAN Industrial Venture (AIV). These projects were not implemented as planned because ASEAN focused on regional political issues and instead became a US-backed political alliance against the expansion of communism in the region during the Cold War.

ASEAN's second birth as AFTA was in 1992, it adopted then a more decisive resolve to accomplish its original agenda, which is to create a free-trade zone with a stronger sub-regional focus. As a direct response to APEC which showed a strong potential to become a rival formation, AFTA was further revitalised in 1996 through fasttracking of former targets. However, because of the 1997 financial crisis and the failure to put flesh at efforts of currency stabilisation, the AFTA is now falling apart. There are a number of stakes casted at its heart and it includes the following.

For the six founding members of ASEAN, free trade was intended to be fully effective by 2002, with Vietnam achieving the same status by 2006, Laos and Myanmar in 2008, and Cambodia by 2010. Developments following this year's Ministerial Conference though negated possibilities that the six founding members will be able to meet their schedule. The crisis which severely affected three of ASEAN's key member countries (Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand) made the members inclined to protect their domestic economies more than furthering regional cooperation. Malaysia's refusal to liberalise its auto industry triggered this. When the other AFTA members agreed to let Malaysia maintain its high tariffs on car imports until 2005, a domino effect followed as other countries have pushed to extend their deadlines up to year 2010 on sensitive products citing their difficulties experienced following the crisis.

By the year 2003 a Common Effective Preferential Tariff scheme, which applies to all manufactured goods and processed agricultural products, is supposed to be accomplished but member countries are passing what is now jokingly called a "mile-list" of products to be exempted. The year 2003 target is an acceleration from the original target date of 2008. Using a simultaneous internal trade liberalisation and external trade discrimination, a wider market with a reduced tariffs of between 0-5 % level is projected, which according to free trade promoters will provide the economies of scale that will induce capital and technology intensive industries. The AFTA free trade is seen by its architects as a way to break the long standing barrier to economic cooperation caused by the relatively low degree of complementarity in economic structures among ASEAN members (Kwan 1994).

By creating an integrated ASEAN market and production base, AFTA projected more competitive regionally based industries using foreign multinationals and ASEAN based firms. A horizontal division of labour in industrial goods is expected to occur as well as increased flow of foreign direct investment resulting from the creation of a common market

for a population of more than 400 million people which is larger than the EU's 372 million or NAFTA's 387 million. AFTA trade now totals \$250 billion and about 20% of which is within the region (ASEAN update, see [www.Asean.org/](http://www.Asean.org/)).

Failure at integration could also be attributed to the fact that different governments have different visions of regional free trade. Free market pushers like the Philippines and Singapore views the regional reduction of tariffs as a precondition to eventual integration into a global free trade system. On the other hand Indonesia and to some extent Malaysia, saw regional preferential trade as a step towards a large, protected regional market that would stimulate regional industrialisation via import substitution. The different members are also at different levels of economic capacity (original six compared to new members except perhaps Vietnam) and it is hard to balance the differences. Lastly, but not the least important aspect, the earlier race for regional integration projects was much reduced now. When APEC was rendered inutile as a trade bloc, the necessity for AFTA to push ahead diminished.

### **The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation**

APEC started essentially as an inclusionary framework for multilateral dialogue and policy co-ordination as well as a market led expression of a regional identity. Beyond being an annual meeting with a photo of twenty one economic leaders (all males) representing a Trans-Pacific cooperation, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) have lost much of its steam. It failed to rise above its inertia after years of debating about its final model, it achieved very little progress to institute effective regional trade liberalisation, and, it failed to do anything during the Asian crisis and had thus forever lost its opportunity to become an essential vehicle for economic integration.

APEC is a ministerial forum composed of twenty one countries and territories which are officially referred to as "member economies". Stretching from Asia to Australia, across the Pacific to North and Latin America, its member countries include: Aotearoa (New Zealand), Australia, Brunei, Canada, China, Chile, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, the United States and Vietnam.

APEC's member economies are composed of a diverse group of small, middle and major economic powers with conflicting domestic concerns and international alliances and interests. In terms of population, trade, investments and economic wealth, it collectively represents a combined Gross Domestic Product of over US\$16 trillion (1998), 57 percent of global trade and 40% of the world's population (APEC Introduction, [www.apecweb.org](http://www.apecweb.org)). It could play a central role in realising global free trade by ensuring the creation of a free trade area in the Pacific Rim. A ministerial level meeting is held every year attended by head of states of member economies. Aside from a small secretariat in Singapore, APEC has hardly any bureaucratic infrastructure.

About 80% of APEC's combined GNP comes from its two biggest economies -- Japan and the US. According to its "2020 Plan", member economies have pledged to liberalise trade

on a "complete non-discriminatory" basis, promote investments among members and achieve an "open regionalism" which is characterised by a border-less trade within the Asia Pacific region by the year 2020.

Despite new agreements and documents that each summit APEC produced, the process of developing APEC principles (open regionalism, etc.); its role in realising global free trade; and its target and general timetable (2020 plan) all lost its significance after APEC failed to provide help to the affected countries during the financial crisis. The competing interests and integration projects in APEC further intensified. The shooting down of Japan's proposed Asian Monetary Fund by the US during the crises added to the feeling among Asian elites that a regional formation without Anglo-Saxons would be better.

The campaign to push APEC to adopt organisational coherence is a dead issue after the Osaka meeting. Prior to the Seattle meeting of the WTO in 1999, some campaigns in Asia were sympathetic to the view of just to bury APEC. APEC and the other regional trade blocs served as WTO's implementing mechanisms. Just as the IMF and the WB needed governments and instruments to implement policies and actualise Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), the WTO needed governments and regional trade blocs to push forward global free trade (ALARM 1996). Regional liberalisation therefore was a way of ensuring global liberalisation in an easier to negotiate, step-by-step manner.

Both AFTA and APEC are projects of Asia's elite and excluded civil society from participating in any of the processes. It is not surprising that unlike the EU, the common people do not feel their presence despite the costly hosting and much publicised Summits. When both eventually folds up, no ordinary folk would even miss them in the newspaper headlines.

### **Regional Civil Society's Initiatives on APEC**

A counter consensus from the progressive blocs on free trade and trade liberalisation were already audible during the height of the GATT debates in the region. People's movements in the Philippines, Korea, Japan and Canada have already articulated their strong apprehension about the massive environmental and social costs of economic openness amidst governments' projection of a coming economic paradise. The expansive opposition to the GATT and the furtherance of economic liberalisation which have already created havoc on the lives and rights of those belonging to vulnerable sectors of society in APEC aroused progressive groups in the region to mobilise and monitor APEC processes.

Opposition to APEC, like the contention in GATT generated different views from Asia Pacific civil society spectrum. On one side, some networks think that to address the APEC and to seek participation in its deliberations is to legitimise an essentially anti-people initiative. They have raised reservations to engage the APEC because of what they deem as inherently limited chances for civil society to contribute meaningful influence in the processes. On the other, a broad network of NGOs and social movements feel the urgency to assert civil society's right to intervene in APEC processes due to its expected impact on

millions of poor people in the region. They hold what might best be called "a pragmatic view" that it is not easy to transform APEC into a pro-people forum, but it is an important venue where specific policy reforms can be advocated and won. APEC's seemingly formidable threat to workers, consumers, farmers and small entrepreneurs is daunting but these latter groups believe that there are spaces within it where people's concerns could be raised as well as in parallel international agreements however few and narrow.

According to documents from the Kyoto People's NGO Forum on APEC which was held parallel to the Osaka Summit, these small openings in a seemingly exclusionary process include: the recognition of sustainable growth, equitable development and national stability as the three pillars of APEC in the Bogor Declaration (1994 APEC Summit); and the commitments made by APEC member countries in UN Summits. It is viewed as crucial to remind the signatory countries to these UN summits that are part of APEC to uphold the gains of those summits.

A strategic engagement in APEC by civil society networks and groups who favoured such move could be traced in a document issued by the Host Committee for the Manila People's Forum on APEC '96. The initiatives started in Seattle when labour, human rights and environmental coalitions gathered and discussed in a forum titled "The Hidden Cost of Free Trade" which was held parallel to the 1993 APEC meeting. A year after, despite restrictive measures employed by the Indonesian government, regional NGOs met in Bogor to monitor the APEC processes and raised issues of common concern on the liberalisation agenda at the summit. In 1994, a broad network of NGOs and social movements gathered in Kyoto and arrived at a strong consensus to formally oppose APEC and its neoliberal agenda notwithstanding the participants' minimum level of unity regarding the form of intervention. The forum stressed the need to de-legitimise APEC and prevent it from consolidating. The Kyoto Declaration expressed:

*we fully support cooperation among countries and their peoples ... but unanimously reject the basic philosophy, framework and assumptions of the model of free market and trade liberalisation embraced by the APEC agenda.*

and asserted that,

*genuine development must be centred on the needs of people and nature, and deliver real social and economic justice... Genuine development must also affirm the fundamental civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of individuals and peoples, and the obligations of states to promote and protect such rights.*

The alternative regional networks in the region believe that there should be another option beside those being presented by Japan, the United States and global institutions of capital. The sufferings inflicted by free trade, neoliberalist policies and structural adjustments to the poor are fierce enough, there should be another choice. Regionalism and globalisation is beyond trade and economics, it is connected to the everyday lives and future survival of those being squeezed out from the trade race. It is therefore crucial for people's discourses to be heard above the limited range of voices coming from those who compose the APEC Business Advisory Group.

The essential point of criticism is the lack of political accountability on the side of government representatives who are attending the process. Alternative groups deem it important to remind each representative that they have responsibilities to their constituents who elected them as head of states, which enables them to attend APEC meetings as "economic leaders" of the "member economies". Governments of member economies are obliged to abide by the decisions, plans and policies agreed upon in the forum, yet as economic leaders performing the requisites of their involvement in APEC, heads of states are not doing an official act of government and therefore cannot be taken to task for their decisions. It is also becoming observable that the interests being advanced in APEC are limited to those of the business sector and multinationals, much of the affected citizenry are excluded from the processes. Lastly, civil society in the last nine years of APEC's existence have time and again protested about the lack of space for participation and transparency in APEC decision making processes. Decisions arrived at in APEC do not go through formal democratic processes and institutions of the member economies. There are also no venues where people could get balanced information which could enable them to challenge and influence those decisions.

The different sectors of civil society in the region bewail the fact that their governments are signatories to all the UN World Summits which have produced volumes upon volumes of reports and materials confirming the connection between poverty and policies generated by liberalisation and neoliberalism. Ironically, the same governments adopt the 2020 Plan and free trade agenda of APEC, which will perpetuate the vicious cycle of poverty resulting from the policies assailed in the UN World Summit statements.

In the sectoral level, the international labour movement created a regional initiative around APEC. This was born during the People's Summit on APEC in Vancouver. This showed an increased labour movement and NGO collaboration in building a counter consensus around APEC. The Asia Pacific Regional Organisation (APRO) serves as the major labour organisation focusing on APEC. The International Congress of Free Trade Union affiliates in the region constitutes it. Meetings organised for APEC discussions led to the formation of the Asia Pacific Labour Network (APLN) which have members in Chile, Mexico, USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan.

During the Manila People's Summit of 1996, APLN issued a statement called "A Trade Union Vision for APEC". The statement summarises the labour sector's agenda of promoting the improvement of working conditions and people's welfare as a necessary component of the internationalisation of market. This statement and all concurrent resolutions were upheld in Vancouver. The issue concerning the Labour Clause generated opposing positions, which were not reconciled.

The development of regional groupings that monitor and face the challenges given by geo-economic formations and the expansion of experiences in the parallel forums to important global economic meetings like APEC, WTO, UNCTAD, etc. contributed to the formation of transnational initiatives that has achieved a level of coordination which was seen in Seattle in 1999 and Washington this year. Though it never went beyond organising a

parallel forum to each summit, the APEC People's Forum contributed in the exercise of collective resistance to a seemingly unstoppable process of globalisation. This opposition gave impetus to multipliers on how to enhance and retool for the new era of opposition.

### **The East Asia Economic Group (EAEG) and the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM)**

Proposed and advocated in 1991 by Malaysian Prime Minister Mohammad Mahathir as a response to the formation of regional blocs in Europe and North America and to APEC's evolution in this direction, the EAEG advanced a form of closed regionalism or an exclusive intra-Asian economic bloc and excluding countries on the other side of the Pacific. It is an expression of resistance to the US' pressure to fast-track trade liberalisation in the region, and at the same time a measure to preserve the operative system of state-assisted capitalism inherent to the NIC model of development which the bloc adheres to. The bloc covers China, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Japan and the NIEs. The EAEG was accommodated as a caucus within APEC in 1990.

All EAEG countries are dependent to the US market as an absorber of their products. Malaysia's offer of a leadership to Japan in the EAEG prompted Japan to seriously consider which identity it will prefer, a major Asia Pacific player or East Asian leader. The formation of Asia-Europe Meeting or ASEM, in Bangkok in late February of 1996, provided a major landmark for EAEG. ASEM brought together ten Asian governments which were precisely those targeted by Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir for inclusion in EAEG, and fifteen heads of state from the European Union. ASEM signify the formal establishment of EAEG and formalised East Asia as a macro-region.

ASEM, in many aspects came about because of APEC. It is a geoeconomic and geopolitical wildcard pulled by the ten Asian countries to put a balance between the three main economic centres of the world today. It was envisioned to place Asia in a strategic position of being in the middle of the two firmly established economic powers of Europe and the US. ASEM could provide the Asian economies a counter pressure to the trade aggression of the US. The EAEG was viewed by the US as the greatest threat to APEC. The integration of East Asia and ASEAN as a production base and its own biggest market would liberate them from the US economic and political dominance. The combined growth of intra-Asian trade and steps toward the direction of EAEG consolidation so worried the US that it threatened to withdraw its security presence in Asia Pacific if the covered countries will continue to economically exclude the US in the region.

After the ASEM takeoff in Bangkok in February 1996, follow up actions took place that year which include the Customs Cooperation Meeting (CCM), the formation of the Working Group on Investment (WGI), a Senior Officials Meeting on Trade and Investment (SOMTI), and, the setting up of a Business Forum. Meetings of these working groups occurred throughout 1997 to further consolidate their structures in preparation to the second ASEM Summit held in London on April 1998. Other areas of cooperation were also formed like the Asia-Europe Environmental Technology Centre (AETC) and the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF).

The Asian crisis which altered the earlier perspective of a Pacific century made European attitude take a quick turn around in the second ASEM held in London in 1998. That is,

from Asia as an opportunity not to be missed towards Asia as a problem to solve. The Asian financial crisis dominated the discussion. Very obvious as well is the fact that the former regard to developmentalist states in Asia as an equal partner to the Europeans was diminished and instead replaced by a triumphalist attitude of Western superiority to the East (Noor, 1998). This shift of being defensive to the Asian advance to that of having a problem solver role gave impetus for the EU in its bid for governance on the neoliberal lines already articulated and promoted by the US government. The London ASEM was used by the EU to persuade Asian leaders that stability and restoration of confidence in Asian economies and financial markets would return if the stricken countries pursue their IMF reform programmes.

The London ASEM achieved the acceptance of World Bank assistance in relation to the restructuring of financial sectors, and to social measures to address poverty, and adherence to WTO rules in order to preserve an open trading system. It also clinched full and rapid implementation by all ASEM partners of the Trade Facilitation Action Plan in order to further open up trade and expand investment between Asia and Europe.

Compared to APEC, ASEM has a twin advantage: First, it has a developed policy coordination through legal and operational integration within Western Europe through the EU. This is something lacking in APEC and in fact what it tried to address in its formation. Second, compared to APEC, ASEM's concerns are broader as it covers cooperation in political, economic, and other fields.

The problem-solving event couched under the title "A Shared Interest in Restoring Stability" was a disappointment for the Asians as it failed to produce solutions. After all the talks, the Asian leaders heard the same formula shoved upon them earlier in the APEC summits of '97 and '98. Asian leaders felt that instead of helping the problematic economies, the crisis was seen as an opportunity to lecture them about the mistakes embedded in the 'Asian way' of managing economies. An ASEM Trust Fund was created and entrusted to the World Bank later but was also viewed as too little too late, and will not answer the long-term effect of the crisis. The third ASEM summit will be held this coming October at Seoul.

The various processes of regional formations if viewed broadly and beyond the issue of inter-regional dialogue, are completing the requirements of capital accumulation on the global scale, and states as its instruments defines and guarantees the constitutional effects of international treaties.

The ASEM NGO working group started with an easier experience of getting an audience with the European Union considering the level of access currently available to the European networks in the European Council. It is doubtful if that can be replicated in Asia considering the manner accorded to NGOs by authoritarian governments in Asian countries. All the ASEM Civil Society Forum held so far shows how NGOs are treated in the process. Conferences which were supposedly organised for civil society were not even publicly announced. The events were held in among the most expensive hotels in host countries, the "disruptive" or "uncivil" sections of civil society were not invited. The notion of "people to people dialogue" being held by organisers is still limited to the elite section of

the populace and quite far from what the civil society organisations understood it to be. It is an enigma then how the formation's recognition of civil society's role in governance and global partnership will be realised.

### **The ASEM NGO Working Group**

Following the developments in People's APEC Forum and the recognition to establish a similar structure to monitor the processes as well as seek participation in ASEM, the ASEM NGO working group was established in 1996 to prepare for the parallel conference in Bangkok. However, the groups within ASEM having learned from their experiences in the APEC campaign and faced with a different character of ASEM organised their efforts in a more structured way. The group served as a point of convergence for ASEM I and II and is continuing its consolidation in preparing their strategies for ASEM III.

The broad networks which form the organising group of the Bangkok ASEM NGO Forum included PARC (Pacific Asia Regional Coalition), ARENA (Asian Regional Network for Alternatives), and ACFOD (Asian Cultural Forum on Development) just to name a few from ASIA; and the CIIR (Catholic Institute for International Relations), TNI (Transnational Institute) and Asia House from Europe. In the ASEM II, One World Action, TNI, CIIR, Asian House, and Focus for the Global South coordinated the civil society conferences. These networks have interlocking constituencies as well as long histories of bilateral and multi-lateral partnerships since the 80s. The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), United Nations Children's Funds (UNICEF), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the UN World Summits also recognize these groups. Apart from their achievements as networks, member organizations and national groups have their respective share of international advocacy work. The ASEM III host committee in Seoul is turning out to be a very well organised group composed of almost 50 vibrant civil society organisations in South Korea.

NGO inputs to ASEM, will be built on the already ongoing alternative development policy and program dialogue between concerned European and Asian NGOs (TNI 1995). Grassroots inputs to the dialogue are provided by the NGOs who have grassroots membership, e.g. Forum of the Poor in Thailand, People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy in South Korea, etc, as well as NGOs who have PO partners, e.g. Pacific Asia Research Centre in Japan, Institute for Popular Democracy in the Philippines, ERA Consumer in Malaysia, etc.

Since the ASEM and the NGO Working Group on ASEM are still evolving, it is still too early to measure how NGOs could create impact to the formal process. In the coming meeting in Seoul, the alternative forum would lobby for the formation of the Civic Forum as a venue where civil society could engage in the formal processes at all levels. In a few consultations organised by the EU, NGOs who were active in the alternative forum were already invited to participate. Information tours, which were held both in Europe and Asia, were received by Parliaments and important development agencies of the visited countries. It is still a lingering problem though that despite the increasing recognition of civil society's importance in development processes, many policy makers could not yet comprehend the essence of civil society and the contribution of their participation in policy processes.

Civil society organisations have achieved a new level of activism following the success of lobbies in the MAI and the effect of mobilisation to the outcome of the WTO discussions in Seattle in 1999. In many national-level experiences, civil society organisations have already proven their mettle in enhancing policies and making project implementation more efficient as in the case for example of engagements in UN projects on environment.

The EC Directorate covering South and Southeast Asia also expressed openness to further develop partnership and exchange with the NGOs in post ASEM III activities. If the Civic Forum will be adopted, it is expected that the level of cooperation and participation would reach a new landmark.

### **The State of Civil Society in Asia**

The theoretical matrix provided by the work of M. Nerfin (1986) and the partnership works of Cohen and Arato (1992), as well as by de Oliveira and Tandon (1994), shows conscious use of the category civil society. Their works discussed the triadic paradigm of state, economy and society, emphasising the close relationship of the public and private realm. They traced civil society from Hegel's ethical ideal. The term has already been associated with various definitions and interests and had been subjected to diverse debates in the past. Israel Batista of the World Council of Churches in a PP21 conference gave it a more pulsating definition, for him it is not merely a concept. It is the attempt to reconnect the theory of civil with political thought analysis and social actions. In his article on Asian Action he gave the following considerations of civil society as a concrete action and reflection processes:

- civil society as a "space" from which organised people address the issues which are generated within society.
- civil society as a strategy of "social transformation", (quoting Fritz Erich Anhelm's emphasis on community building from below).
- civil society as a "laboratory" for experiencing people's participation and interactions in building comprehensive and participatory democratic society.
- civil society as a "classroom" for learning and training in the struggle.

While interest in civil society is broadening and slowly claiming a space in the unfolding politico-economic mosaic in the region, the challenges confronting it are also increasing. One of the most formidable threats that it has to address is the growing resignation of governments to the increasing hegemony of neo-liberalism. Most organised groups within civil society for a time was overwhelmed by the transformations brought about by the altered geo-economic and geopolitical situation and were confused regarding how to explain it and arrive at appropriate actions to engage in it and maintain relevance.

Now that energies are being spent to sharpen organisational positions and measures are being made to matter in what Ohmae termed as "region states" (1995), civil society actors have recognised two complementary tasks as requisites of an effective political strategy. These are a). The multiple levels of intervention and engagement in the struggle for defining social development, and b). Networking among movements for alternative

development. It is also widely accepted that finding coherent unity between theories and practices of alternative development is a must in order to be included in the overall development debate.

The term civil society itself is still vaguely defined in many regional documents which have spearheaded efforts at gathering Asian social movement leaders towards the creation of alternative views to the post-NIC development model. Although breakthroughs are being made at different levels in sketching a vision of a regional future that will promote economic dynamism and sense of community in the region, a long and difficult struggle is seen and understood before it could be realised. Many gaps are still to be filled to further current efforts of deconstructing concepts, elaboration of classical formulations and tools of analysis as well as explore other multidimensional approaches for alternative development work. In the painstaking venture, the role of the intellectuals, and the people's subjective consciousness in the new arena of struggle should be further expounded.

The region offers a rich tapestry of culture, spirituality and religion. Combinations of which lends colour and texture to the institutions of civil societies that flourished notwithstanding colonisation and political turmoil brought about by totalitarian regimes, military dictatorships as well as civil wars. These differences are oftentimes highlighted by conflicts resulting from the national agenda of organisations. Notwithstanding the differences, a slow movement to build processes for transnational participatory democracy is taking place. PP21 defined it as the accumulation of power from below to represent the diversity of citizens' responses to globalisation and attempts toward the formation of more horizontal processes of decision making. The seed of this initiative comes from the realisation that the NIC model of development may have created the dragons, but the dragons are now facing a great problem considering the harm done to society and environment by its growth ethos (Bello, 1991).

With the advent of global communications and leaps made by communication technology, ideas and goods tear their way beyond borders penetrating the everyday lives of different peoples, gradually dissolving cultural and geographical boundaries. The preponderant role of the media has aided the trend being pursued by corporations toward globalisation. Likewise, the progress in technology made contributions for the rapid dissemination of information concerning civil society efforts from different countries known to many.

The emerging conflict of knowledges resulting from the prevalence of indigenous knowledge systems in some areas, the influence of Western practices and concepts brought about by modernization, as well as colonial histories and other factors coexist and animate Asian social movements, bringing about the need for new abstractions. For this purpose loose networks of intellectuals like ARENA (Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives), and Focus on the Global South, for example, came into being. The needs of the present emphasises a more pro-active role for experts, and their involvement in the ongoing redefinition of social movements in the light of new socio-cultural arrangements and categories which is being infused in the emerging communitarian voluntary actions (ARENA, 1994).

What remained central and particular to civil society's strength is the agenda of people's organised participation in development. This strength continues to give it potentials,

initiatives, imagination and versatility. People's participation is now meandering at two complementary levels: from above and below. From above, civil society is now engaging in regional and national policy making and being recognised by governments and institutions like the UNDP and the Asian Development Bank.

In April 1996, an Asia Pacific Regional World Bank NGO Policy Meeting was held in Manila. During that meeting, the World Bank admitted the existence of some adverse effects of Structural Adjustment Programs to the economies of poor countries in the region. An agreement was forged for NGO participation in future World Bank projects. An example of such partnership include a consultative status gained by the Freedom from Debt Coalition (the broadest Philippine network on economic and development issues) in the World Bank formulation of the strategy to fight poverty in the Philippines.

Democratisation from below is taking various forms and scale. It is spearheaded by communities who are asserting their own power and self management, preservation and development of the diversity of culture, life forms and knowledge systems, as well as pursuance of alternative development and human scale economies (or economies of communities). Such community initiatives are scattered in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, and the Philippines (see Serrano, 1994, IADEA Workshop Report 1997). The assertion of identity must be complemented by the familiarity with the whys and hows of disempowerment. In the Philippines, the popular education circle is now arguing for the redefinition of "people" towards "actually existing people", not limiting it to NGOs and other terms of objective categories (de la Torre, 1992). "People" then will not only refer to the left's previous notion, but closer to Jurgen Habermas' idea of communicative power relevant to those who are seeking for alternative paradigm, the real actors in the life world. Dealing with the local language and the treatment of subjective consciousness like spirituality, identity, etc., is what the new form of struggle is all about: the meshing of the language of reform and everyday politics.

Community Development work involves a plethora of innovations and resourcefulness. Many initiatives, which started as home-grown projects, are now being shared and adopted with appropriate adjustments from source countries to other countries within the region. Detailed accounts of how citizens take on the responsibilities of providing basic services and goods as well as people to people sharing of alternative development approaches can be read from the works of Richard Holloway (1986), David Korten (1986 and 1990), and Isagani Serrano (1994).

Current discourses on civil society in the region have broadened the practical horizon of most political activists and have facilitated a lot of regional advocacy efforts in preparation to UN Summits which started in Rio de Janeiro. It also inspired processes toward the formation of ambitious projects like the Asia Pacific Civil Society Forum. The competing regionalist projects (APEC, and ASEM) prompted regional responses to parallel the emerging structures.

Recently, debates concerning the role of civil society in politics came to the fore considering the involvement of many national voluntary organisations in elections. Civil society's crucial role in legitimising governance in the political transition of many Asian

countries during the 80s expanded the arena for manoeuvrability of many social movements and enhanced state-society relationships (Alagappa 1995). Specifically in South Korea and the Philippines, civil society's mediating role in politics is indispensable. The operating rule of thumb at the moment is the recognition that social movements should have a state agenda which is within the boundaries of influence generation over political-administrative and economic processes and unconstrained discussion in the cultural sphere (Serrano, 1993).

Another arena of engagement where civil society is experiencing a paradigm shift concerns the market. Relationships between the non-profit sector and the profit-making corporations are experiencing changes. For all practical purposes, a more pro-active engagement with the market and its institutions are taking shape in Japan, South Korea, Sri Lanka and the Philippines (Asia Pacific Civil Society Forum, 1995 and CIVICUS, 1999). In these countries, a broadening section of civil society are cognisant of the fact that though the market cannot be expected to be concerned with equity and fair competition, it has brought about concrete and much wanted improvements in the quality of life of many people. A few influential actors within civil society in the region are looking at possibilities for a pro-active engagement with the market society, although the initiatives are being met with scepticism by many of their colleagues.

These shifts in methodology and advocacy strategies do not make civil organisations adopting these innovations less radical, less critical, and less liberative. The traditional idea of revolution which used to inspire many conscious efforts in the past was characterised by rejection of any possible engagement with liberal democracy. Unfortunately, all revolutionary projects failed to deliver their promised utopia. It is now common to hear within alternative movements' discussions, the idea of exploring multiple levels, forms and arena of struggle and at the same time address the opponent in a language that it will understand most.

Global policy advocacy and networking through holding parallel regional conferences to state sponsored conferences and UN Summits became integral part of many national level organisations and served as their contributions to the regional level networks they are affiliated with. Starting from the UNCED Process where environmental NGOs organised and mobilised themselves to gain access and actually influenced both the UNCED negotiations and evolution of the global NGO community (see Princen and Finger's *Environmental NGOs in World Politics*, 1995), national governments like in the Philippines from then on held processes of local to national consultations for every UN Summits. Repeatedly, regional initiatives hammered down the message of genuine development centred on the needs of people and nature as well as the delivery of real social and economic justice as primary concern and basis of state, market and civil society efforts. Economic growth and promotion of trade must serve the people, and should not become ends themselves.

In preparation for the demands required by international advocacy and networking, big NGOs and social movements professionalised the training to arm their representatives for such tasks. Such efforts include for example the People's Diplomacy Training Course rendered regularly at the University of New South Wales in Australia. The course was

initiated in 1989 by the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize recipient Jose Ramos Horta. The project trained a good number of international lobbyist in the region ranging from representatives from movements for self determination to development NGOs. The different women's networks are also effective in training women to do lobby work in the UN and other international venues. Training workshops were also held in preparation for UN Summit lobby work since the UN Conference on Environment and Development.

Walden Bello see transnational democracy as the wave of the future, where the popular sector will serve as an equal part of the triad together with the state and business, and as a dominant part later on in this triad (1994). Considering this view, Edicio de la Torre challenged Asian civil society leaders who attended a preparatory meeting for the World Summit on Social Development held in Manila in 1994 to ponder the following questions: "How do we construct? After criticising hierarchical, authoritarian, and vertical structures, how do we construct horizontal, participative and democratic structures, which will be effective?".

### **Towards Regional Civil Society**

The different sectors of Asian civil society are cognisant of the comprehensiveness and multidimensionality of the present development processes and the lack of space for participation and manoeuvre in the new trade regimes and geo-economic formations. As the world condition approach a "high or radicalised modernity", there is also an increasing possibility and necessity for the development of a global civil society which is offering complex and interdependent global alternatives (Waterman 1996). This new phenomenon is also called by Richard Falk as "globalisation from below". The initiatives' strength lies on the movements' advocacy for the inclusion of ethical and normative dimensions like democracy, equity and environmental protection to counterbalance the negative effects of regionalism and globalisation.

Apart from posing a critique to the formal initiatives, mechanisms and processes are taking place and converging toward the formulation of alternatives to the development path offered by the dominant neo-liberal consensus. Initiatives include researches and studies on development being done by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and independent development think tanks, forging of linkages between indigenous peoples, women's groups, environmental networks, etc., as well as a reorientation towards new internationalism and solidarity being discussed in labour and workers groups.

As the phenomenon of regionalism continue to cast its influence to the dominant forces which are shaping the present and the future of Asia, one of the most dynamic inclination of civil society in the region is to build a corresponding response. However, the current regionalisation of people's initiatives and the direction they are heading are both controversial and challenging developments for observers and activists within the different sections of Asian civil society. Between honesty and hope, is a regional civil society which will spur what proponents in the region call transnational participatory democracy possible? Are current initiatives of forging sectoral, issue based, and multi-dimensional networks

effective enough as building blocs towards that dream? Are the proposed alternatives of these alliances viable?

To examine whether or not Asian civil society initiatives of engaging the different state-market nexus efforts of regional economic integration are effective enough, it is important to analyse the strength of the currently existing regional networks and their relationship with grassroots civil society, the alternatives that they are proposing, and its contribution in the policy process. Criticizing formal processes and offering alternatives are not enough, what is crucial and urgent is to be heard in the processes, ensure that the proposed alternatives will be adopted and included in the implementation, while continuing with the alternative development programs in the grassroots.

The networks discussed in this paper are accomplishing their alternative development actions in two parallel ways: engaging governments both in the regional and national levels in development debate, and carrying out their autonomous development projects through local/national members. They are showing a new way of doing politics or what Seabrook called "politics of hope" (1992), which is about fighting and claiming the present, the here and now, and not only a dream and faraway future.

It is noteworthy that many of today's regional networks are approaching advocacy work in ways which are considered as departures from their old traditions. Many actors within these movements know that it is not valid to reject liberal democracy, what is more important is how to radicalise liberal democracy through the use of the institutional and symbolic resources of liberal democracy itself .

### **Civil Society's Alternative Regionalism**

The different efforts of engaging regionalism are based on the common view that APEC, ASEM or any of the mainstream regional formation serves the interest of the poor. This is because of the economic development model that guides mainstream regionalisms, which is the free market model. The APEC People's Forum and the emerging formation around ASEM in many respect are not just echoing hollow rhetoric despite the many limitations that they have to hurdle in bringing their messages across governments, business firms and the Asian people at large. Each is a network of networks as well as networks of national organisations with solid local constituencies and NGOs with partner local groups. Each member organisation have its own record of engagement with national and global decision making bodies. The position being carried by these formations regarding the official regional initiatives are result of painstaking processes of consultation and crystallisation of previous stands of member organisations concerning free trade and trade liberalisation.

The alternative conferences that they hold parallel to official regional conferences also goes through processes of consensus building, coalition and strategy formulation. They offer a paradigm that carry different assumptions from those being espoused by AFTA, APEC and ASEM. In the book titled *Challenging the Mainstream* (1995:67), Walden Bello lined up the core of key ideas of the emerging paradigm as discussed by civil society groups from Thailand, the Philippines, Korea and Taiwan. It has its core in the sustainable development

perspective, and the major components of which are already featured in many constructive dialogues between civil society and governments. The dialogues in turn have resulted to the creation of common grounds for partnerships.

In the same book, the following are enumerated as the terms of an alternative structure for regional integration: a). limitation of the members of the bloc to the newly industrialising economies and the developing countries of the Western Pacific; b). development of regional environmental and labour codes that would regulate the behaviour of corporations in the region; c). the coordination of technology transfer, research and development strategies, with the emphasis on developing alternatives to unhealthy and environmentally destructive technologies; and d). the development of trading relationships that enhance rather than diminish the capacities of communities in the region.

In terms of assessing how civil society in Asia mesh the optimism of the will and the art of engaging in decisive action for reform, judgement is based in terms presented by Nederveen Pieterse's arguments on globalisation and politics (1997) where he discussed the new contours of the politics of resistance for the coming century. Following Nederveen Pieterse's first argument, it can be said that most of the currently existing regional networks in Asia have long graduated from the "opposition to proposition" question. In the national and regional level, the big networks were already locked in intense negotiations with government officials, and international financial institutions to advance proposals that will give a more humane face to the new national and regional policies. What remains to be fleshed out and negotiated further are specific measures that could address the effects of blanket and rapid liberalisation on environmental, social and human rights issues; specific policy initiatives on structural adjustment programs which is now being linked to regional agreements; and, establishment of concrete safety nets to balance the effects of economic deregulation with state and corporate accountability.

Engagement with states and international bodies however is still a risky business, since part of the openness still emanates from the desire to coopt civil society in the projects. Some organisation fall to this risk specially if there is a lack of unity caused by differences in positions which is quite common within the NGO community everywhere. As exemplified by events leading to the 1996 APEC Summit held in Manila, multiple positions adopted by different organised network caused the presence of four parallel NGO conferences. It was replicated in Vancouver the following year when there were two parallel people's summits. In the Philippines itself, disunity was highlighted by bitter debates emanating from a coalition's role in the government process of chartering the Individual Action Plan of the Philippine government in APEC. Events like those, which transpired in Manila in 1996, and which was unfortunately repeated in Vancouver in the 1997 APEC Summit should be avoided in future civil initiatives.

The appreciation of the role of the market and the growing efforts to engage in economic activities are positive developments. Such engagements may result in partnerships where civil society could use the capacity of the market mechanisms to inject vitality and dynamism to society in general. After all, it is now proven how demanding consumers could determine the flow of goods and services as well as spur innovation. The power of organised demand, which was proven by Consumer's International in previous campaigns,

have unlocked new doors which civil society in general should further explore. In Malaysia, the consumers groups bridged people from all walks of life in pushing companies to be more friendly to sustainable growth, taking advantage of the market's readiness to take risks and promote innovations if gains could come in exchange. Consumers' demands are now being heard on how production should be done, making them partners in production (or prosumers), although the activism does not cover Malaysian transnational firms operating in countries like the Philippines or Indonesia.

Current NGO economic agenda is not comparable to the scale and level of the state-market nexus which are being challenged. It can indeed be said that most of the economic engagements are modified Mondragon type programs which may have limits, but, they are teaching people how to define the meaning of the word possible and unleashing new energies to create new and bigger alternatives. These could be the pillars for the redefinition of international political economy and a seed for radical political economy. The combination of efforts aligned with popular economics (cooperatives, people to people trade, etc.) and high level advocacy to global financial institutions are formerly uncharted terrains that are now being mastered by civil society. At this early stage of treading these waters, prospects are becoming visible showing that there is no limit to imagination and commitment to change. Projects like the people to people trade and autonomous currency initiatives shows that a community could engage in trade and create a "shadow" society shaped by the member's real perceived needs and dreams.

### **Shortcomings of Current Regional Networks**

In terms of building a united front however, there are many fundamental characteristics that could be viewed as flaws in all the current regional networks. Generally, members of Asian progressive movements recognise the many limiting factors which hinder efforts of building a regional civil society. The primary factor is the distinct geographical and cultural features of Asia. Due to the great distances between countries, language differences, poverty, the prohibitive cost of travelling and the underdeveloped communication facilities in most peripheral parts of the region, there is still a people to people communication and interaction. Differences in language, culture, and religion are immense. Histories of colonialism contributed as well to such divergence, making Asian national social movements isolated from the rest and to have country-centric perspectives, priorities and programs. NGOs also have great differences in work standards and capacity.

Apart from the geographical, cultural and historical factors there are seemingly intractable weaknesses of regional networking. Foremost of which is the fact that north-south alliances is still stronger than regional people to people linkages. This tendency is stronger in the case of NGOs given the circumstances related to funding. Because of NGOs' dependency to northern donors and support groups, what is still operative is "south-north-south" relations, with the north facilitating the connections.

Secondly, the establishment of a regional people's movement even on specific issues is still an aspiration, no single regional network could claim to represent Asian civil society. The problem of representation even (or specially) among the groups which identify themselves

to be from the left of the political spectrum is rooted on the national dynamics where these movements are coming from. The nuances between the different groups are a given and has strong ideological and historical reasons. It is always a tricky task for organisers to identify groups that could represent civil society from each country. This lead to a connected question concerning the process of inclusion within networks. So far, in terms of preparing for regional meetings and organising a network, the operative measure normally adopted is to have a broad convenor or host group to ensure that the range of participants will also be broad.

Thirdly, in terms of the character of representativeness in the broad initiatives, organisers of APEC People's Forum, ASEM NGO Working Group and PP21 admit that NGOs and big networks outnumber the organic or grassroots based organisations. The imbalance could be attributed to the fact that it takes huge amount of resources to shuttle from one international conference to another and at the same time monitor regional processes. The language used in the different official processes also requires a higher level of education and expertise for those who wish to intervene in the respective processes. In terms of human resources, the "diplomatic veterans" or experts in the field of international work can be found largely in the ranks of NGOs, especially bigger, regional and international ones who have more resources. The people at the base are minimally involved in the regional process though they are present in national meetings in preparation for regional ones. This gave rise to remarks that what is currently present is emerging alternative regionalism from the middle.

A positive development in recent years is the emerging gender balance in representation. "NGO and social movement advocacy and public relations" positions are now evenly balanced between women and men, even if in most cases organisational leadership in the strong sectors (labour and peasant) are still dominated by men. In terms of managing Secretariats, women still do the less prestigious but crucial staff work like administration, communication and information facilitation as well as conference preparations.

In regional and global fora, representativeness is still biased even within social movements. Most likely it will be those based in the national offices or headquarters of organisations that will get to attend international fora if they decide at all to engage in such exercises. Another factor is that international and regional solidarity remains a secondary agenda to many country groups and social movements (ARENA, 1999). Issues of survival like food security, rights and welfare are still the primary concern, and justifiably so, of grassroots organisations.

Since there is a lack of horizontal distribution in terms of professional skills and material resources between NGOs and grassroots organisations, measures are needed to alter this situation. Most NGOs have to reflect more and instil measures like sponsoring an organic activist in every international gathering that they will participate in. Demands for gender consciousness, grassroots participation, empowerment, pluralism, accountability and solidarity are since a long time part of the resolutions of conferences and plans of action - it is time to make them real. The use of and democratic access to modern technologies is another aspect of networking and advocacy work that has long been discussed. Still, an intensified crusade to make resources available to the grassroots is urgently needed.

The tasks ahead for regional networks are indeed daunting. Indeed, transnational advocacy have made a distinct position in the repertoire of movements' actions and the new trade regimes already tasted its power as experienced in Seattle in 1999 and earlier by the OECD during the campaign against MAI. Financial institutions however are hardening its position against further "disruptions" by protesters and lobbyists, security measures and rights violation to free speech and assembly were outrightly violated in recent events.

Developmental language and rhetoric is also getting more tricky and misleading. There's much talk about poverty reduction for example but new set of global rule for investment which will expose weak economies to further afflictions were also firmly set and these will create serious implications to the plight of the poor. The foreseeable aggravation of the exploitation by transnational corporations of workers, women and the environment resulting from the governments' renunciation of their role to impose regulations will make all the gains achieved by NGOs in all recently held UN Summits practically eliminated.

Since free trade agreements are already operational, there is no use for NGOs and lobby groups to think that it could be reversed. The remaining option is to stall events, which are speeding up liberalisation and to continue in exerting efforts on how they could be influenced and humanised. The rapid establishment of trade structures is making civil society organisations operating in the national and global levels simply overwhelmed by all occurring formations, reducing their initiatives to scattered and reactive activities. It is also alarming that in some post transition democracies like the Philippines and South Korea, there is a rolling back to intense police handling of protests.

There is a need therefore to come up with a cohesive way of engaging in the different state-market formations. There are several assumptions that need reconstruction as well. For effective approaches to be designed, it should be clear to civil society formations that all existing geo-economic formations are established to create markets and not to control it. In the emerging century it is the activities of states, which are, being restricted and what is being broadened are the activities of corporations. This reality cannot be approached using the old sweeping way like working for a general social clause in free trade agreements. The needs of specific countries are nuanced thereby creating the need to consider the differences in goals, conditions, and social contexts.

Initiatives should be exerted in studying trade and investment flows. Lobby activities should be refocused. Instead of simply opposing foreign investments, groups should recognise that there are several good effects, which could be gained from foreign investments and to look at ways on how to make these kinds of investments beneficial to the majority. Considering the currency crisis, which created a long lasting effect in the economies of the region, lobby groups should work together to demand for the establishment of international institution that will control and discipline capital.

It is becoming increasingly fashionable to talk about parallel formations and transborder civil society networks. It is indeed logical that the current state-market nexus be met by corresponding regional and global civil society organisations. However, it is still important to link international efforts with national and local level initiatives. Progressive groups

should continue to exert efforts in pushing governments to be more democratic and to support the interest of the poor.

It is disturbing to observe that the similarity between government summits and the “people’s summits” which are aspiring to challenge the former is being limited to the token parallel conference from the side of civil society. Aside from coming up with a common reading about the negative implications of increasing globalisation of trade and production, concrete counter-measures are not yet coherently formed. Membership is still a lingering dilemma. Organising who is supposed to be talking to whom (and in some occasions who could stand whom politically) at which meeting already requires huge amounts of networking skills. It is a given that the left is experiencing maybe its most serious dilemma in terms of unity, in most instances this disunity is backfiring to each individual initiatives. It is no longer a question of representativeness but a question of how each formation claiming to represent the majority could come together to form a cohesive challenge to a perceived common enemy.

Continuity is another Waterloo. While governments are building on previous efforts (with bottleneck issues notwithstanding), networks seems to be perpetually trapped with the amazing ability to start from base one in every international conference. The People’s Summit on APEC held in Vancouver (which followed the Manila experience) is a very glaring example on how not to move forward. The debates in various workshops emanated from the lack of the necessary clarification and information of previous discussions. What made experiences like these disheartening is the fact that the building blocs for parallel NGO and labour networks already took a huge amount of energy to put in place. From the gathering of environmental and labour councils in Seattle in 1993 to the formal Kyoto and Manila People’s Summit, discussions and debates have moved inch by painstaking inch until a common reading of the current global political economy was achieved.

## **Conclusion**

Sections of civil society in the region however divided concerning positions on how to address the emerging regional integration shares the same aspiration of seeking possibilities to articulate the contention of those who are feeling the adverse impact of the triumph of neo-liberalism. The initiatives exerted in the last five years shows growing maturity and competence to address the needs of the time. The continuing efforts of civil society to be heard amidst the din of contending capitalist agenda signify that there are opposing views that are seeking to formulate viable alternatives to the development path being offered by the emerging arrangements.

In terms of civil society's contribution to the transnationalisation of democracy in the region, it can be said that the openings achieved by strong civil society in some countries like the Philippines, Thailand, Korea, and Japan are encouraging efforts to organise and strengthen groups and organisations in other countries where the spaces are narrower. The continuing repression of people's rights to organise and oppose government policies in countries like Indonesia, Burma, and to some extent Malaysia and the Philippines are posing serious threat that might affect the gains achieved before. The growth of regionalism

and the development of closer links of region states (growth triangles like Singapore-Malaysia-Indonesia, Hong Kong and adjacent parts of Mainland China for example) could change the way people will relate to each other in those areas. Sentiments of Asianess (brotherhood and sisterhood among Asians) are beginning to be stirred with the closer links made possible by revolutions in communication technology and regional events. It is a challenge to transform the sentiment towards finding a way on how to bring people's interests and welfare as primary goal in whatever forms of regional economic integration, which will eventually dominate in the region.

The biggest challenge is how to make the "actually existing people" identify with the alternatives, see them as a vehicle for the realisation of their hope and put a stake on the alternative agenda. Therefore, the process of program, priority setting, and building of advocacy position should remain close to what the alternatives claim to serve. Lastly, it should be understood that all this initiatives is for changing and reclaiming the present (the here and now), as well as building the future. Therefore the need for understanding what is happening, and the mobilisation to change it are urgent and necessary responsibility of everyone.

## **Bibliography**

- Alagappa, M., (1995) Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia. The Quest for Moral Authority (Stanford, Stanford University Press).
- ASEAN, (2000) AFTA Update, [www.seasec.org](http://www.seasec.org)
- APEC, (1992) A Vision for APEC, Report of the Eminent Persons Group to APEC Ministers (Bangkok, Asian Cultural Forum on Development).
- APEC, (1994) Declaration of Common Resolve (Bogor, APEC).
- APEC, (1995) Osaka Action Agenda (text printed in The Jakarta Post, Tuesday, Nov. 21, 1995).
- APEC Secretariat, (2000). APEC Updates and Brunei Priorities 2000, [www.apec.org/](http://www.apec.org/)
- APEC Labor Rights Monitor, (1996) APEC and Free Trade, ALARM Update, July-August (Hong Kong, ALARM).
- Arrighi, G., (1996) The Rise of East Asia and the Withering Away of the Interstate System, Binghamton University, New York.
- ARENA,(2000) Movements Directory, [www.asianexchange.org/](http://www.asianexchange.org/).
- ARENA, (1996) Engaging the Asian Development Bank, Voices from NGOs, Asian Exchange Vol.12, No.1, October 1996, Hong Kong
- ARENA, (1994) New Directions, Paradigms and Perspectives (Hong Kong, ARENA).
- Asia Pacific Civil Society Forum, (1995) Civil Society Country Reports. Documents from the conference with the same title (Seoul, Korea Coalition for Citizens' Movements).
- ASEM Briefing Papers (1996) Part of ASEM Documents provided by the DG1B Directorate-General for External Relations (South and South East Asia) of the European Commission.
- Batista, I., (1993) Civil Society: A Paradigm or A New Slogan? Asian Action July-September Issue (Bangkok, Asian Cultural Forum on Development).

- Bello, W., (1992) *Dragons in Distress: Asia's Miracle Economies in Crisis* (London, Pluto Press).
- \_\_\_\_\_, (1994) *Dark Victory: The United States, Structural Adjustment and Global Poverty* (London, Pluto Press, Food First and Transnational Institute).
- \_\_\_\_\_, (1994) *Clash of Development Models in Asia and the Pacific* (Hong Kong, ARENA).
- \_\_\_\_\_, (1995) *APEC and the Conflict of Capitalism, Challenging the Mainstream: APEC and the Asia Pacific Development Debate* (Hong Kong, Asian Regional Network for Alternatives- ARENA).
- \_\_\_\_\_, (1996) *APEC's Unauthorised History* (Bangkok, Forum on the Global South FOCUS).
- Bergsten, C.F. and Noland, M., (1993) *Pacific Dynamism and the International Economic System* (Washington D.C., Institute for International Economics).
- Centre Tricontinental, (1982) *Free Trade Zones and Transnational Corporations in Malaysia, The Philippines and Sri Lanka* (Louvain, CETRI).
- Chowdhury, A. and Islam, I., (1993) *The Newly Industrializing Countries of East Asia* (London, Routledge).
- Cox, R., (1987) *Production, Power, and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History* (New York, Columbia University Press).
- de la Torre, E., (1995) *Responsive Governance and People's Participation*. Paper presented to the Asian NGO meeting for the World Summit on Social Development.
- De Oliveira and Tandon R., (1994) *An Emerging Civil Society* (PRIA, New Delhi).
- De Sousa Santos, B., (1995) *Toward a New Common Sense: Law, Science and Politics in the Paradigmatic Transition* (Routledge, New York).
- DAGA, (1996) *What is APEC?* (part of email conference-discussion in preparation for the APEC People's Forum in Manila on November 1996).
- Finger, M. and Princen, T., (1995) *Environmental NGOs in World Politics. Linking the Local to the Global* (London and New York, Routledge).
- Focus on the Global South - FOCUS, (1995) *The APEC Summit in Japan: The Other Side* (Bangkok, Development Policy Research and Practice - Chulalongkorn University).
- Forgacs, D.(ed), *An Antonio Gramsci Reader*, (New York, Schocken Books).
- Gamble A., and Payne, A. (ed.), (1996) *Regionalism and World Order* (London, Macmillan Press).
- Gill, S., (ed), (1993) *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- \_\_\_\_\_, (1995) *Theorising the Interregnum: The Double Movement and Global Politics in the 1990s*, *International Political Economy: Understanding Global Disorder*, (Hettne ed.) (Halifax Fernwood Publishing).
- Hamelink, C., (1994) *Trends in World Communication. On Disempowerment and Self Empowerment* (Penang, Southbound and Third World Network).
- Held, D., (1995) *Democracy and the Global Order. From Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Cambridge, Polity Press).
- Hettne, B. (ed), (1995) *International Political Economy, Understanding Global Disorder* (Halifax, Fernwood Publishing).

- Hogan, T., (1992) *A Guide to Central Thinkers and Social Theory*, (Beilhars ed.) Sydney, Allen and Levin.
- Holloway, R., (1993) *Civil Society - the Non Profit Private Sector: Trying to Categorize it in Bangladesh*. Paper presented to UNICEF, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- Hutton, W., *The State We're In, The Political Economy of the World's Capitalisms* (London, Jonathan Cape).
- International Monetary Fund, (1996) *Inter-regional Trade Report*, from the ISS database.
- JETRO, (1998) *Japanese Outward FDI Declined while Inward FDI Increases*. Japanese External Trade Organization 1998 Report.
- Kelsey, J., (1995) *Economic Fundamentalism* (Kyoto, APEC NGO Forum Papers)
- Kennedy, P., (1994) *Preparing for the 21st Century* (New York, Vintage Books).
- Keohane, R.O. and Nye, J.S., (1989) *Power and Interdependence*, 2nd Edition (Boston, Little, Brown)
- Korten, D., (1986) *Community Management: Asian Experience and Perspectives* (Connecticut, Kumarian Press).
- \_\_\_\_\_, (1990) *Getting to the 21st Century* (Connecticut, Kumarian Press).
- Krugman, P., (1991) *Geography and Trade* (Massachusetts, MIT Press)
- Kwan, C. H., (1994) *Economic Interdependence in the Asia Pacific Region* (London and New York, Routledge).
- Landsberg, M.H., (1993) PP21: It May Be Positive, But Is It Radical? *AMPO Japan-Asia Quarterly Review*, Vol. 25 No 1
- Manila People's Forum on APEC, (1996) *Brochure on Manila People's Forum on APEC '96* (Quezon City, Philippine Host Committee).
- Mendl, W., (1995) *Japan's Asia Policy, Regional Security and Global Interests* (London, Routledge)
- Motayama, Y., (1993) *Politics of Liberalization: A Japanese Perspective on APEC*, *AMPO-Japan Asia Quarterly Review* Vol. 26 No. 34.
- Muto, I., (1993) PP21: A Step in the Process, *AMPO Japan-Asia Quarterly Review*, Vol. 25 No.2.
- Muto, I., (1993) *International Civil Society, Asian Action July-September Issue* (Bangkok, Asian Cultural Forum on Development).
- Nederveen-Pieterse, J., (1990) *Empire and Emancipation* (London, Pluto Press).
- \_\_\_\_\_, (1997) *Globalization and Emancipation. From Local Empowerment to Global Reform*, *New Political Economy* Vol. 2, No.1, Carfax Pub. Hants.
- Nerfin, M., (1986) *Neither Prince nor Merchant: Citizen - An Introduction to the Third System in World Economy in Transition*, K.Ahooja-Patel ed., (Oxford, Pergamon Press).
- NGO Forum on APEC, (1995) *Kyoto Declaration, Statement from the 1995 NGO Forum on APEC*.
- Noor, P. (1998) *ASEM Avoids the Issue, Commentary, No.12, May Issue*, Selangor, International Movement for a Just World.
- Ohmae, K., (1995) *The End of the Nation State, The Rise of Regional Economics*, (New York, Free Press).
- Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement, (1994) *The Way of Power: Development in the Hands of the People* (Manila, PRRM).
- Polanyi-Levitt, K., (1990) *The Life and Work of Karl Polanyi* (Montreal, Black Rose Books)

- Robertson, R., (1992) *Globalization: Social Theory's Global Culture*, London Sage
- Serrano, I., (1993) *Reimagining Civil Society* (Manila, PRRM)
- \_\_\_\_\_, (1994) *Civil Society in the Asia Pacific* (Washington D.C., CIVICUS).
- Sondhi, Sunil. (2002) *Global States: An Introduction to International Relations* (New Delhi, Sanjay Prakashan).
- Sondhi, Sunil. (2003) "Globalised States in the Asia Pacific Region", paper presented at the Asia Pacific Conference on Canadian Studies, Mysore, India, January 2003.
- Spero, J., (1995) *US Policy Toward APEC, Challenging the Mainstream* (Hong Kong, Asian Regional Network for Alternatives - ARENA)
- Stallings, B. (ed), (1995) *Global Change, Regional Response: The New International Context of Development* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)
- Thomas, H., (1995) *Globalization and Third World Trade Unions: The Challenge of Rapid Economic Change* (London, Zed Books).
- Transnational Institute, (1995) *Asia's Wake-Up Call to Europe: The Perspective for the Philippines*. Conference document. 13-14 March Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), (1995) *Human Development Report* (New York, Oxford University Press).
- \_\_\_\_\_, (1998) *Poverty Report*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- Varona, R. (1996) *Reflections on Regional Networking and PP21*. Paper presented to the 6th General Assembly of PP21 held in Katmandu, Nepal. 8-10 March 1996.
- Wallerstein, I., (1984) *The Politics of the World Economy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Waterman, P., (1995) *A New World View: Globalization, Civil Society, and Solidarity* (The Hague, Institute of Social Studies).
- \_\_\_\_\_, (1996) *Beijing and Huairou: Approaches and Departures. Second Thoughts on Researching Women, Feminism and the New Global Solidarity*. Conference Paper presented at the Conference on Women, Citizenship and Difference 16-18 July 1996, University of Greenwich, London.
- Yun-han, C., (1995) *The East Asian NICs: A State-led Path to the Developed World*, *Global Change, Regional Response* (Stallings, ed.) (Cambridge University Press).