



**DIÁLOGO DOS POVOS  
PEOPLE'S DIALOGUE  
DIÁLOGO DE LOS PUEBLOS**

**Africa and Latin America People's Dialogue:  
an experience in progress to build political  
and intercultural dialogue  
(Executive Summary)**

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## **Introduction**

This text summarizes a longer document with the same title. Its goal is to present the main political elements identified in the People's Dialogue (PD) process regarding both the actors who participate in it and the overall framework of social struggles in which the dialogue takes place. The original document is only available in Portuguese; this an abridged version that emphasizes the main topics developed during the Dialogue meetings from 2008 until 2010.

The identification of these issues came after reading the reports from each of the events of the People's Dialogue in both continents, as well as the reports of the Reference Groups meetings. All of them served as the basis for identifying the key issues within the debate, as developed over recent years.

We hope that this document provides an overview of the concerns of the different actors engaged in the dialogue, as well as the open potential and prospects for the process in the immediate future. One of the great challenges that we face is to identify the mechanisms in order to continue and deepen what has already been achieved, with a better understanding of what have actually guided our work together.

### **1. What deliberation within the People's Dialogue is all about?**

Which are the topics that constitute the areas of interest, controversy and exchange within the organizations and movements involved in this process? The PD has tackled issues such as agribusiness and its impacts in the rural world of both continents, the struggle for land and food sovereignty, the relationship between the state and social movements, violence against women, and building alternatives from below to neoliberal globalization, among others. In what follows, we will present a brief conceptual map of the PD key themes developed over its more than three years of existence.

#### **1.1. The state and the social movements**

The question of the state is one of the most complex themes tackled in the PD process, both in terms of its nature and in its relations with social movements and indigenous peoples. The three initial main findings are the following:

a) First, we are not talking about the "state" as if it were a univocal and ahistorical construction. In the debates, emphasis was placed on the question of the "nation-state" understood as:

*"... a historical construction, which has not always existed and which is based on the non-recognition of*

*other nationalities, languages and cultures that lie within a given territory. Therefore, the nation-state is a manifestation of power and of political, cultural and economic domination; as well as an area of contention between groups, classes and projects. It is essential to differentiate between the sovereignty of the nation-state and peoples's self-determination." (PD Chile Report /2009)*

b) Related to what is mentioned above, the question of power must occupy a central place in the analysis of the nation-state. This always requires taking into account the processes of political struggle and the struggle between contending projects, which could express themselves as a dialectical relation between domination and liberation.

c) Another key point to bear in mind when it comes to the discussion about the state and social movements is that "*the state is not the same unity everywhere and that different states face different challenges*" (PD Zimbabwe Report /2009). The question of the state is different in Latin America and Africa, and within each of the continents because its actual configuration is the outcome of historical processes taking place over long periods of time with varying pace and depth. All of these elements cannot be extrapolated, although, of course, important convergences can be found both within and between regions.

Keeping in mind the previous remarks, we highlight the process of profound change experienced by nation states within the framework of the capitalist globalization during the past three decades, from the early eighties until today. From this point onwards, and in many situations, the state would be increasingly turned into an instrument of capital accumulation, and re-shaped to match the interests of capital, while leaving out social issues that were previously included in its institutional fabric. The role of the international financial institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund) is key in this process. They imposed a number of adjustment programs that included, among others, policies such as the cutting of subsidies for small agricultural production, trade liberalization, the destruction of family farming and the introduction of large-scale agribusiness, privatization and elimination of public services.

The relationship between the state and social movements is tense, and challenges the established base of power with organized forms of resistance and people's based alternatives. In Africa this relation has to do with the recent colonial history, and in Latin America with the consolidation of dominant interests that suppresses all expressions of social struggle.

Therefore, it is of great importance to strengthen the autonomy of social movements vis-a-vis the governments in power, with the aim of transforming the existing power relations within the nation state and supporting a truly popular project (PD, Guatemala Report/2008). Again, when considering social movements' autonomy, it should be remembered that each case has its peculiarities and that any generalizations must be viewed with caution. Given this set of dynamic and contradictory factors, the question arises as to whether the state should only be

used according to the ongoing processes but basically maintaining its inherited structure, or superseded by a profound transformation of its institutional structures and therefore by a confrontation between social classes

In the African case we see that, broadly speaking, most states are weak and dependent on foreign countries and international cooperation. The social function of the state is weakened and replaced by external actors and NGOs in a context of generalized emergence of multiple centers of power. In Africa, the weakness of the state is partly explained by its lack of institutionalization. We are dealing with states that, during the post-independence era, have experienced serious difficulties defining themselves as a legitimate locus for the construction of new social projects. The presence of European NGOs often replaces the state and gives continuity to colonial power relations. The external NGOs often act independently, without consulting the local governments or social movements on project implementation, minimizing the sovereign decision of governments. (PD Guatemala Report /2008). This is reflected in the following words:

*"The role of the international cooperation is of great importance and has a strong influence on government policies. 60% of Mozambique's national budget comes from donors, which is why they have a considerable influence on the government in terms of land and other issues. The country's national policies have been prepared by consultants and contractors and, as might be expected, often do not meet people's needs" (PD Zimbabwe Report /2009)*

Considering the previous explanation, a central aspect in the current debate on the state or on the alternatives to it, is the proposal by indigenous movements in the Andean region (particularly in Bolivia and Ecuador), to build "Plurinational States." Within the PD, the issue raises important discussions given the fact that the very same concept is difficult to grasp both for African and other Latin American countries. The PD starting point is that:

*"In both cases the state's role in displacement, exclusion and administration of social conflict generated by structures of unequal access to income and resources (land, for example) has been examined, and the need to build other organizational forms based on political education and mobilization for peoples sovereignty and independence has been discussed. It is necessary to call into question the concept of the "nation state" as well as many other Eurocentric categories of analysis that we continue to use, and which determine our actions as social movements. Nation-states have erased and made invisible the diversity that exists. " (PD Guatemala Report /2008).*

Therefore, the proposal of a "Plurinational State", that today is a constitutional reality in Bolivia and Ecuador, cannot be understood within the liberal paradigm imposed on our countries since the nineteenth century: it is a challenge to power-subordination relations and historical domination, and an attempt to remake the structure of the state with people's participation. In summary:

*“Experiences such as those of Ecuador and Bolivia advanced the idea that the nation state should be radically recast as a plurinational comunal state. This state recognizes that there can be unity at the state level, in coexistence with other nations, cultures and languages within that national unity. The ‘plurinationality’ does not entail a state built upon the idea of ‘race’. On the contrary, it means to create forms of coexistence between different nations within a particular state. It is important to remember that ‘plurinationality’ is a transitional concept that allows us to question the naturalized forms of internal oppression and domination imposed by the nation-state. This is why it is an enormously useful and defying concept despite its limitations and conceptual problems; it allows us to advance in the search for alternatives that requires a gradual approach and counter-hegemonic instances. ” (PD Chile/2009 Report)*

There is not necessarily a consensus within the PD participants on all these issues and their possibilities to achieve a genuine transformation of the nation-state in both continents. (PD, Guatemala Report /2008). Nevertheless, there is a level of consensus on the following points that reflects the vision that the PD participants have on what the state should be, and delineates the pathway towards its transformation:

- *Politics should occupy a central place and the economy must be subordinate to politics;*
- *It is essential to devise new forms of participation in decision-making;*
- *Diversity must be explicitly recognized and a system of rights that acknowledges and respects this diversity, as well as develop policies to ensure universal rights through this recognition, must be built.*
- *The central place of contention for the State is the public policy domain*

New ways of state building must guarantee citizenship recognition at the individual, collective and multi-national level. A new proposal for the "state" must provide answers to the various issues that its current structure face, and should build an alternative consciousness that supersedes the logic of economics and the market. (PD Zimbabwe Report/2009).

## **1.2 Defense of common goods and struggle for food sovereignty**

Another main unifying theme in the process of the PD is the defense of the common goods and the struggle for food sovereignty. In its process of global expansion, capital is turning those goods previously regarded as common heritage into commodities, especially land and human labor, integrating them as "factors" of the industrial production and the reproduction of capital. This process takes place under the new conditions of 'globalization', and has occupied a significant place in the analysis of the PD meeting, as can be observed in the following reflection:

*"The traditional capital-labor contradiction remains valid, although it is not enough to explain the expansion of the capitalist system in multiple areas of social and community life. Contemporary capitalism is based on an extensive exploration and colonization of all resources and means of life, from aspects related to the work force to the microorganisms and seeds, and from the land to the*

*human body " (PD Guatemala Report /2008).*

For the PD participants, the commons are the basis of existence for both humans and for other animal and plant species, and that form part of *life* as a whole. These goods must be cared for and respected. Speaking of them as "natural resources" only leads to reproduction of the dominant Western thought which sees nature in terms of a productive resource, thereby justifying its continued exploitation to enable capital accumulation. (PD Guatemala Report /2008).

This view of nature as a "resource" is what prevails on both continents and it is the one which serves as the basis for the systems of political and economic domination. This is why the defense of territories by native peoples, of food sovereignty by the peasants movements (especially by women's organizations in the countryside), and the protection of rivers by rural communities, are seen as a defense of the common interests of mankind in the preservation of life, understanding that the Earth's, the *Pacha Mama*, has also the right to live and that this is precisely the precondition for our own survival.

In countries where the economic structure is fundamentally agrarian, the impacts of the expansion of capitalism in the rural world are enormous. The promotion of the "Green Revolution" in Africa is ruining thousands of small farmers with financial support from the World Bank and even inter-governmental regional bodies like the African Development Community (SADC). They favor a large scale agriculture oriented to foreign markets rather than to food production for the population (PD, Zimbabwe Report /2009).

The defense of food sovereignty is thus a symbol of the struggle in defense of the common goods. At stake is the protection of food and seeds, water and access to land, territories, cultural goods, and so on, as well as proposed alternatives to the dominant paradigm of plantation agriculture and hyper-concentration of land. Protecting the global commons from merchantilization , and putting them in the hands of peasants and indigenous peoples is a key element in the agenda of the movements that integrate the PD.

### **1.3. The impacts of agribusiness in rural areas of Africa and Latin America**

Today, participants in the PD note that the advance of agribusiness in all countries is a major problem, and one of the most pressing challenges for governments and social movements, both in rural and urban areas. Agribusiness, by definition a large scale activity, impose both a predatory production model and an international political regime of domination and violence where the main actors are big transnational corporations from industrialized countries.

Agribusiness is sweeping away small scale agriculture and thousands of producers in the countryside. It is further gathering up the best land and seriously threatening biodiversity, food

sovereignty and eliminating or displacing impoverished rural families around the world. In the framework of the PD, the analysis has focused on the question of agrofuels as one of the fastest growing sectors in recent years, with implications for food, energy, land tenure, the introduction of transgenic seeds and a new “green revolution” on the way in Africa. One of the PD events, a meeting held in Cape Town (South Africa) in May 2008, touched on this point:

*“Choosing agro-fuels as the theme for this meeting does not imply that it is the biggest challenge for the Peoples’ Dialogue, but it allows a dialogue between Latin America and Africa around the common way in which their common goods are being expropriated, and allows for the development of new perspectives and ways of acting. It encompasses struggles for land, for the rights of women and indigenous people and of Afro-descendants in LA and peasants and the rural poor in the SADC (Southern Africa Development Community) region. It encompasses struggles against neo-liberalism, privatisation, imperialism, agri-business, monocultures and genetically modified organisms (GMOs)”* (DP, Relatório Cape Town/2008).

The concentration of land ownership, the acceleration in the merchantilization of resources like water, seeds and traditional knowledge, and the displacement of rural populations to make room for the new "energy crops" (as in the cases of Colombia in Latin America and Zambia in Africa) has also been highlighted. And another theme has gained international prominence - the purchase or lease of land in Africa and Latin America by foreign countries such as China, India, Japan and Saudi Arabia in order to grow food for their own populations, which displaces local producers and does not solve the problem of hunger in the countries of the affected regions. (PD Guatemala Report/2008; PD Zimbabwe Report /2009)

In summary, agribusiness is expanding and reproducing a pattern of control over territories, strategic resources and political power. This elements gives historical continuity to colonial domination and the subordinate integration of peripheral countries into the world market, led by the big powers and their corporations. Social movements, especially in rural areas, fight against an unlimited expansion of agribusiness, raising the banner of food sovereignty, family agriculture, agrarian reform and preservation of native seeds and traditional knowledge, demanding from the state the defense of sovereignty and the implementation of policies that recognize peoples right to self-determination.

#### **1.4. Inequality and patriarchal violence: rural women's struggles and towards a radical democracy**

Since it is a cross-cutting issue within all of the other topics discussed, one of the key issues addressed in the PD process is that of inequality and patriarchal violence. In addition, we also tackle women's struggles in the countryside (and the city) towards a truly participatory and inclusive democracy. This is a struggle for a democracy that makes real the aspirations of superseding any physical, sexual or other violence that women suffer and their lack of

opportunities for full human development, as well as ensuring equality between men and women in all aspects of social life.

A first key element is the notion that patriarchy is not just a symbolic system in which the relationship between men and women takes shape. It is also a complex paradigm that expresses itself at multiple levels, combining class, race, ethnicity, age, sex, sexual orientation and gender. Together they operate as an integrated system of domination (PD Guatemala Report /2008). The nation-state, economic exploitation, various forms of violence, inequality and exclusion that involve both men and women are all built upon the patriarchal system. This is why women are those who suffer the most perverse effects of the system at all levels (PD Chile Report/ 2009).<sup>2</sup> The following description within the PD debate reveals how the reflection on patriarchy attempts to place the issue in a broader level of analysis:

*"Patriarchy is a paradigm of social relations among men and women but also between men and men, women and women, and humans and nature. Nature emerges as something external and marketable. In short, patriarchy reproduces alienating and violent social relations operating at multiple levels. All this does not deny that patriarchy, as a historical construction, occupies a central place in the ownership and control of women by men "(PD Chile Report /2009).*

Violence inflicted upon women always takes shape as violence on and control over their bodies. A woman's body, therefore, is the locus of relations of oppression that they live on a daily basis under patriarchy and capitalism, embodied as economic exploitation, sexual violence, birth control, inequality, poverty and hunger.

In this context, social movements are challenged to think about how the patriarchal system reproduces itself in the different realms of society, as well as the extent to which they are prepared to fight multiple forms of exclusion and violence towards women, both internally, in their own structures and practices and vis-à-vis the state, multinational corporations, etc. (PD Cape Town Report / 2008). This challenge takes place within the historical framework of the capitalist crisis and the open possibilities to deepen social struggles, particularly women's struggles for their emancipation. A particular difficulty is how to make women's struggles in the countryside converge with women's struggles in the city, how to make visible that, though it might seem that they are separate places, patriarchy is a system that connects the two of them. Oppressed women in the countryside are displaced from their lands, and this is reflected, for example, in oppression on the outskirts of the cities where they end up residing.

One topic addressed is the issue of traditional cultural values and how they relate to the reproduction of male domination, both in Africa and Latin America. It is necessary to open the debate to think up to what extent traditional cultures, although important in terms of

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<sup>2</sup> Violence and discrimination against the LGTB was not explicitly addressed within the PD. Nevertheless, we believe that deepening the debate on these issues will make necessary to go beyond what has been discussed until now.

preservation of indigenous, ethnic or tribal identities, operate as a factor in the reproduction of violence and patriarchal domination. This can take the form of polygamy, monogamy, traditional rites, or the roles allocated to men and women within the social order to help preserving those values (PD Chile Report /2009).

While the topic of traditional cultural values is delicate and controversial, it is necessary to break the taboos that prevent analysing it so as to expand the horizon of possible collective actions towards social transformation. The issue at stake is being open to dialogue on these sensitive issues (and not only on those where there is greater consensus) with a critical eye on the social role of traditions in Africa and Latin America. It is important to avoid a simple identification of the Western civilization as the *Place of Evil*, from which all forms of imaginable violence stems from, and our own cultures as the *Place of Good*, pure but corrupted by the contact with the dominant civilization.

Other issues developed within the framework of this discussion are: the appropriation of the concept of gender by the State, leading to its depoliticization; the urgency of considering, from a critical perspective, the state as one of the open scenarios to women's political struggles ; the need to consider the differences and inequalities within women's struggles as well as women diversity, avoiding another universal abstract construction, in this case "the woman", as if she were not embedded in sociohistorical contexts; the issue of care and the need for advancement in the construction of more humane social relations, rooted on the responsibility and care of each other, in which both men and women participate together based on a new *ethos*. This new *ethos* can and should draw heavily on the practices and knowledge historically preserved by women-knowledge that has been neglected or underestimated by a masculinized society, but that today we are able to evaluate from a new perspective.

The important thing, rather than to analyze all the aspects that have been addressed in relation with this debate, is to stress that they are on the table and that, although controversial and contradictory, the PD is advancing in the discussion of a range of issues related to women's oppression by men. Moreover, without ever denying its centrality to the understanding of patriarchy, the PD is making progress to place the debate within a broader critique of the dominant paradigm and its different levels of expression in the social reality.

### **1.5. The colonial inheritance and the decolonization of power and knowledge: resistances and alternatives**

The debate over the colonization /decolonization of power and knowledge occupies a prominent place within the PD. Latin America achieved its independence in the early nineteenth century; Africa from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, as a result of intense processes of social struggle. However, the main idea is that although our countries are formally independent republics, their social and economic relations with the major powers

continue to reproduce, in essence, a similar system of subordination and dependency to that of the colonial era. This has been largely due to the lack of interest or inability of the governing elites to develop truly autonomous national projects or because their interests, in almost all cases, could only materialize with the economic integration of our countries into a world market controlled by the superpowers.

The histories of both continents are diverse. Each continent experienced different moments when countries advanced alternative projects, yet remained in constant conflict, besieged by the former colonial powers attempting not to lose control over strategic resources located within Latin America or Africa (oil, minerals, labor, etc.). Generally speaking, today we see the historical continuity of shared interests between the national elites and the elites of the former colonial powers. The ties have been reconfigured within the new scenario of global capitalist expansion (new actors, new political regimes, new technologies). We cannot refer to colonialism in *strictu sensu*, with a metropolitan government in the conquered territories as in the past centuries, but we can refer to enduring relations of subordination that emerged from colonialism and that in many cases remain a reality. In some countries, these relations are being challenged by popular projects (the case of Bolivia for example) as a consequence of mixed interests and tendencies both inside and outside these countries.

When we talk about colonization /decolonization we must remember the specific historical process of both regions. For the Southern African countries,<sup>3</sup> we can speak of a period of 400 years of colonization attempts by the Europeans (since the beginning of the fifteenth century) and more than 150 years of effective colonization. The process of decolonization took off only in recent decades, and most states have between fifteen and forty years of existence as independent republics. This status was gained in many cases by armed struggle, as were the cases of Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola (PD Zimbabwe Report /2009).

In the Latin American case, the formal break of the colonial dependence with Spain and Portugal began two centuries ago. Almost all the new nations had claimed their sovereignty vis-à-vis the metropolis by 1820s. However, independence was followed by the consolidation of the interests of a minority; the imposition of a violent and authoritarian power structure, dependent from the outside (the British Empire and France in particular), and an oligarchic, undemocratic and centralized nation-state. The continuity of indigenous and black peoples' subordination was also part of this reality. In the Brazilian case, for example, the abolition of slavery was only concretized sixty six years after independence, and in the other countries the overall situation for black and indigenous peoples continued to be one of violence and exclusion.

In the current era we see new ways by which the old patterns are being recast. One aspect

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to remember that in the PD, the participation of the African countries is mainly integrated by the countries of the Southern African region ( Mozambique, South Africa, Zimbabwe, among others)

that was highlighted in the discussions of the PD is the role of "international cooperation for development" in relation with the 'new-colonialism' exercised by the European powers, which still enables them to have a great influence on the political and economic spheres.

The political and economic domination is also expressed in the cultural realm. In the context of relations of economic and political dependency, there is a tendency to reproduce and legitimize the ideas, concepts and values of the hegemonic powers as the best or even as the only possible option to think our social reality. Our own symbolic constructions and political and economic ideas are ignored or underestimated. This phenomenon is present both in the popular culture and the academy, and within the government and the media.

However, this is changing for participants in the PD. We now know that going beyond the coloniality of power and knowledge involves the construction of alternatives from our concrete histories, revaluing our political trajectories, the critical thinking forged in the processes of popular struggle and by the revolutionary intellectuals, the knowledge of native and traditional peoples, etc. It entails giving to the ideas and worldviews the proper place that allows us to rediscover our own perspectives, our own interpretation of our dependence and our potential to overcome the long dormancy of colonial rule. We must recognize we have already advanced much in this journey and our present and our future depend on our ability to think in spite of all categories built in the symbolic and political systems of power and submission. The DP is a space that can contribute to the collective discussion on these issues and suggest possible ways forward.

## **1.6. Civilizational crisis and alternatives**

Within the PD framework, when we speak of a civilization in crisis, we specifically refer to the crisis of the Western capitalist civilization, turned into the hegemonic paradigm. This, in turn: *"Reflects a combination of different crises and reveals the extractive-predatory production model, as well as social relations based on domination"* (SD, Chile Report/ 2009). These different crises are found at the environmental, energy, financial, food and demographic levels, but there are also many other factors that have been pushed to unsustainable levels within the framework of the worldwide capitalist expansion. Therefore, to speak about a civilizational crisis means carrying out an in-depth critique of capitalism as a paradigm for the relationship between humans humans and nature.

Therefore, the crisis is not just an isolated factor that can be solved with the implementation of financial plans or another "green revolution". Solving it will entail shifting from productivism as a paradigm that makes the current predatory model possible, towards a new paradigm based on the power of solidarity, mutual responsibility, respect for the Earth and life, and respect for the rights of the different peoples living on the planet today.

The hegemonic powers' response to the crisis is recolonization through a complex re-combination of imperial interests in alliance with the interests of national oligarchies, increasingly using coercion and force. For the PD participants, a true alternative to the crisis requires a strategy that unifies not only the social movements but the society as a whole, in defense of the Earth, women, indigenous peoples, peasants, workers; not so much at the *individual* level, but at the collective level. It is essential to view the struggle with a wide perspective that incorporates problems that we as human beings are all facing worldwide. This is a condition not to remain only with our particular demand or those of isolated groups. We must integrate the specific struggles into a general struggle towards social transformation (PD Zimbabwe Report /2009).

### **1.7. The potential of the People's Dialogue to promote dialogue between diverse women and rural and urban social movements**

The PD, by the very nature of the organizations involved, and as seen in this document, incorporates a diversity of themes. However, it also stands out up to what point the PD could also favor specific dialogues using key crosscutting themes to widen the impacts on the ground. From this perspective, and given the strong connection that exists between these areas, the PD should foster dialogue between rural and urban social movements, as well as strengthen dialogue between women's organizations and women not necessarily organized in a movement (in order to recognize their diversity).

In terms of rural and urban social movements, the first challenge is to make their respective struggles mutually visible. For the urban movements (and for city dwellers in general) it is difficult to see how the struggle of rural movements relates to their own reality. One aspect that can enhance this relationship is that of food sovereignty, because food is a topic that affects everyone in different ways and has economic, political and cultural dimensions.

Another relevant issue is migration from the countryside to the city; sometimes this is a real exodus that reproduces at ever increasing scales the poverty and exclusion that peasants endure in their place of origin, generating phenomena such as slums, drug addiction, violence against women, unemployment, etc. In this sense, it is urgent to stop this migration by creating development alternatives for small and medium-sized farmers. This in turn has implications for the quality of food in the cities. Likewise, the right to the city, understood as the right to secure the services needed to improve the quality of life in urban centers, stands out as one of the potential issues to be addressed in this rural-urban dialogue. In the case of Africa (mainly, but not exclusively), a topic with great potential to link the struggles is AIDS, especially given the magnitude of the problem in both rural and urban areas, and it that particularly affects young people and women. (PA Guatemala Report /2008)

Another pertinent aspect to highlight within the urban-rural debate is that it is increasingly clear

that the boundaries between them are not fixed or stable. On the contrary, they feed each other and they are connected by economic, cultural, political and territorial aspects. Therefore, it is not realistic to speak of the "countryside" and the "city" as mutually exclusive or separate places. This is important when thinking about strategies for action linking the movements and the populations within these geographical and social locations.

Meanwhile, regarding the potential for dialogue between different women's groups, at least since the meeting in Zimbabwe during June 2009, the PD has been reviewing the proposal to create a concrete meeting space for women from both continents. The aim would be to discuss their problems, visions and proposals, recognizing as a starting point the existing women's diversity and the multiple ways of facing common problems such as violence, discrimination and poverty.

Therefore, it is of enormous importance for the PD to generate conditions that enable women on both continents to meet and recognize their differences and inequalities, while deepening mutual understanding of what it means to be a woman here or there; black or white, indigenous or 'colored'; poor or rich; Christian, Muslim or member of an African traditional religion; from the countryside or the city; with or without linkages with a formal organization, etc.

### **1.8 The PD methodology: a path to intercultural dialogue**

With the aim of facilitating political and cultural dialogue, to reflect upon the methodology of the PD is one of the aspects that we consider relevant to analyze with some detail in this text. The PD's methodology in its attempt to think how to go about this bicontinental process, is based on an attempt to follow the legacy of the popular, participatory and emancipatory methodology inspired by Paulo Freire's work and other popular educators of our continents. Each meeting, whether debating one or several central themes, also branches out to address other issues. This allows us to talk about the PD as a place for multi-level debate that also tries to strategically discuss each aspect that interests the participants, according to their praxis.

The praxis criteria is crucial because the themes chosen for each meeting are based on what movements are working on, and the struggles they are engaged in. Questions are used as the basis for starting a discussion, in an attempt to try to understand and consider our own subjectivities, the objective reality we are enmeshed in, and define possible avenues for political action. All of this is part of the effort to carry out meetings from a *dialogical* perspective, that accounts for the differences and similarities of our historical experiences.

Each meeting has supported the direct exchange of experiences and reflection through activities that involved the direct participation of attendees work in regional groups (continent and mixed), plenary sessions and thematic groups, depending on the objectives. Presentations

by researchers or NGO representatives about some of the key themes of each event complemented them.

Each meeting included a 'field trip' to see up close some organizational or political experience in each of the host countries. During the meeting held in Guatemala, in fact, the African participants had the opportunity to arrive a few days early and attend the Third Social Forum of the Americas, which was marked by strong popular participation from Central America and Mexico, as well as the rest the Americas and the Caribbean. It is important to highlight that the Reference Groups from each continent were responsible for acting as the 'methodological teams' at each meeting. By doing so, each day they facilitated the discussions and debated about the methodological guidelines to follow, in order to overcome possible problems and contradictions arising during the activities.

Political and intercultural dialogue must start from the basic understanding notion that there are no "pure" cultures or identities and that they are all *"hybrid products born from multiple forms of contact and within specific certain power relations"* ( Vich, 2005: 268). The very possibility of dialogue depends on this understanding, and knowing how to find the bridges that unite our different experiences and the places where they intersect. In this sense, the path followed by the PD allows us to recognize how the idea that *"All identities are formed in interaction with other identities and it is that play of differences what ensures its possible definition"*. (Vich, 2005: 268)

The appropriate methodology for the dialogue remains an element that invites us to think about how to better build the PD process path, in addition to specific meetings or events, as a permanent practice for of the actors engaged in it. The most recent meeting of the Reference Groups, held in South Africa (March 2010), once again opened discussion about the methodology of the PD, and in terms of our work, we record below some of the key points addressed.

#### **The methodology of People's Dialogue**

The PD has been struggling with the question of methodology since it was formed, it should be at the basis of how PD operates, it should reflect PD character. PD methodology is not being incorporated into its constituent organisations. How does PD deepen and extend its analysis, how does it create and strengthen new ideologies, how does PD enhance political reflection in the dialogue, how does it take methodologies, processes and systems into the organisations.

The dynamic of PD involves a continuous self-evaluation, the weakness of methodology has been raised in ongoing processes but PD has never assigned enough time for discussion around this issue.

There has to be a common understanding of the character and objectives of PD in order to

develop an appropriate methodology.

The basis of PD methodology is the construction of a space for political debate and reflection. This does not involve a purely theoretical analysis, it includes both an understanding of crisis and a sharing of reflection on the struggles.

The question of methodology has bedevilled movements for centuries. In PD there are complexities of language, culture, different political experiences, lack of a common political language.

One of the big challenges PD needs to address is how to connect complex understanding of what is going on with struggles as they are happening in organisations and how to connect this across Latin America and Africa. PD needs to develop the methodology for an ongoing process of debate in which PD enriches movements and is itself enriched by movements.

PD's methodology must build on diversity, it must incorporate different perspectives and tools.

There have been gains and ongoing weaknesses: The discussion in Cape Town on biofuels and land issues two years ago has resulted in a project that deals with traditional seeds; there has been discussion on patriarchy and gender, but this debate needs to be deepened; the process has supported a women's event in Limpopo, South Africa, and a tribunal in Chile; the tools and activities are being built step by step, methodology has to be thought of in terms of this process; for many, PD is a place for intellectual debate that people don't understand.

There is a need to link meetings with process to ensure continuity and increasing participation. This has not been done well. There is a need to find ways to increase exchange of experience across organisations in different countries.

There was a common understanding that, methodologically, more needs to be done and that the discussion needs to be developed in the Reference Group.

*Source: Reference Group Meeting, South Africa, 2010.*

The previous set of concerns allow us to understand that the issue of methodology is far from being closed. In fact, it remains the principal vector of inquiries, as it forces us to reflect on the strengths, limitations, problems and advantages of the effort performed and the prospects for the future.

## **2. Conclusion**

We are now reaching the end of our trajectory. Though somewhat general, we hope that we conveyed the focus of the reflection process developed in recent years by a significant group of political actors in Africa and Latin America. It comprises a set of complex issues on the praxis of the subjects and the struggles in which they participate, be it in the countryside or in or the city, in educational and/or research institutions, or combined at multiple levels. The diversity of actors entails a wide range of voices, experiences and expectations that are not always easy to reconcile or to harmonize in defining common goals. However, the PD is a rich

experience that it is worth considering in depth, including both its potential and limits.

We spoke here of eight unifying themes that have gained greater importance during the course of the dialogue, although there are other concrete aspects within each of these themes that have been left out. Nevertheless, what is reviewed here allows us to see that the PD has an internal logic and coherence both thematically and within its objectives. Each meeting contributed something in the attempt to build a collective analysis about the reality of the African and Latin American worlds, sometimes as unknown as close they are, sometimes as invisible as evident.

It is clear that the PD is an incomplete effort and indeed it does not intend to be fully representative of the societies within each continent. The themes addressed mirror the interests and concrete views of specific actors. However, it is from this point that the dialogue began to emerge, opening the horizons for people and organizations who have assumed the responsibility to participate. It is certainly missing to further open the PD to popular participation. To achieve this it is very important to move from quite regular events, but with limited incidence, to a permanent methodology for the participating movements and others that could also join the process in the coming months and years.

The PD has travelled a path of inquiry in an attempt to draw an answer from the contributions of different voices and experiences of those involved in it. It has done so by addressing different issues, from a critical approach to the state and its relations with social movements to agribusiness and its impacts on the rural world; from colonialism, domination and patriarchal violence to social movements' attempts to build alternatives. The extent to which it has or has not achieved its goal is something that has to be answered by evaluating the impacts that the PD has on people's day to day work, whether at the community, regional or national level.

In any event, the PD has tried to break the imposition of silence and ignorance amongst each other that so deeply serves the interests of power by keeping us apart; it has contributed to overcoming prejudice, build counterhegemonic knowledge, and bring about joint political action so people in the South can meet, recognize and be emancipated from both the external and internal domination that has weighed upon them for centuries. If the PD helps to make at least some progress in this common challenge, it will have contributed something to the cause. It has to remain highly self-critical and take heed of the constant methodological problems that arise in our common effort. Because in the end, the PD does not want to be just an event, but instead aspires to become a permanent emancipatory praxis, integrated in the perspectives and action of social movements on both sides of the Atlantic, and which is permanently confronted with the realities in which we fight, think and dream, towards building "another possible world."

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