

## **EXPERIENCE OF MY PARTICIPATION AT CSD-13 R. MURALI, MODERN ARCHITECTS FOR RURAL INDIA**

### **Nostalgic:**

As a grassroots activist engaged in NGO development sector for the past 20 years, I have been encountering UN literature, analysis of living conditions from the framework of UN declarations, new priorities emerging from UN summits which often determine funding opportunities for grassroots NGOs etc. Several times I used UN material to build sanctity and credibility to my own ideas & field level initiatives. With all this in background, getting an opportunity of participating in CSD-13 held in UN Headquarters was really an exciting time for me. While walking towards UN building on the first day I recollected the images of most thrilling sessions we had in our village school hut on the "UNO" chapter. Probably that was only part of Social Studies subject which somehow attracted me and helped me finally secure pass marks.

### **Learning:**

The orientation organized by Northern Alliance and Freshwater Action Network for the first time participants in CSD gave a wonderful opportunity to understand historical perspective of CSD-13, IPM of CSD-13, significance of CSD in Economic & Social Forum, connecting themes of CSD & MDGs, Political importance of CSD-13 outcome, role of CSD in integrating social, economic and environmental sectors, philosophy and rationale (article 71) behind providing space for 9 major groups participation etc. I could get very well familiarized with physical settings inside UN building, (particularly the strategic points like Vienna Café, book shop, Restaurant etc.), the programme, simple but importance cautions (respect the vanity & ego of official delegations) to be followed in lobbying process and how to identify and build the lobbying contacts with the official delegations. Crown plaza meeting was an important strategic intervention from the point of view of strengthening CSOs participation. The strategy holds good even for regional and National level events where CSOs have space for participation. Coaching in advance through internet would also be very useful.

### **CSD-13:**

This participation had helped me understand how exactly the inter-governmental deliberations and negotiations take place. The process through which outputs of UN emerge was quite useful education for me. Prior to commencement of session, I was bit unclear about meaningfully linking my micro level experience and understanding to a global level discussion. But I realized that the issues and concerns discussed in CSD-13 are the same as what we come across in our daily work. I did feel that grassroots activists like me certainly have very deep & realistic understanding coupled with concrete experience of making things happen. I felt from within that I need to shed the hesitation & shyness and should boldly make use of the opportunity to express and influence. Enlarging space for grassroots activists participation and enabling them to make a systematic effort would certainly make way for people centered deliberations and activists would also be able to implement the actions at the field level.

Integrated approach in achieving water, sanitation & human settlements goals, adequacy of financing & financing priorities of governments, time lines & deadlines for achieving the progress, decentralization and community capacity building, transparent monitoring & information sharing, efficiency of delivery system were the main focus of discussion at CSD-13. It was quite shocking to note the reluctance of Nations, particularly the developed countries, to commit to "rights based approach".

### **My voice in UN:**

Personally I have always been voicing my concerns that in the absence of transparency & efficiency in implementation and monitoring, no amount of finances & policies can make any sustainable progress. There is huge loss of finance in implementation process and there are mind boggling gaps between what governments are claiming and actual realities in which people live. Transparency & efficiency in delivery is a greater priority than "asking for more" (resources,

policies programs). From this stand point, I have really enjoyed the opportunity of presenting NGO major group statement during the plenary session on “strengthening monitoring & evaluation of water and sanitation services”. This is certainly a most memorable joyful moment of my life.

Panel of speakers for various plenary sessions included representatives of CSOs and all of them addressed the official delegations with great clarity and conviction which must have made a strong influence on their thinking. As a fellow Indian I felt very happy about the contribution made by Mr. Ravinarayan (WaterAid) Mr. Gouri Gosh (WSSCC) and Ms. Sunita Narayan-CSE (I was not present on this day). The 9 major groups and thematic caucuses were working hard with serious commitment. There was good coordination and mutual respect between these groups. Interventions of these major groups were always heard with great attention and eagerness by the members of official delegations.

Despite a very busy schedule, CSD chair Mr. John Ashe spent considerable time to interact exclusively with major groups and it was always quite frank discussion. CSOs were provided physical space (rooms) and communication facilities in UN premises. Official delegation members are generally receptive when approached by NGOs. Of course my own personal experience with Indian delegation was not much encouraging. United Nations Non-governmental Liaison Center (NGLS) exists to strengthen UN civil society relations.

While all this is a clear indication of success of global civil society in reaching its voice to highest level of governmental system, there is also evidence of threats to this process. There are questions on keeping the doors open for CSOs in future UN events. There is a need to put up stronger fights to defend and enhance our spaces.

Side events and partnership fare resembled a supermarket in store of a wide variety of opportunities. Sometime I had difficulty in making choices. But I realized by being an indisciplined participant walking from one room to the other I could benefit maximum from all those events. In building contacts with activists from Africa this particular event participation had helped me a lot. The learning and participation was good, and stay was very comfortable & in expensive because of sharing with new friends from Africa. We departed with commitment to keep in contact for regular exchange of ideas, experience and information.

I returned with a good sense of fulfillment and lot of ideas for future action. I am very thankful to FAN for this wonderful opportunity. From the practical experience of CSD-13, I felt following preparation is essential to be effective in advocacy process in similar global events.

1. Irrespective of funding commitment, at least one year in advance preparation for participation in the interested event should begin. Need to regularly follow the event planning process and should have a consistent assessment of opportunities available particularly to address our agenda. Understanding of background history, players, and important documents is essential.
2. From the regional and Nation perspective the issues to be raised and position to be taken should be clear at individual and organization level.
3. Pre-event consultation and networking among the participants of a region and or Nation would create opportunities of collective lobbying and sharing responsibility. Also building inter-continental alliance on issues of mutual interest and solidarity concerns should be planned carefully for which we should join different dialogue forums.
4. We should have full knowledge of the latest scenario with in our regions / countries and should be able to know to the extent possible the members of official delegation and their position on pertinent issues. Pre-event consultations at regional and national level should be held.
5. Identification as well as strengthening grassroots initiatives in line with the advocacy agenda and efforts to bring them to limelight. So that when such experience is quoted to support our arguments, people receive the same with familiarity.

6. Collective efforts to ensure best representation and participation from the region. Collective efforts would also help in ensuring a reasonable number of participants required to do effective lobbying.
7. Coordinated team work during the event focusing on the pre-set objectives and agenda emerging from the event process.
8. Post event sharing, critical analysis of the event output, planning for follow up and monitoring the actions of govt. at the regional & national level. Every citizen should be able to question the state on its commitments at international level and the real actions.
9. Post event regular advocacy process within the regions involving media, elected representatives and other groups concerned would create conditions for implementation off commitments.
10. Our own initiatives to generate experience and learning on implementation of international commitments.

I would like to commit myself to the above course of action with regard to IV World Water Forum to be held in Mexico in March 2006.

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