

CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP TO LAUNCH THE UN-NGO INFORMAL REGIONAL NETWORK IN PAKISTAN

Karachi, Pakistan, 11 October 2004

Background

In Aracaju, Brazil, a Meeting took place in April 2001 and formally launched worldwide the United Nations Informal Regional Network of NGOs (UN-NGO-IRENE). This initiative, spearheaded by the NGO Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs was designed to address a problem of growing concern in this age of global development based on easy access to and exchange of information and communication as well as a better use of new technologies' potential for the NGO sector development.

As a result of the Economic and Social Council's emphasis on the importance of a representative and inclusive NGO relationship, consultative status is being granted to a steadily increasing number of organizations from countries and regions that provide geographical diversity, but are often economically distressed. A significant number of organizations, therefore, find themselves subject to financial and logistical constraints that effectively limit their ability to make full use of their consultative status with ECOSOC, particularly in regard to participation in the international arena.

One underlying problem has always been the difficulty of establishing and maintaining regular contact between the NGO Section in New York and the large number of NGOs with limited communication systems. These organizations are therefore deprived of up to date information on UN activities in the economic and social fields and the electronic systems of communication that has become a trademark of the increasingly influential NGO sector.

To address this problem, the UN-NGO-IRENE was designed as a means of drawing even the smallest, most isolated organizations into a system that provides information, assistance and the opportunity for sharing expertise and resources of every description to support joint NGO activities within and among regions thereby enhancing their significance and strengthening their impact. One of the most important aims of the proposed network is the possibility of providing national and regional organizations with the practical tools to make a tangible contribution to the work of ECOSOC both operationally and by adding a broad-based NGO perspective to the deliberations of that body, particularly the discussions of the High Level Segment. It is intended that the networking capacity will be exploited to the fullest in following up the outcome of the major international meetings, particularly of the Millennium Summit that resulted in a declaration of the political will of the world's leaders to achieve certain objectives for the betterment of humankind.

UN-NGO-IRENE will be supported through the intermediary activities of designated regional / sub-regional coordinator organizations. During the Aracaju meeting, such organizations have already been identified for Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. The Tunisia Meeting agreed in 2002 on five African NGOs to serve as sub-regional coordinators and one of them as regional coordinator. For Eastern Europe, the Bucharest Meeting agreed in 2003 on two sub-regional coordinators and one regional coordinator. For the remaining regions, the network will be expanded similarly to cover the whole sector of NGOs. At national level, the UN-NGO IRENE was established in Canada, China, India, Japan and Mauritania.

Additionally, the interest sparked by the concept of UN-NGO-IRENE itself has attracted a number of UN and other intergovernmental and large international bodies to seek synergy and mutually supportive action for the NGO Section/DESA, as informal partners in its implementation.

All Pakistan Women Association “APWA”, a leading NGO in consultative status with ECOSOC since 1951, hosted the Workshop to launch the UN-NGO-IRENE / Pakistan in Karachi, Pakistan on 11 October 2004 in partnership with the NGO Section / ECOSOC of UN DESA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Workshop to launch the UN-NGO Informal Regional Network in Pakistan (UN-NGO-IRENE/ Pakistan) took place in SIDCO Center in Karachi, Pakistan on 11 October 2004.

Hosted by All Pakistan Women Association APWA, a leading NGO in consultative status with ECOSOC since 1951, the Workshop was organized in partnership with the NGO Section, Office for Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Support and Coordination of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). The President of APWA, Mrs. Tazeen Faridi, opened the Workshop and welcomed the participants. In her opening remarks, Mrs. Laila Sarfaraz, Executive Vice President of APWA highlighted the importance of the upcoming International Conference on Gender Equality and Sustainable Development that APWA is coordinating and the role that the present Workshop will play in bringing together the Pakistani Civil Society to enhance the preparatory work of the Conference towards concrete results. The Workshop was coordinated by Mrs. Meher Kermani and Mrs. Yasmine Dastur from APWA. It was conducted by Ms Najet Karaborni, Senior Interregional Advisor and UN-NGO-IRENE Project Coordinator / UNDESA who made the three following power point presentations:

- ◆ ECOSOC and its relationship with NGOs: NGO Consultative status with ECOSOC
- ◆ The Millennium Development Goals
- ◆ UN-NGO-IRENE and NGO Capacity Building within Participatory Governance

Participants included:

- ◆ **33 Representatives of 16 Pakistani NGOs** representing NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC and other leading and dynamic NGOs;
- ◆ **One Official** from the **United Nations Secretariat**, Department of Economic and Social Affairs;
- ◆ **Partners and Sponsors** representing the Press, the business community and donors

The meeting agreed on the relevance and the need for an Informal Regional Network of NGOs in Pakistan. NGO representatives noticed that such an initiative was a timely one.

It was agreed that the primary focus for the Network should be on the Pakistani NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC (13) in 2004, but that it needed to go beyond this to include all NGOs supporting the goals of the United Nations, notably as set out in the Millennium Declaration taking into account the huge number of registered NGOs (About 56 219 NGOs in 2002) according to the Social Policy and Development Centre of Pakistan.

Building on the work of existing NGO coalitions, participants underlined the need for the Network to be quickly operational to facilitate the access of Pakistani NGOs to the global scene. One of the important added values of this Network would also be its responsiveness to the diversity of Pakistan and the priority given to engaging with NGOs at all levels (local, regional, national and global).

Consideration was given to the need for a database of Pakistani NGOs to strengthen networking and exchange of information, innovative experiences and best practices among the NGO community. The scope of the Network and responsibilities of participating NGOs were discussed and agreed upon. APWA, as the national coordinator, was asked to take responsibility for this in collaboration with Mrs. Najet Karaborni, Senior Interregional Adviser/DESA and UN-NGO-IRENE Project Coordinator.

Participating NGOs stressed the vital importance of mobilizing additional resources in order to realize the Network's potential. Information about sources of funding could be disseminated through the Network.

Following substantial and candid discussions, the meeting agreed on the following major issues:

I. OBJECTIVES

The following objectives were agreed:

1. To strengthen and promote partnerships initiatives and projects among and between Pakistani NGOs, the United Nations, Government, Corporate Sector and Donor Community;
2. The network should serve as a focal point and clearing house among Pakistani ECOSOC accredited NGOs and should help other leading and committed NGOs to apply for consultative status with ECOSOC;
3. To establish permanent dialogue and direct contacts between NGOs, the NGO Section/DESA and the United Nations in general.

II. STRUCTURE

It was agreed that the structure of the Network would be flexible and open, and optimize the use of Information and Communication technology (ICT). Much of the actual networking would be conducted through the Internet. It was considered necessary to set up a Web portal for the Network and facilitate information sharing activities.

To better serve the needs of the beneficiaries of the Network and contribute to an effective and concrete implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the outcomes of the major UN conferences, the following NGO thematic focal points and regional representations of the Network were established:

A. Thematic Focal Points at national level:

1. **Poverty Alleviation and Hunger (MDG 1):** SEVA in collaboration with Ladies' Forum, Pakistan Association for Women Entrepreneurs and the First Women's Bank Limited
2. **Education (MDG 2)** : BUNYAD in collaboration with BEHBUD
3. **Gender Equality /Women Empowerment:** AURAT in collaboration with Tehrik-e-Niswan
4. **Health (MDGs 4, 5 and 6)** : Family Planning Association of Pakistan (FPAP) in collaboration with Geriatrics Care Foundation of Pakistan
5. **Environment (MDG 7)** : SCOPE in collaboration with Shirkat Gah, Women's Resource Centre
6. **Partnerships (MDG 8)** : Federation of Business and Professional Women in collaboration with Business, Professional and Agriculture Women Association and First Women Bank Limited
7. **Peace, Security and Human Rights** : Karachi Women Peace Committee in collaboration with World Muslim Congress and Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child

B. Regional Representations of the Network:

1. **Sind Region:** Scientific and Cultural Society of Pakistan
2. **North west Frontier Province:** Afghan Development Association
3. **Islamabad:** Rural Development Foundation of Pakistan
4. **Punjab:** FPAP
5. **Balochistan:** Rural Support Program

III. STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

The meeting concluded with a discussion on a Strategic Action Plan, which should include the preparatory work for the International Conference on Gender Equality and Sustainable Development.

To ensure all conditions of success to the Conference it was agreed that each NGO focal point will lead - on behalf of the civil society - one of the five following workshops of the Conference:

1. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
2. Gender Equality, Human Rights and Peace
3. Gender Equality and Poverty alleviation
4. Gender Equality and Health
5. Gender Equality and Education

Other crucial activities will be discussed and included in the Network Strategic Action Plan during upcoming sessions of respective focal points with relevant NGOs.

IV. CONTRIBUTION OF THE PARTNERS AND OF THE NGO SECTION/ ECOSOC/UNDESA

In addition to the proposals to be included in the Strategic Action Plan, partners of the Network would contribute to the flow of information.

The NGO Section of DESA would provide a range of services, including regular flows of information to assist NGOs in making full use of their consultative status with ECOSOC. It was proposed that a UN-NGO-IRENE/ Pakistan newsletter be produced.

V. PRESS CONFERENCE IN THE KARACHI PRESS CLUB

A Press Conference took place in the Press Club of Karachi at 5: pm to brief the Media about the Capacity Building Meeting to Launch the UN-NGO-IRENE in Pakistan as well as the International Conference of 22-24 February 2005.

About 30 Media representatives attended the Press Conference and addressed relevant questions on the functioning of the Network, its role and main objectives towards a strengthened civil society in Pakistan. The United Nations representative highlighted that the Network has to focus on result-oriented partnership initiatives with government, the United Nations, the corporate Sector and the donor community to enhance the NGO contribution to the ECOSOC work in implementing the internationally agreed millennium development goals and the action plans of the International Conferences and Summits.

Regarding the February 2005 International Conference that APWA is coordinating, the Executive Vice President of APWA emphasized the importance of a collaborative work and joint efforts with all committed NGOs and CSOs at local, national and international levels, Government, the United Nations and all other interested stakeholders as well in order to reach the expected Conference accomplishments and especially an Islamabad Action Plan on Gender Equality and Sustainable Development.