

Equal Procedures and Social Conventions

Published as a comment at www.u-landsnyt.dk on September 30th 2013

- translated from Danish by Lea Bergkvist Vester.

It does matter what Southern and Northern NGOs are saying to each other.

It also matters how we organize.

The cicadas were singing but otherwise it was quiet around us. Koudbi Koala and I could barely see each other in the dark, warm tropical night while we were having a nice chat that started when he had asked me about Genvej til Udvikling's commitment to countries in West Africa. He is from the Emmaus member organization Benebnooma (= "The Other school" – in the Moré language) in Koudougou, the third- largest city of Burkina Faso. Our conversation took place in a work camp in Tohoué near Porto Novo in Benin in December 2004.

Koudbi's organization is in charge of a wide range of educational initiatives and income-generating activities, including a dance troupe, and Benebnooma is co-organizer of the city's yearly festival, "Koudougous Atypical Nights". Koudbi's closest employee in Benebnooma, Blandine Ky, is chairwoman of Burkina Faso's "Coalition on Education For All" and was interviewed when the consultancy Tana, in a thorough "Desk and Field Study" in 2012, was gearing up for Ibis' planned commitment to development in Burkina Faso. (*Ibis is a great Danish development NGO.*)

Today, Koudbi is chairman of Emmaus Africa. He is former vice-chairman of Emmaus International (EI) and was the coordinating power when EI held its general assembly in the capital of Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou, in 2003. One line that I will remember to the end of my days from our conversation in 2004 is:

"I am happy that you say "cooperated with" rather than "supported". (*Je suis content que tu dis "collaboré avec" au lieu de dire "soutenu"!*)

I wonder if he valued my words because he had heard so many white people saying "supported".

The Land of Dignity

President Thomas Sankara was only allowed to govern for 4 years before he was murdered in a coup d'état in 1987; but one of his clearest reforms remained. Instead of being called something sounding like a French department (Upper Volta), since 1984 the name of the country has been Burkina Faso, which is formed by the two most common languages, Moré and Dioula, and means "the Land of Dignity". It both entails responsibility and gives strength – on psychological and organizational levels – to live in a country with such a name. Koudbi Koala may occasionally need international solidarity for the many tasks he tries to accomplish through his organization, but he seeks cooperation – he does not wish to be supported. He expects respect in the procedures and in social conventions.

In the 2015 Millennium Development Goals § 8 is called:

"Global partnership for development" cf. <http://verdensbedstenyheder.dk/om-verdens-bedste-nyheder/2015-maalene/>; "Create increased global cooperation" cf. <http://da.wikipedia.org/wiki/2015-m%C3%A5lene>.

Or "Developing a global partnership for development" cf.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennium_Development_Goals.

Why is the paragraph placed as the last of the eight? - It is a sort of a first step that the subject is even mentioned; but perhaps there could be some substance added to the formulation next time around? There is very little inspiration to get from what is in the 2015 goals for paragraph 8, and it's a far cry from obligations.

How do South and North talk with one another, and how do we organize in a way that is both equal and perceived as equal by all parties?

The Tanzanian organizer John Ulanga explained during a meeting held in Uddannelsesnetværket (Danish NGO Education Network) a couple of years back that the average of Southern representation in the leading bodies of international development NGOs is 6.5 per cent.

Or put differently, there are not many people from organizations in the South sitting in the place of honour, where strategies and decisions are made.

Self-determination

I am proud to be part of a network, <http://emmaus-international.org/>, where non-Europeans determine their own affairs at home, and where they are taking part in the international leadership on equal terms with white people. Each continent has its own structure with general assemblies, councils and executive committees in Pondicherry (*India*), Ouagadougou (*Burkina Faso*), Montevideo (*Uruguay*), and Paris (*France*).

The international council consists of 4 Asians, 4 Africans, 4 Americans and 12 Europeans. Of these, 8 have been elected to the executive committee – in the current term it is composed of 1 member each from Brazil, DR Congo, India, Spain, and Great Britain, and 3 from France, among these the chairman; but one of the other Frenchmen is born in Rwanda. We are dealing with a significant relative over-representation of non-Europeans, considering that there are 7 Asian, 15 African, 27 American and 278 European member organizations.

When these bodies meet they all take responsibility for all that may be discussed. The Peruvian must be able to understand the benefits and the drawbacks when the Asians are promoting eco-tourism, and the Ivorian takes part when determining whether a project in Lithuania to fight trafficking in human beings has been correctly put together.

By joining Emmaus you can forget about focusing exclusively on your own context.

Let us have some inputs on how other international networks organize, and especially how they plan to organize in the future! And let us keep the debate on the procedures and conventions fuelled, at least to the same extent as the debates on all other aspects of ~~the~~ development cooperation which can more easily be measured.

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