



SOCIAL WATCH

LEARNING FROM SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCES

**Summary of the analysis of four case studies
from the Social Watch National Coalitions
How successes and failures can be valuable as
lessons learnt for other national coalitions**

Learning from successful experiences.

Summary of the analysis of four case studies from the Social Watch national coalitions

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Executive Summary

◎ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When civil society organizations (CSOs) become part of an international network like Social Watch they are enabled to share their mission and experiences and also to enhance their impact by implementing actions together with organizations in other countries that pursue the same objectives at a national and at a global level.

In a world increasingly “interconnected”, being part of a network seems to be a “must”. However, is it just a question of opportunity or is there something more at the back of this choice? The present booklet summarizes the result of a study conceived to produce a better understanding of the main reasons driving the member organizations to join the Social Watch network. The study analyzed four successful cases of national platforms that chose to be members of Social Watch years ago and that are able today to present the results they achieved in their respective countries.

The study summarized here should be understood as a contribution to the crucial process intending to facilitate sharing of experiences, know-how transfer and capacity building among network members that are crucial to the promotion of a learning process based on sharing each others’ experience.

One of the strengths of the Social Watch network is its worldwide membership and its rather unique composition of NGOs, grassroots organizations, trade unions, women’s organizations, research centres coming from both Donor and Beneficiary Countries. This composition allows Social Watch to have a two-folded perspective, from the North as well as from the South, and to actually contribute at analysing local issues by pointing out their relevance and interconnection at a global level often in a cross-sectoral and multi-disciplinary way. The plurality of actors participating in the process enables civil society organizations to join their own expertise and enhance their capacity to carry out a more effective advocacy and lobbying work at a national as well as at an international level.

The role of a coordinating/facilitating group is essential, since it guarantees consistency and coordination in the implementation of the activities among the heterogeneous coalition members – all of them bearing their own and distinct internal organization and structure – as well as a close relationship with the International Secretariat.

Taking into consideration the vast array of themes the network usually deals with at a global level, it is cost-effective for national platforms to focus on a handful of issues considered as most relevant for their national agenda and agree on a yearly work plan.

Trust, flexibility, mutual respect, high commitment to common objectives: these seem to be the network's features which ensure the wellbeing and satisfaction of its members. The national platform achieves its success when it does not duplicate the work of its members but rather offers them a valuable space for shaping public policies in a more comprehensive way. Indeed, the capacity of the network to combine different expertises in a single joint action becomes the added value.

The national coalition is required to play a key political role: the consultation process and researches it carries out for its reports is sometimes even more relevant than the report itself. Watchers need to be proactive at different levels: the alliances with the media and the academic world are critical, also those with local communities and ordinary citizens.

For all the four national coalitions analyzed, the above-mentioned elements have contributed to their gain in legitimacy and credibility in face of their Governments (for instance, the reliability and the international dimension of the data and of the analysis provided in the Reports have helped the national coalitions to be a relevant social actor able to attract new members constantly).

The cases presented here give an exhaustive picture of the challenges and opportunities any other national platform could face. Although this was not a comprehensive study, neither

expected to be an academic research, it represented an initial survey on relevant experiences among SW national coalitions. Far from being an evaluation of the four selected Social Watch national platforms, this publication intends to become a useful tool for the whole network, as it identified and suggested key successful factors and best practices to be adopted by other coalitions in other national contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

Social Watch is a worldwide network with members in over 60 Countries around the world, comprising about 400 citizens' organizations struggling to eradicate poverty and the cause of poverty, to ensure an equitable distribution of wealth and the realization of human rights. The network was created in 1995, the same year two high-level United Nations conferences on Social Development (Copenhagen Summit¹) and on Women (Beijing Conference)² took place. By participating in those conferences and their preparatory meetings, civil society organizations understood the importance of creating adequate mechanisms to monitor the Governments and to ensure a follow-up to those Summits. The creation of Social Watch stems from an "obvious" lacuna: there were hardly any mechanisms to commit Governments to implementing social development policies.³ Indeed, Social Watch was promoted in order to remind Governments and International Organizations of their commitments, to transform their promises in reality and to independently track their implementation, country by country and at the international level. Since

¹ The 1995 World Summit on Social Development adopted three core objectives (poverty alleviation, expansion of productive employment and social integration) and 11 major social concerns (poverty alleviation, population, health, education, employment, shelter, environment, disaster, crime, social protection, family).

² The 1995 Beijing conference took into consideration several areas of concern related to the situation of women around the world. Among them: the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women, unequal access to education, health care and related services, inequality between men and women in economic structures, in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels, in participating in all communication systems, persistent discrimination against and violations of the rights of women and girls.

³ Mirjam van Reisen, "*The Lion's Teeth. The prehistory of Social Watch*", Social Watch - Occasional Papers 01, 2001.

the adoption of the UN Millennium Declaration,⁴ Social Watch has been sternly monitoring worldwide the Governments compliance with the agreed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): these time bounded targets were conceived as an initial, very concrete and measurable, attempt to render Governments accountable, to their own citizens and also to the international community, of their achievement of important development objectives. As an international NGO watchdog network, from the very beginning Social Watch undertook the task of monitoring the fulfilment of the MDGs and - in a more inclusive and comprehensive perspective - kept its role of measuring social development progresses year by year in each country.

Criteria for selecting the case studies

The four case studies summarized here are: Benin, Brazil, Germany and Philippines. For the selection, different criteria were taken into consideration:

a. equal representation of the four continents where Social Watch is present.

This criterion enables to report on the life of SW national coalitions in different contexts (Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America): the activities carried out in the South are hardly comparable with those in the North, and this publication wanted to give a sample of SW coalition life in its different geographical areas.

b. long-term membership in Social Watch.

⁴ In September 2000 the Millennium Summit adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Summit identified 8 goals to be achieved by the year 2015:

- 1) Reduction by half of the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and hunger.
- 2) Achievement of universal primary education.
- 3) Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.
- 4) Reduction of child mortality rates by 2/3.
- 5) Improvement of maternal health and increase access to reproductive health services.
- 6) Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.
- 7) Environmental sustainability.
- 8) Promotion of international partnership for development.

Being part of the network since its creation (or as in the case of Benin since 2005) is an essential condition for evaluating the national coalitions' constitution processes, evolution and functioning. Apart from this, national coalitions which have been joining the SW network for a long time have a historical background and a valuable experience which contributes to the identification of the best practices developed and consolidated during the years.

c. active membership in the network at the local and at the international level.

This last criterion is strictly linked to the capacity of national coalitions to be active both at the local and the international level. The Social Watch network operates according to a very basic and short Memorandum of Understanding that establishes mutual expectations between the network and its national groups, respecting the autonomy of each national coalition and recognising democratic horizontal decision-making. Thus, most of the activities of the network, stimulated by the SW International Secretariat, rely on the autonomous initiative of SW national coalitions, on their capacities to stimulate debates at a local level and on the interaction with the International Secretariat at the international level.⁵

The survey was carried out by professional researchers, each of them responsible for investigating one of the four case studies. A common methodology was agreed upon and used as a guideline by each researcher in order to allow comparability among the different case studies.

Dimensions for analysis

The investigation of each case study was developed according to five dimension analyses that took into consideration key aspects for the assessment of the national coalition's performance. These dimensions are relevance, efficiency and sustainability, effectiveness, strategy and impact, and coherence and complementarities. The emphasis was on processes and practices rather than in concrete achievements, since processes, within the logic of learning from

⁵ Four main structures can be identified within Social Watch: the General Assembly, the Coordinating Committee, the International Secretariat and the national coalitions. Alongside these structures, a spontaneous process of regional-level organisation is taking place in different regions. The International Secretariat, which implements the networks policies, is located at the Third World Institute in Montevideo, Uruguay.

each other's experience, become much more interesting than a mere evaluation of the the results: the analysis of a process implies understanding why and how certain activities were successful or unsuccessful.

A final note: although the findings in this study cannot be scientifically proved, they are mostly the result of an objective, even if sometimes personal, interpretation of the authors based on the information directly provided by the national coalition's members and collected through other specific sources (websites, publications, internal documents, training materials, etc..

It is also worth mentioning that this study was conceived within the implementation of the project funded by the European Commission "Monitoring Social Development: building capacities of Social Watch Coalitions"⁶ whose main objective is to enhance capacities of Social Watch national platforms in Italy, Poland and the Czech Republic. This research and the best practices stressed in this summary would like to contribute to the inspiration of a debate within these three national coalitions in order to enable them to assess their performance and boost their functioning at all levels.

⁶ The project, whose beneficiaries are the SW national coalitions in Italy, Poland and the Czech Republic is led by Ucodep (IT) in partnership with Karat (POL), EAP (CZ), Mani Tese (IT), Lunaria (IT), Fondazione Culturale Responsabilità Etica (IT), Calre.net (IT), Oxfam Novib (NE), Eurostep (BE).

SOCIAL WATCH BENIN CASE STUDY

Ann-Charlotte Sallmann

Social Watch Benin was established in 2005, at a crucial moment. In spite of the government commitments to the principles of poverty eradication, this small West African country has experienced a period of recession with no significant progress in reducing poverty since 2003. Although Benin benefits from a rich civil society, some organizations felt there was a lack in public scrutiny on how the government was doing in its fight against poverty, especially concerning the progress towards the MDGs.

The establishment of a Social Watch coalition in Benin filled the gap by focusing its actions on **establishing a true citizen scrutiny process** targeting both the national budget and the country's poverty reduction strategy.

The initiative was undertaken by the organization Sœurs Unies à l'Oeuvre (SUO), together with Centre Afrika Obota" (CAO), Women In Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF/Bénin), le Groupe de Recherche et d'Action pour la Promotion de l'Agriculture et le Développement" (GRAPAD), le Réseau d'Intégration des Femmes des ONG et Associations" (RIFONGA/Bénin) and le Réseau Glégbénu/Chantier Jeunes. Social Watch Benin was created on in March 2005 during a national workshop organised by SUO, with technical and financial advice from both Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) and UNDP.

Social Watch Benin is a **very extensive and all-inclusive network**. However, the subscription of new members, which had been done in an all-inclusive way at the start, was changed in order to look more at the competences valuable for the different thematic groups for future adhesion.

Social Watch Benin mobilises civil society around the main themes of the Benin Poverty Reduction Strategy and the MDGs, particularly on poverty reduction and the improvement of basic services, by publishing reports and carrying out public information activities. The national coalition, besides contributing to the Social Watch International Annual Report, produces a series of **Alternative Annual Reports** on the progress towards the MDGs in the country. The network's activities have generally proven to be very effective, especially with regards to its work on the national budget and on the poverty strategy paper.

The organization of **capacity building workshops** is one of the coalition's main tools and assets, enabling even small, local organizations to do their own scrutiny of complicated budget documents.

The fact that the coalition gets numerous invitations to **private consultations** with government officials, public administration functionaries and international partners can be seen as a sign of how valued their opinion is.

Many local member organizations can testify that local authorities are now more responsive to the inputs of civil society. In some cases, local authority representatives have even attended the workshops that the coalition has organised on capacity building and on the national budget and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process.

The coalition's **media strategy** has also been an important tool: in spite of its lack of resources, the Communication unit has been able to sign contracts with a variety of important media actors, in five languages, displayed through different communication channels (three documentaries on Benin's progress towards the MDGs have been produced as well).

During these three years of existence, Social Watch Benin has managed to build a network that includes many of the most important local civil society organizations. The coalition has also good relations with organizations outside the network, collaborating with them on a

number of common priorities and activities. The coalition is itself a member of a couple of other umbrella organizations, bringing together the entirety of Benin's civil society organizations.

The approach of bringing the national agenda to the local level and the local agenda to the national level, has given Social Watch Benin a unique concept and position. Paradoxically, its big success has made the coalition very attractive to, and dependent on, external donors. This is a major concern for the network and for its members since the subscriber fees are not enough to keep the coalition alive.

In the near future, the coalition hopes to spread the concept of citizens' scrutiny to other parts of francophone West Africa and to build more local offices in order to cover all corners of Benin.

Good practices learnt from the Beninese Social Watch Coalition:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear, detailed organizational structure.• Good networking on both the governmental and the local level.• Great expertise, resourceful people on a number of different areas.

SOCIAL WATCH BRAZIL CASE STUDY

Larissa Barbosa da Costa

The Social Watch network in Brazil was created as a consequence of the UN Conferences in Copenhagen and Beijing in 1995 by a group of non-governmental organizations internationally linked to other NGOs struggling to influence the positions of the Brazilian government and to affect the results of the Conferences.

Social Watch/Observatório da Cidadania (SW/OC) has become a relevant space of convergence of civil society organizations acting on different aspects of the social struggle in Brazil. By 2008, the network had 60 members, including NGOs, trade unions, women's organizations, academic institutions, environmental and youth organizations as well as several social movements such as human rights coalitions, members of black and indigenous movements, the Landless Movement (MST) and others. The network plays the role of **a Forum of debates and of a think tank** expressing the state of reflection of the CSOs in regards to the international and national political juncture, and also contributes to the setting of the country's both civil society and political agenda regarding social development.

Due to the diversity of its composition, SW/OC is able to interpret the political context, to build a collective understanding of the social issues and to explore alternatives. The elaboration of the SW/OC report is not only a technical activity but rather a political process catalyzing policy dialogues and mobilizing people for political action. The Report, besides being a system to monitor and control public policies and governments compliance with its commitments, expresses the concepts of CSOs and movements in regards to social and development issues. The SW/OC network constructs the space for civil society organizations to gather, dialogue, build and mature their own views in order to advocate and promote social change. These spaces are **essential for the strengthening of civil society and for deepening democracy** in Brazil. Dedicating time and

energy to promote dialogue is a good strategy to enhance the network and the bonds of trust between the members.

SW/OC defines itself as a network and is not a registered legal entity. This option has been chosen partly to avoid bureaucratisation, partly because it better fits members' desire for flexibility, horizontality and equality.

The network has never drafted any internal document (i.e. statute, terms of reference) laying down the structure and internal rules. The decision making processes are collective and are usually achieved through dialogue and consensus.

One special feature of SW/OC is the **coordinating/facilitating group**, which is a sort of Committee. In regards to planning and management tools, the Reference Group (RG) is the one proposing the annual work plan, which comprises a number of national seminars and workshops, the elaboration and the launch of the SW Report as well as some other related activities. Currently, the RG is composed by seven organizations (IBASE, INESC, FASE, CRIOLA, CFEMEA, CESEC and Rede DAWN), acting in different fields of social struggles and by IBASE, which plays the role of the Secretariat. Organizations and members all work on a voluntary basis.

The fact that the RG is composed by experienced organizations is certainly an asset. Their **credibility, leadership, expertise and mobilization capacity** is a key factor for SW/OC success. In this direction, counting on the right organizations to guide the national network seems to be an important aspect.

On the other hand, however, accountability links are weak with this kind of structure. In the SW/OC case, despite the RG takes responsibility for the network, accountability is referred vertically between the Secretariat and the donor and very little from the RG to the members.

Another point is that the RG, including the Secretariat, is highly involved in the network activities planning while the rest of the members have a minor participation.

Currently, IBASE has a very dominant position in the network, affecting its autonomy, but it is also the only organization to bear all the responsibilities. Evolving to a more autonomous model would probably demand the RG and members to assume new positions and responsibilities.

Funding seems to be one of the main long-term threats for the sustainability of the SW/OC network. The network is trying to cope with constraints in resources; while the situation is getting critical, alternative solutions have not been found yet.

In order to **influence the Government** and the social public policies towards the guarantee of rights, social equality and justice, SW/OC has adopted different strategies. The first aims at building a plural space of convergence and debates, gathering diverse groups of organizations. Secondly, SW/OC organises national seminars and workshops aimed at discussing the national juncture and social policies, including the commitments assumed in Copenhagen and Beijing.

As a third strategy, SW/OC elaborates a National Report, the main advocacy tool (and a visible and concrete output) produced by the network.

The fourth SW/OC strategy refers to its engagement in developing and/or participating in public campaigns aimed at fostering cultural, political and public policies transformation.

The “Dialogues against Racism”, raised in 2001 by black women’s organizations participating in the SW/OC network as an essential problem to be tackled in society in order to achieve social justice, equality and rights in Brazil, involved SW/OC members in a deep transformative learning process which reveals their capacity and potential to deal with very complex social issues as well as the involvement in vital processes of cultural change.

Another feature contributing to SW/OC success is related to its effort to **translate the international issues** into the national context proved to be essential to make SW/OC relevant in the national level.

Regarding the global SW Network, SW/OC contributes to the consolidation of the broad network itself by working in close collaboration with the international Secretariat, participating in meetings, Assemblies and in the Coordination Committee. In addition, SW/OC produces good international analysis, thematic articles and country reports regularly. Yet, SW/OC has been publishing the **SW report in Portuguese** since 1997.

The elaboration of the SW Report is a **lively and rich process**; however, once it is launched and distributed, it is difficult to get to know how the Report was exactly used to support advocacy and lobbying actions.

The fact that SW/OC operates mainly on a national level, far from the grass roots of the organization, has been pointed as a weakness. The SW National Report itself is addressed to a limited audience and there are no popularized materials. Thus, despite the Report is a very good quality output, consulted by many civil society organizations, leaders and policy makers, it could be used more intensively.

Since Brazil is a middle income country, relatively developed but presenting some of the highest levels of inequality in the world, indicators based on statistic average, such as those used by SW International Report, tend to portray Brazil always in a better situation than it really is. Since SW/OC indicators are not very 'sensitive' to inequality they are not very helpful in Brazil. On the contrary, they can even offer a counter-argument, compromising the advocacy work. This is a methodological challenge not yet solved.

SW/OC has an open channel to **dialogue** with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which is responsible for the Brazilian government positions in the international fora like UN. Besides that,

SW/OC members participate in public hearing, policy discussions at the national, state and local levels as well.

Another strategy to keep the dialogue open involves inviting government officials to participate to the National Seminars and workshops promoted by SW.

SW/OC does not perform lobbying and advocacy actions directly. Rather, it supports the member's initiatives and counts on them to **advocate for policies changes**. Two members of the RG, INESC and CFEMEA, perform lobbying and advocacy directly in the Brazilian Congress as part of their main activities.

In 2007, the focus theme chosen for the SW Report was "Making the universal right to social security a reality". Thus, when Luis Inácio Lula da Silva's administration created the National Social Security Forum to discuss proposals for changes in the system, a Parallel and Itinerant Social Security Forum was created (by some informal sectors and women's organizations not represented in the National Forum) aiming at raising the women's voice and advocating for the universalization of the system for the ones excluded from social security coverage. Women's organizations and SW/OC then organized a series of seminars and workshops on social security policies mobilizing 400 women with the objective of contributing to the debate, of building women's capacities and developing alternative proposals.

Since the SW/OC Network is already consolidated as a credible and legitimate initiative and as the SW Report has become a reliable source of information and a valid tool for advocacy, there is the risk members resist any changes. Some watchers manifested their concerns in this regards and believe it is time for SW/OC to explore new possibilities, such as to innovate the format and the language of the report, in order to reach other publics and audiences, and get connected with the local and grassroots level by building strategic alliances and partnerships.

Embracing new complex issues such as public security, violence, environment and development might lead SW/OC to **new horizons**, 'refreshing' somehow the network. Increasing

SW public profile by taking public position on delicate issues such as the affirmative policies could be an opportunity to make SW/OC more visible and to contribute to innovation in the global SW network.

Good practices learnt from the Brazilian Social Watch Coalition:

- SW/OC has built itself as a space for plural debates and its members dedicate time and energy to promote long term rich dialogues and get engaged in them.
- The diversity of members helps to improve SW/OC's power of mobilization and capacity to build bridges between different segments of the social struggles in Brazil.
- The process of the Report elaboration is not only a technical activity but rather a political process that engages SW/OC members in hot political debates as well as maintaining open spaces for a dialogue with invited government representatives.
- The development of a relevant national agenda contributes to maintaining the network lively and active.
- SW/OC frequently organizes national seminars and workshops, contributing to members capacity building and to set new political agendas.
- SW/OC promotes public campaigns, such as the Dialogues against Racism, in order to create a better environment for cultural and social change to happen.
- The network has developed an impressive ability to manage conflict.
- SW/OC contributes regularly to the International SW Report and elaborates a National Report, very relevant for the Brazilian social actors.
- SW/OC relations with the academia are very positive and helpful. Having academics as SW/OC members has contributed to the network research and to the critical reflection capacities. Besides this, several SW/OC members also produce high quality research materials.

- SW/OC has very good relationships with the media.
- SW/OC does not directly carry advocacy and lobbying actions but rather supports and counts on the members' activities, thus it does not duplicate or compete with the members' efforts.
- SW/OC is part of many networks in Brazil and this strategy improves its mobilization capacity.
- SW/OC works in close collaboration with the International Secretariat and contributes to the Global network by participating actively in meetings, General Assemblies and in Coordinating Committee (CC).

SOCIAL WATCH GERMANY CASE STUDY

Valerio Cutolo and Tommaso Rondinella

Social Watch Germany was initially founded under the name “German NGO Forum for the World Summit for Social Development” in January 1994. After the Copenhagen Summit in 1995, the Forum decided to continue its activities and to monitor the implementation of the Copenhagen commitments by the German Government. The Forum changed its name to “Social Watch Germany” in 2002 in order to demonstrate its close relationship with the international Social Watch network.

The network has showed the ability to keep a **wide group of organizations** ranging from trade unions, to welfare organizations, to development NGOs together for over 10 years. Such a wide and heterogeneous coalition has been able to contribute annually to the international Social Watch report and to publish a **national report in German** continuously since 2001. The actual objective the network intended to achieve has always been the publication of the report, and that minimum has been reached. The constant presence and activity of the German coalition itself gave strength to the Social Watch network at the international level.

The main weaknesses are identified in its inability in doing anything more besides the publication of the national report as well as not reaching the “policy power” (parliamentarians, ministries, etc.) in a systematic manner so as to implement an effective lobbying and advocacy activity. Also, the coalition has never adopted particular modalities or strategies to involve new members.

Probably because of its large size, the coalition develops very few parallel activities to the report and its launching. When workshops have been carried out to discuss the themes of the report more thoroughly, they are promoted by some coalition members, in particular Global Policy Forum and Terre des hommes.

The German Coalition has a **minimally formalized structure**; It doesn't have any legal statute, in order to keep it as open as possible to other groups and organizations interested in joining in. It doesn't even have any formal internal document, but only a very general memorandum describing the origins of the German SW coalition and the main activities. To become a member it is sufficient to send a letter or an e-mail declaring the organization's interest in Social Watch activities (which are totally focused on the SW Report) and promotion.

The members gather for the national coalition meeting that takes place twice a year and is open to all participating groups. During the meeting the participants elect the Coordinating Committee members (the committee that discusses everyday work of the German Social Watch) as well as the network's spokesperson.

Methodological decisions have to be taken by all members in the national coordination meeting. Other decisions, particularly related to the Social Watch Report are taken by consensus of the Coordinating Committee.

Once the coordinating committee receives the Secretariat's guidelines for the report, it starts a process of discussion, mainly of the substantive themes of the national report and of the German contribution to the international report.

The annual budget is largely related to the editing, printing and launching of the report, and it is around €25,000, funded through voluntary contributions by the individual members. Thus, publishers of the report are not all the members of SW Germany but only those who contribute (financially or in kind), usually around 10 organizations.

Apart from the contribution to the SW International Report, **SW Germany produces a national report** containing an international section, a section on development policies and another section on the social situation in Germany.

The definition of the overall issue of SW Germany is also strongly limited by the attempt to avoid overlapping with the themes already covered by member organizations. The presence of unions and social welfare organizations limits the **advocacy focus** of SW Germany, excluding themes such as poverty, labour, pension reform or health system, while development NGOs would keep the issue of development assistance and the German aid budget for themselves.

This doesn't mean that the German Social Watch Coalition is not allowed to speak about those issues and to cover them in the annual reports; it means that they cannot be the Coalition's reference theme.

Finally, in order to **enhance internal capacities**, a workshop on poverty indicators has been organized by member NGOs. The workshop's theme was the measure of poverty and alternative poverty indicators. The workshop hosted various international speakers, including Roberto Bissio and Karina Baththyány from the SW Secretariat in Montevideo and professor Pogge from Columbia University. The workshop was organized by Global Policy Forum and Terre des hommes, both active members of SW Germany, and was attended by 30 people.

Regarding the BCI and GEI calculation at the country level, the coalition just maintains the international indicators without calculating them for lower territorial levels, for example the

German Laender. The coalition doesn't use BCI actively in its work while GEI is distributed at meetings and conferences.

The problem with GEI is a lack of statistics in Germany since the country lacks disaggregated figures for male and female pupils in elementary school, so that dimension of the GEI simply could not be calculated (this has been a problem for the UNESCO too, but now UNESCO has solved it). With regard to the BCI, the coalition discussed the building of an alternative and more useful index; moreover there was a proposal to elaborate a kind of solidarity index, like the Commitment for Development Index, by Social Watch, but it is something that has to be done at the international level and not only in Germany. A more adequate index for all those countries that are reaching top positions in the BCI might be useful for many coalitions, not only the German one.

The **outreach and the public impact** of the coalition remain weak as SW appears in the media just once a year in correspondence to the launching.

In order to represent a tool that is widely used, the report should find its own thematic niche, and Social Watch Germany had to define its own specific identity more clearly. This appears very difficult for two main reasons: the first is the annual changing theme of the international report, the second is the twofold focus on domestic welfare issues as well as on development cooperation policies. The lack of a clear focus and a precisely defined target group represents a major weakness in front of possible interlocutors, starting from members of Parliament and Government. Yet they are just one of the target groups, but not the only one; the SW report is mainly distributed to NGOs, journalists, students and academics.

As the German network was established in 1994, this is, before Social Watch was founded, the original intention to become member of the German network was not linked to the

international network. Later some members joined the German coalition because of its international dimension; for them it was more attractive to be part of an international network and to influence decisions at international level.

With regard to the relationship with other national Social Watch coalitions, in 2004 SW Germany hosted **the first European Social Watch meeting in Berlin**. However, due to a lack of capability and funding there has not been a follow up meeting in the years after.

There is a lot of thematic and institutional overlapping of the SW coalition and its members with other networks and platforms in Germany. But there is no formal relationship between Social Watch and these other networks. Up to now the relationship to other networks – like VENRO, the German network of development NGOs – is exclusively through individual Social Watch members.

Good practices learnt from the German Social Watch Coalition:

- Ability to maintain a large network always open to new members, even if limiting the space for the themes treated.
- Ensuring the continuous production of a national report.
- Light but effective structure. The presence of a Coordinating committee guarantees a constant discussion and agreement on everyday work without questioning all member organizations.
- Development of tools to be used together with the report (even if occasionally) in order to reach the media more effectively.
- Carrying out of an impact assessment survey to better understand the target group the report is actually reaching.

SOCIAL WATCH PHILIPPINES CASE STUDY

Caterina Marchioro

Social Watch Philippines (SWP) can certainly be considered a successful national Social Watch experience. It was established in 1997, as part of Social Watch International (SWI), in order to monitor and advocate the progress of the government commitments to the social development goals as provided for in the Copenhagen Summit in 1995. Guided by strong, highly professional and very dedicated personalities, SWP has been able to actuate its mandate in an efficient manner, becoming a recognised leader in the monitoring and advocacy on the MDGs at the local, national, regional and international levels.

SWP strength derives from being a **large network of advocates** in which different matters regarding poverty and social development are represented. The in-depth, unless still quite informal, relationship among coalition's members shows an excellent opportunity for a constant capabilities development, not only through trainings, but also through comparison of different experiences and practices among clusters.

With its small and cohesive group of convenors, representing the decision making body of the coalition, SWP decides in an efficient way and creates **effective strategies**. Compatibly with its limited human and financial resources, SWP makes a great effort in organizing consultations and meetings among its members at national and local levels, involving them in the definition of the framework, process and strategies for their common activities.

SWP's structure broadly follows the SW International structure, even if in a smaller scale. There is a Secretariat with a coordinator and two persons as contractual staff. There are local coordinators for the three main islands of the Philippines: Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

Because of the **growing amount of activities carried out** by SWP and the increasing number of members becoming part of the network, at the Secretariat level more resources and personnel would be desirable, for the Secretariat itself to be able to give a greater attention and support to the local clusters.

At present, SWP is in the process of exploring the possibility of institutionalizing the Philippine Social Watch network as an entity: the convenors have recognized the value of a legal statute mainly to apply directly for new fundings. In the formalization process, SWP may consider to accept other members of the coalition in the decision making body. The SWP Secretariat takes care of coordinating the network activity, as guided by the convenors.

There is at least one national consultation every year and regional consultations (Islands of Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao) take place once each second year.

The relationship among the members of the coalition has been harmonious so far: no conflict has been experienced. SWP consults its members on the framework, the process and the strategies for their common advocacy activities: this is the main reason why these good relations exist.

SWP receives its funds by International Organizations: Oxfam Novib funded SWP's activity until June 2008; in June 2007 SWP was able to get funding from UNDP; also Christian Aid and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung offered a partnership with SWP. For the year 2008, SWP has approached other international organizations for possible support. SWP does not receive funds directly from the network's members even though they financially support its initiatives.

SWP's **strong commitment in research** has generated a series of high credible data and analysis regarding development, governance, fiscal policies, poverty, etc. SWP's publications are very suitable for advocacy: using data based on empirical evidence and a language that is accessible and understandable by all, they provide a human face to the MDGs.

Since 1996, SWP annually contributes to the Global Social Watch Report with a Philippine Country Report. Once Social Watch International has provided the theme and the guidelines of the annual report, the SWP convenors meet and assign to a writer the task of preparing a draft for the Philippine report, which will be then submitted for initial comments to the convenors. After this revision, a second draft is distributed among the members. A third draft might be prepared as well, gathering further comments, and is submitted to SW International for the editing.

Moreover, **SWP produced its own National Report**: in 2001 (on the status of social development), in 2003 (on the monitoring of social development), in 2005 (on the status of the MDGs) and in 2007 (on midterm assessments of the MDGs). SWP uses the Global and the National Reports in its engagement with the national and local governments and with other international agencies, as well as in information campaigns.

In the Philippines, **legislators and their staff, academics, researchers, NGOs and students** are the most interested in the analysis found in SW reports.

The BCI (which in the Philippines is still also referred to as the QLI) is used quite extensively by SWP.⁷ BCI/QLI serves as an alternative measure for the level of poverty and summarizes the overall gains in human development. This index can be a term of comparison for poverty situation which the Philippine government claims to be enhanced, on the basis of the official poverty measure. Actually, BCI/QLI index consistently points to a lack of improvement in poverty level. The measure is also very effective in comparing situation in regions and provinces across the country; it effectively speaks about disparity and problems related to the exclusion.

The Gender Equity Index (GEI) is used in monitoring achievements in gender parity, according to the MDG 3 (Promote gender equality and empower women). GEI is especially useful because of a lack of effective measure of MDG 3 in the country.

Capacity building of the coalitions' members in monitoring, research, data gathering, analysis, lobby and advocacy is considered a key issue. Big efforts are made to organize at least once a years workshops, seminars and trainings addressed to NGOs, academics, legislative, national government agencies, local government officials and media.

SWP has created a good relationship with mass **media** which

⁷ To this respect, it is worth mentioning that Action for Economic Reform, one of the convenors of SWP, developed the Quality of Life Index (QLI), the basis of the BCI that SWI adopted in 2004.

have been attracted by the relevant issues raised by the network and the brave statements from high credible personalities supported by eye opening analyses based on extensive research.

In its **lobby and advocacy activities** at the national level SWP has proved to be very effective as the **Alternative Budget Initiative (ABI)** – worldwide recognized as one of the best practices in budget advocacy – shows. The partnership between NGOs and local government and the involvement of academics can be considered key elements in its success: through the analysis of the budget proposed by the Executive and the formulation of an alternative budget for MDGs related expenditures, SWP and other civil society organizations partnering with legislators achieved increases in the national budget for education, health, agriculture and environment.

Through the ABI, civil society groups and their partner legislators were able to achieve P5.3 billion increases in 2007 national budget for basic and tertiary education as well as P6.3 billion increases in 2008 national budget for basic education, higher education, health, agriculture and environment.

It is noteworthy to highlight the **lessons learned by SWP** in the ABI:

- the need to engage and partner with key players in the budget process (i.e.: legislators and executive);
- the need for NGOs and CSOs with different advocacies to get together;
- the need to be familiar with the budget process of the Country;
- the need to utilize the alternative budget as an effective tool for advocacy;
- the need to strengthen CSO's research and data gathering capabilities and to enhance the packaging of their advocacies.
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ABI represents a breakthrough in Philippine history, since the media have considered its campaign as an exceptional occasion for exposing to the public credible information on how the national budget is crafted and which are the implications on the population.

At the local level SWP with the **MDG localization and monitoring programme** succeeded in promoting with the local government units an evidence-based planning and budgeting using MDGs as frame.

At the regional level, SWP as former Secretariat of Social Watch Asia, promoted anti-poverty and social development advocacies, including on the MDGs', through the organization of meetings and venues that represent opportunities to assess the status of regional social development and to share experiences and knowledge among different Countries.

SWP actively participates in the SWI general Assembly and is member of the Coordinating Committee. The national coalition largely promotes and utilizes the SWI reports, the BCI and the GEI in its lobby, advocacy and capacity building activities.

SWP is also very active in the international arena. It is often invited to participate to global decision making forums on social development where it brings recommendations coming from its local, national and regional initiatives and consultations.

Good practices learnt from the Philippine Social Watch Coalition:

- Working as a network of NGOs, CSOs and individuals with advocacy on different subjects (education, health, environment, agriculture, human rights, gender, etc).

- Frequent consultations/meetings among the members of the network. These venues offer the possibility to share experience, gather inputs in terms of strategies, strengthen good relationship and foster cooperation.
- Involvement of personalities from the academic and political circuits. It helps giving to the network high impact and visibility.
- Regular communications with the International Secretariat and the Coordinating Committee.
- Active approach to and negotiation with new partners in order to find possible financial support for the network's activities.
- Strong commitment in research on poverty and social development matters that generates high credible data and analysis.
- Use of an accessible and understandable language in publications.
- Regular contribution to the Global SW Report with a Country Report and production of a proper National Report and other publications.
- Extensive use of the Reports, the BCI and the GEI in the information campaigns, workshops, seminars, etc.
- Frequent organization of specific seminars, trainings, workshops for improving the competencies of national coalition members in monitoring, analyzing and making researches, in the lobby and advocacy activities.
- Engagement and partnership with key players in the political arena
- Good relationship with media.
- Integration between local, national, regional and international activities. Linking the local with the global gives more effectiveness to the lobby and the advocacy carried out at the different levels.

CONCLUSION

The coalition life mostly depends on the specific country context in which it operates and on the personal high commitment of the national members to make the coalition a lively actor at the local level; however, it is worth trying to identify key factors that made the experiences analysed in this paper successful cases. This could represent a useful exercise for stimulating other SW national coalitions to emulate the best practices, even if adapting them to their own national contexts, as well as reflecting on their own experience by facilitating an organizational learning process crucial for any network aiming at improving its performance.

As already mentioned, the following findings do not represent any scientific evaluation of the performance of the four SW national coalitions analysed, but rather point out basic suggestions for facilitating “know-how transfer” and “capacity building” among the national groups of the SW network.

As far as the “*relevance*” **dimension analysis** is concerned, in all the four case studies the importance of the constituency process can be stressed. The historical moment when the national platform was created is a critical one in all the four case studies: time of political changes, need of influencing the global Agenda towards greater development targets and the very quick growth of the role of CSOs. The creation of each national platform can be considered as a bottom up process since CSOs felt the need of joining the SW worldwide network and working at the national level by locally contributing at achieving global development goals. Probably Germany can be considered an exception since it comes from a former German NGO Forum which was constituted in preparation of the World Summit for Social Development and from the very beginning of SW

creation in 1995 decided to carry on with its tasks by joining this international network. Without decrying the conscious choice made by the German coalition before joining Social Watch, probably in terms of membership commitment the latter is much higher when the decision to join the network is linked to the need of giving birth to a specific national group in the country. Indeed it requires so many more efforts and energy and probably it implies a stronger motivation which ensures better support during future work.

Diversity of membership can be both a strong point and a weakness. Looking at the Brazilian case the much varied membership composition has allowed to make the coalition a real “space for plural debates, for building new perspectives, knowledge and discourses on social and development issues”. The plurality of actors participating is seen as a richness, rather than a potential condition of conflict, also in the Philippine experience. On the contrary, for the German coalition, the diversity of composition, although considered an important aspect to be preserved, currently hampers a good functioning of the coalition beyond the yearly publication of the Social Watch report, because of the difficulty to find common strategic themes between development NGOs and welfare organizations. Probably this difference in managing the diversity of membership composition needs to be understood considering the country context; it is likely that in Brazil and the Philippines there are many more common working areas among NGOs, trade unions and welfare organizations than currently in Germany.

Anyway, from all the four case studies the following positive aspects seem to emerge:

- The attitude of the national platform to be inclusive and open to a plurality of organizations that bring into the network their different competence and expertise in the field of development. This makes Social Watch a special opportunity for discussion where the analysis of an issue is hardly confined to a

single perspective: the plurality of interests included in the network always allows taking a multi-sector perspective of any theme.

- The capacity to bridge the local with the global issues ensures a double advantage: at local level by basing the advocacy and awareness building activities on worldwide reliable data and analysis; at the international level by making the perspective of the local communities known thus giving them the exceptional chance of getting their voice heard by the international community. Both these aspects, often proved by a constant membership increase, have widely contributed in giving great relevance to SW national coalitions in their own countries.

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In addition, it clearly emerges, from the Beninese, Brazilian and Philippine case studies, that over the years all these coalitions have reached high levels of legitimacy and credibility, this demonstrated by the attention given to their actions by media and governments. Above all the Philippine coalition is externally perceived as an important “source of information on human development matters”. The accuracy of its analysis and the reliability of its data earned strong worldwide appreciations.

Regarding the second **dimension** – “*efficiency and sustainability*” – it is quite interesting to compare how each national coalition settled its own functioning through different levels of formalization of its structure.

Actually, because of the complete autonomy given by the Social Watch network to the national groups so as to determine their own organizational structure and to raise funds for their activities, each coalition is concretely responsible for its good functioning in the country and the solutions found by each of them can be very different.

The analysis of these four cases is a proof of it. There are different levels of formalization: Benin is the example of a very structured coalition with a registered legal statute and several fundamental texts which lay down internal rules. Brazil opted out of getting a registered legal statute because they preferred informal arrangements which currently guarantee flexibility, horizontality and equality in the functioning of the network at the national level. The Philippine coalition is currently taking into consideration the possibility of institutionalizing the national coalition by getting a registered legal statute; this is going to be evaluated not because of a need to formalize the internal functioning of the coalition but rather because it could facilitate the process of applying for funding support. Thus, the motivation behind this choice, which is still under discussion, is more linked to making a use out of it rather than to define new internal rules improving the functioning of the national platform.

The German coalition chose a minimalist structure: a very low level of formalization is ensured, based on a general memorandum describing the origin of the SW German Coalition and its many activities.

In all the case studies, no matter if there is a formalized structure or not, there is always one or few organizations in charge of ensuring the coordination of the network both at a strategic level (i.e. Coordinating Committee) as well as at an operational level (i.e. Secretariat). This is for sure a key success factor in managing a national platform: indeed being a network involving several organization members, it is essential, although in informal and loose structures, to identify few organizations responsible for the stimulation and coordination of the network activities.

In terms of activity planning, drafting an annual work plan might be deemed an excellent practice; the Beninese, Brazilian and Philippine coalitions work on a wide range of activities at the national level and usually draft one. Also, an annual action plan seems to be a tool in helping the coalition ensure a good performance in implementing different activities. They all refer to the International Social Watch Strategic Framework (adopted at the General Assembly every three years) and consistent to the principle of autonomy which strongly characterises the network, the plan focuses on the specific activities that the national platform intends to promote locally. The effort of both the Beninese and Philippine coalitions to draft a multi-year plan is noteworthy since it shows their stronger commitment and intention to set up a medium term strategy.

As to **sustainability**, all the four coalitions experience difficulty in fundraising; this is a worrying aspect which affects the capacity of the network's long term planning. Regarding this aspect it is interesting to compare the different modalities of the members' direct involvement. In Benin members of the coalition are required to contribute to the network with a specific yearly membership fee, while in the other three coalitions there is no such formalization, however members are expected to support the network's activities as best they can. Hardly any optimum practices can be identified on this subject since much depends on the country context; however, there are a few points in the Benin case that deserve highlighting. Indeed, notwithstanding the difficulty in collecting membership fees, the idea of foreseeing them gives a greater sense of responsibility and ownership among the coalition members. In addition, the SW coalition in Benin, probably facilitated by the relevance and uniqueness of its work promoted by local CSOs at the country level, has been able to get financial support from several international organizations, stirring up interest and consolidating the partnership with some of them over the years (i.e. UNDP, Embassy of the Netherlands).

Regarding the “*effectiveness*” **dimension**, all four national platforms contribute with a yearly country report to the annual Social Watch International Report, but almost all of them carry out many other additional activities.

Benin is a very good example of national coalition having adapted the mission of Social Watch to the country context: its choice to focus mainly on poverty reduction strategy and on the progress towards MDGs, made the “citizens’ scrutiny of public action” (the so-called main activity of the national coalition) extremely relevant and very much appreciated in the country. Indeed the coalition was able, thanks to a wide involvement of local communities, to give its own contribution to the drafting of the PRSP II by gathering data and suggestions from citizens at the municipal levels. As to the monitoring of the MDGs, the coalition is annually committed to produce an Alternative Report on the progress of the Millennium Targets. This monitoring is carried out by compiling the analysis made by six thematic groups, each of which competent in specific development issues. This work methodology proves a very good practice, since it guarantees an overall and comprehensive analysis based on more specific and ad hoc policy scrutiny made by the competent thematic group.

Similarly, the Philippines selected priority issues in research activities. This allows the coalition to deepen its competence on themes relative to financing for development, poverty, MDGs, disparity and equity issues and to produce specific publications in addition to the national Social Watch Report published on a biannual basis since 2001. Another feature that deserves mentioning is the methodology adopted in researching by the Philippine coalition: the current Basic Capabilities Index, widely used from Social Watch network at global level, come from the Philippine experience. In addition, in carrying out research, the coalition combines official data with empirical ones often supported by case studies which

give a human slant to the debate. Such a methodology, together with the use of a language which is also accessible to and comprehensible by ordinary citizens, makes SW Philippine publications very suitable for advocacy.

Both coalitions in the Philippines and Benin are profoundly noteworthy for their effort in training civil society organizations. This can be surely deemed as a very successful experience: upgrading competence of NGOs, journalists, local communities and local public officers is a key factor for getting increasing awareness on social development issues. Training people means enabling citizens to really demand for accountable Governments and to boost an active citizenship.

The Brazilian and German coalitions are among the first coalitions that, besides contributing to the Social Watch International Report with the country report, have been producing a yearly national report of their own since 1997. Both experiences show the importance of summarizing main findings from the International Report and focusing the national one mainly on country issues, thus stimulating public national debate through it.

As mentioned in the analysis of the German coalition, creating a more adequate index for all those countries that are reaching top positions in the BCI will be a challenge for the Social Watch network in the coming years, especially for the most developed countries. Brazil - a middle income country characterized by high levels of inequality - also faces a problem with the BCI and calls for the need to make the SW indicator more sensitive to inequality, in order to build a more accurate figure of the national realities.

The Brazilian experience in drafting the national Social Watch Report is extremely interesting: indeed it is a “real process of social learning (...) not a technical activity but rather an inherent political process as it engages SW

members in hot political debates”. It is to be hoped that this same practice of mutual learning can be experienced by all the other SW coalitions being this activity in itself a very significant outcome, probably even more noteworthy than the Report in itself.

The **fourth dimension** – “*strategy and impact*” – focuses more on the external exposure of the national platform by showing good examples of positive interaction between Social Watch and local/national Governments.

Over the years the Brazilian coalition understood the importance of Social Watch in helping Brazilian civil society organizations, which consider it as a “control and monitoring system to create impact on the public policies”. This is a successful approach identified by the Brazilian coalition: it means that SW doesn’t directly work on advocacy and lobbying but enhances the capability of its members to do so. In this way the coalition doesn’t duplicate the work done by Brazilian social actors but offers them space of dialogue and exchange. This is very helpful to understand any issue from different perspectives (the positive experience of dialogues about racism is one evident proof). Moreover, the Brazilian platform often succeeded in inviting government officials to attend national seminars and workshops: this is a good practice for always keeping a dialogue open with decision-makers and getting closer relationships in a more “informal” way as effective as “formal” advocacy or lobbying actions.

The SW coalition in Benin, consistent with its priority issues, continues working on two very relevant initiatives, both of which received great acknowledgments from the Government: the first concerning state budget analysis and its compliance to the MDGs, the second relating to the second generation draft of the PRSP II. There are two elements that deserve particular attention and which could be considered key factors in allowing the success of both these

initiatives. First, the Beninese coalition organization: its task-sharing among the member organizations, its attention to deepen each issue according to the competence of each organization (by dividing the work in six thematic groups) and the creation of a Budget Analysis Unit ensuring a thorough analysis that is very much appreciated externally. Indeed the coalition had the chance to be invited by the Government for consultations prior to the adoption of the annual budget. Secondly, the coalition understood the importance of working at the local level to raise awareness among locally active CSOs and local public officers. Working at these micro-levels gave the coalition the possibility to widely involve citizens in the process of defining their needs and priorities for drafting the second PRSP. This is, of course, a very remarkable action which supported the Beninese Government with a proper citizens' perspective on their own poverty. Without the extensive work at the local level and involvement of nationwide local communities the "Civil Society's Contributions to the elaboration of the PRSP II in Benin" would not have probably been so influential as it actually was.

Looking at the Philippine coalition there are many aspects that make their experience a successful case. The Alternative Budget Initiative is probably one of the best worldwide practices in budget advocacy. The tangible results achieved in terms of additional funds earmarked for basic services prove the effectiveness of this action. Behind the achievement of those important results there is a successful work modality that other national coalitions should take into account when implementing similar actions. It is noteworthy the way the budget analysis is carried out, involving different interests and balancing them when defining the alternative budget proposal. The advocacy work then has two phases: firstly advocating on single issues according to the competence of each organization and secondly coordinating the advocacy action in a unique alternative budget proposal. This implies discussions and exchanges among the CSOs involved in the action and as well as among them and the different

governmental sectors involved in some component of the State Budget. Involving key players at the political level is surely a critical step for succeeding in this kind of actions. In addition the involvement of media in this initiative deserves to be highlighted. By understanding the importance of having media as allies in the NGOs advocacy work, the Philippine coalition tried to stir up interest among the media also through the organization of thematic seminars properly addressed to them. This action is particularly stimulating for them since it “arms the media with credible data that shows the relevance of the national budget process to the people’s daily lives”.

Besides the Alternative Budget Initiative, the Philippine coalition promotes MDGs localization and monitoring. The importance of facilitating collaboration at the local level between local government and NGOs to enhance development planning and finance strategies can be pointed out as a similarity to the action undertaken by the Benin coalition. In the Philippine experience the crucial role of academics representing “natural advocates and potential engineers of ground level experiments on MDG localization through their technical capabilities” deserves to be highlighted as well.

One last thing about the Philippine coalition is the capability of contributing to the debate on Financing for Development at the national, regional and international level, thanks to the specific competence of some of its members. This work has provided the Philippine Government with Philippine CSOs perspective and analysis on the issues discussed during official international Summits and their preparatory meetings.

A quite interesting initiative is the impact assessment survey carried out by the German Coalition to better investigate the main target groups of the

national report. Despite the survey did not fully achieve the objective to clarify which is the current rang

e of groups reached by the German SW report, the intention of the national platform to better identify its main readers in order to improve its advocacy work accordingly is noteworthy.

In the **last dimension** – “*coherence and complementarities*” – it is demonstrated how belonging to the international network has supported the national coalition at the country level in terms of reputation and reliability of the analysis carried out.

The international dimension of the network is for sure one of its strengths, even though probably each platform could make better use of and enhance the relationship with the other national coalitions.

As far as the regional dimension is concerned, it is quite well developed in the Asian region where the Philippine coalition has been the focal point for some years. During its mandate SWP organised Asia-wide consultations that have represented important venues for updating the status of social development both at country and regional level, and for sharing and learning from other national coalitions’ experience. It is interesting to observe how the current experience of the Beninese coalition which, having met difficulty (mainly for language constraints) in interacting with the other SW coalitions, is transforming this difficulty into a challenge by promoting a regional debate among CSOs in the Francophone area of West Africa.

All the coalitions have developed good relationships with other civil society networks at the country level. What is highlighted in the Philippine experience is interesting: the uniqueness of Social Watch is to cover a broad range

of social development issues, thus other networks with advocacy on specific issues appreciate participating in national consultations promoted by Social Watch considering it a critical moment for interaction with other groups so as to compare their experience in a wider context. The Brazilian SW coalition also attracts other specialized networks to participate in its debates and activities and has contributed even to the creation of new ones, for instance, the Dialogues against Racism network.

In conclusion, this work deserves attention for its intention of reflecting on tangible experiences of SW national platforms and of suggesting to other coalitions a few elements of analysis to initiate their own assessment process. It is a starting point for stimulating an in-depth internal debate that could motivate members to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

If a “network energy index” was built in order to measure its power, probably it should be composed of three elements: capability to observe and reflect on other experiences as well as its own, capability to be creative and capability to attract people (not only in terms of new members but mainly in terms of promoting dialogue with other social actors). As far as all these three components are alive in a network, it will always be able to propose innovative solutions and to adapt to new challenges.

This work’s objective is to support the aptitude of observing and reflecting: now it is up to Social Watch coalitions around the world to make a good use of it and to provide evidence, through their own experiences, of the worldwide power of such a network.