

Social Watch: promoting accountability

Social Watch, a network that today has members in over 60 countries around the world, was created in 1995 as a “meeting place for non-governmental organizations concerned with social development and gender discrimination.” This network was created to respond to the need to promote the political will required for making the United Nations promises come true. Social Watch, which is continually growing both qualitatively and quantitatively, has published 15 yearly reports on progress and setbacks in the struggle against poverty and for gender equality. These reports have been used as tools for advocacy on a local, regional, and international level.

From its number 0, published in 1996, to this present issue, the 15th, the *Social Watch Report* has brought to light more than 650 reports from civil society organizations, all of them sharing the aim of reminding governments of their commitments and tracking their implementation, both country by country and at the international level.

The present issue, featuring contributions from 63 national Social Watch coalitions, sustains the flame that brought the network into existence in 1995: the need to generate tools and strategies to rectify the lack of accountability mechanisms and ensure compliance with international commitments related to social policies and development goals.

In the decade Social Watch was created, a series of high-level United Nations conferences, starting with the ‘Children’s Summit’ in 1990 and ending with the Millennium Summit in 2000, redefined the global social agenda. In 1995, the Social Summit (Copenhagen) and the Women’s Conference (Beijing) defined, for the first time, the eradication of poverty and gender equality as common universal objectives, setting concrete targets and timelines to achieve the goal vaguely formulated in 1946 in the UN Charter as “dignity for all”. To promote the political will needed for those promises to become a reality, the Social Watch network was created as a “meeting place for non-governmental organizations concerned with social development and gender discrimination” (*Social Watch No. 0*, 1996), by a group of civil society organizations.

Thus, the *Social Watch Report* was formulated as a powerful tool for the presentation of internationally available statistical information and for reporting on qualitative aspects of the issues addressed through analyses by social organizations working at a national level. A yearly publication, the Report is devoted to progress and setbacks in the struggle against poverty and for gender equality, two largely overlapping objectives, since the absolute majority of the persons living in poverty are women.

The Social Watch yearly reports, while adding an international dimension to local efforts and campaigns, became the first sustained monitoring initiative on social development and gender equity at a national level, and the first to combine both in one international overview.

The report N^o0, published in 1996, featured contributions from 13 organizations; since then, the network has been steadily rising. Currently, Social Watch has members (“watchers”) in over 62 countries around the world, and membership grows each year.

The local, the global and the Report

Every year Social Watch chooses to analyze a different subject in depth through its Report, usually focusing on topics under discussion on the international agenda that can be addressed from a local perspective. Experts from diverse origins and disciplines contribute alternative views on the issues through thematic articles. This international perspective is complemented with national and regional reports through which member organizations contribute a local perspective,

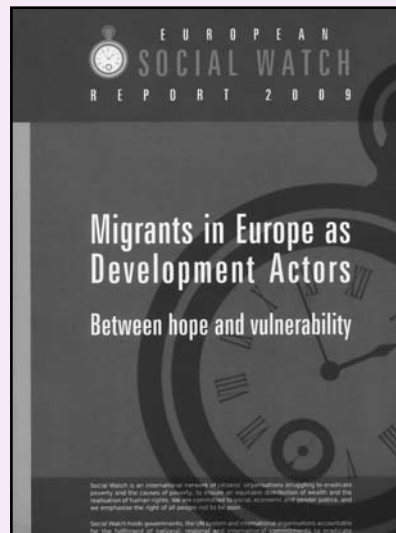
reporting on the state of affairs in their countries in relation to each year’s specific theme.

In addition, Social Watch produces indexes and tables with comparable international information, presenting a macro-perspective of the situation related to certain dimensions of development while also providing national level readings. Social Watch has developed alternative indicators to measure progress or setbacks in gender equity and the meeting of basic human capacities, which are now used as reference

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN NATIONAL GROUPS AND THE SOCIAL WATCH NETWORK

1. Coalitions must be based in the country and be active in social development issues in that country (not exclusively as academics or consultants).
2. Their basic commitment to the international network is to provide a national report, with their own conclusions and determination of priorities, to be included in the annual publication.
3. They are expected to use their national report and the global report in lobbying activities at a national level.
4. They must be open to the incorporation of other organizations, work actively to broaden awareness of Social Watch and encourage the participation of other organizations.
5. They are responsible for raising funds for their activities. National coalitions are not dependent for funds on, or financially accountable to, the Secretariat or any other international Social Watch entity.
6. Each coalition determines its own organizational structure.
7. Social Watch membership and the exercise of governmental functions are absolutely incompatible.
8. Cooperation with other national platforms should be encouraged at sub-regional, regional and global levels.
9. In cases of conflicts between members/participating organizations of a coalition on issues related to Social Watch (e.g. nomination of the focal point, contribution to the Social Watch Report, nomination of delegates to the Social Watch Assembly) all parties involved have to demonstrate their willingness to solve the problems at national level. If, in exceptional cases, an agreement cannot be reached, the Coordinating Committee can take the necessary decisions.
10. In order to demonstrate their affiliation to the network all coalitions are encouraged to use the Social Watch logo for national activities directly related to goals and objectives of Social Watch. They are requested to inform the International Secretariat about these activities. In other cases they have to seek permission from the International Secretariat or the Coordinating Committee in advance for other uses of the Social Watch name and logo.

The Memorandum of Understanding was adopted during the 1st General Assembly, Rome, 2000, and it was last updated in October 2009.



Keynote Address by the Hon'ble Vice President of India Shri M. Hamid Ansari at the inauguration of the "Evaluating Committees and Committee System: Changing Contours of Governance and Policy" seminar, organized by the National Social Watch Coalition India in November 2009.

points for both civil society and international institutions. These are: the Gender Equity Index (GEI) and the Basic Capabilities Index (BCI).

Although members use the document for advocacy work in diverse situations, report launches, as well as indexes launches, are key opportunities for dissemination of its contents, taking place both in relevant spaces of international and national debate and decision-making. The report is published by the Secretariat in several languages: Spanish, English, French, Arabic. Some national coalitions also publish their own versions of the report: Spain, Italy, Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Europe, India and Brazil. Other coalitions publish an array of materials. The Czech and Italian Social Watch coalition, for instance, publish the Gender Equity Index, while Ghana's Social Watch has published a compilation of its national reports and the Beninese Social Watch coalition issues a quarterly, *Social Watch Bénin*. Also, in December 2009 the first *European Social Watch report*

was launched: *Migrants in Europe as Development Actors: Between hope and vulnerability*.

Also, Occasional Papers are published, mainly to help build the capacity of member coalitions, regional training workshops have been organized, and position papers have been produced. For example, in 2010 Social Watch published *Beijing and Beyond – Putting Gender Economics at the Forefront – 15 years after the IV World Conference on Women*.¹ This

1 Available from: <www.socialwatch.org/node/11571>. The first Occasional Paper by Mirjam Van Reizen, *The Lion's Teeth*, examines the political context in which Social Watch was created. The second, by Ana María Arteaga, *Control Ciudadano desde la base*, analyzes the democratization of international human rights instruments experience in Chile in 1997. The third, a compilation by Patricia Garcé and Roberto Bissio, introduces the experience of monitoring Copenhagen goals through the concrete example of Social Watch. Papers 4 and 5, coordinated by the Social Watch Social Sciences Research Team, address poverty and inequality in Latin America and the links between poverty and human rights. Occasional Papers available from: <www.socialwatch.org/taxonomy/term/459>.

publication was launched on 9 March 2010 at the UN headquarters in New York, during the review of the Committee on the Status of Women marking the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Through its website, blog, and presence in social networking platforms, Social Watch is also utilizing new multimedia and tools to disseminate information on gender, development and human rights issues, generate discussions among fellow civil society practitioners, and conduct outreach to policymakers and journalists. Advocacy, communications and campaigning strategies will complement each other to achieve its goals. At the same time, Social Watch will make efforts to publish the report in additional languages and formats that allow reaching wider audiences.

Additionally, on several occasions, Social Watch spokespersons have addressed the UN General Assembly and other intergovernmental bodies on behalf of the network or wider civil society constituencies. In August 2009, Social Watch established an office in New York to enable a continuous presence at the United Nations and to coordinate advocacy efforts with country missions at the UN, international agencies and other NGO networks. It has been assisting the participation of members in global decision making processes and informing regularly about them to the national coalitions.

A flexible network

As the "meeting place" has grown, several aspects of it have evolved, but the founding ideas and objectives remain. In preparing for their participation in the Copenhagen Social Summit, civil society organizations adopted flexible and ad hoc ways of organizing as a network. No formal governing structure or steering committee was created and no stable coordinating group was established. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) preferred to inform each other and



General Assembly

The General Assembly is the Social Watch network's highest directive body. Policy discussion and medium- to long-term strategic planning happens in its realm, which serves as a decision-making forum. However, it is also a space for reinforcing the sense of belonging and strengthening the network's identity and unity. It takes place every three years and up to now has been held four times: in Rome 2000, Beirut 2003, Sofia 2006, and Accra 2009.² The 2011 Assembly will be held in the Philippines. In addition to setting medium- and long-term priorities and identifying potential alliances in advocacy strategy, the Assembly elects members of the Coordinating Committee to whom coordination and political leadership between assemblies are delegated.

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee (CC) is the key political body for the 'daily' work of the network, with an organizational structure which requires fluid communications, facilitated principally through an email list, plus biannual face-to-face meetings and regular telephone conferences to discuss specific issues.

As the CC's task is to "ensure the political visibility and participation of the network in relevant spaces and processes,"³ its composition endeavours to represent a geographical and gender balance, as well as considering the contribution, in terms of experience and capabilities, that members can provide

to the whole network. In general, the CC's decisions are adopted by consensus, and every single decision (and discussion) is communicated to the watchers in a timely manner. The constant participation of two Secretariat members as ad hoc members of the CC ensures coordination between the two bodies, the function of the Secretariat being to support and implement the strategic decisions made.

International Secretariat

The Secretariat is the main executive body of Social Watch. The first external evaluation of the network (1995-2000) noted that, "Of the various roles in the Social Watch network, that of the Secretariat has changed the most" (Hessini and Nayar, 2000). Originally the Secretariat's function was limited to responsibility for the production of the Report, but due to the network's growth it has subsequently incorporated a series of new functions, including research, capacity building, campaigning, promotion of the network and its representation in international forums.

Promoting accountability

The Accra Assembly, held in October 2009, endorsed the concept of "mutual accountability" among members and among the different bodies of the network (secretariat, CC, members). Social Watch believes that the key action to achieve poverty eradication, gender equality and social justice happen primarily at local and national level and, therefore, its interna-

tional activities and structures should be accountable and at the service of national and local constituencies, and not the other way around.

Social Watch will achieve its objectives through a comprehensive strategy of advocacy, awareness-building, monitoring, organizational development and networking. Social Watch promotes people-centred sustainable development. Peace is a pre-condition for the realization of human and women's rights and the eradication of poverty. But also poverty and lack of respect for human rights are at the root of many armed conflicts. Therefore the devastating impact of conflict and post-conflict situations on people is of particular concern for Social Watch.

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² Final reports, working papers and other materials from these four Assemblies available from: <www.socialwatch.org>.

³ The document describing the nature and mandate of the Coordinating Committee was agreed at the 2nd General Assembly, Beirut 2003. Available from: <www.socialwatch.org/node/9388>.