Over 100 civil society delegates together with representatives from the Peruvian Ministry of Environment, the Brazilian Foreign Affairs Ministry and Itaipu Binacional – dubbed the world’s largest generator of clean energy – met in Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil on 1-2 August to strategize around the effective participation of civil society in the lead up to the Lima Climate Change Conference (COP 20) to be held in Lima, Peru from 1-12 December 2014. Due to the role that the World Centre for Sustainable Development (RIO+Centre) has been playing in opening spaces for civil society
dialogue with governments, particularly around intergovernmental processes such as Post 2015 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), we were invited to join and give our perspective.

When thinking about influencing a huge and difficult process like the COP negotiations, being able to define what success looks like – in other words what “organized” civil society would be happy with on December 13th once the Lima COP concludes – is a fundamental first step. This is part of the analysis and strategizing that is needed in order to have effective participation and influence. While this may seem obvious, in practical terms it is not so easily achieved, particularly when agendas are unclear and at times even discordant. Since it is unlikely that any single action or channel will materialize into the influence that people want, having a multipronged approach that uses both formal and informal channels of influence is fundamental in order to achieve desired results.

**The Importance of a Good Analysis**

The end of the 20th century and the dawn of the 21st century have been marked by increasing influence among non-state actors, including civil society, social movements and NGOs. From the economic crisis to the fuel and food crisis, from the mass mobilizations on the streets of Cairo in 2011 to the Occupy Wall Street movement around the 1%, many civil society groups have been leaping from one crisis to the other, organizing for or against certain agendas and hoping to influence the state of affairs. However, with climate change there is the potential to act before the most crippling effects are felt rather than to react, there is a real opportunity to lead rather than to follow.

Having a clear analysis of how climate change is linked to the overarching objectives of achieving human development and dignity, eradicating poverty and promoting social justice for all is helpful in shaping a clear narrative on sustainable development. This narrative can then be used in a consistent, massive and repetitive way, which is good for campaigning. This also helps to see COP as a wonderful opportunity to address more deep rooted issues related to how we define development and growth. As the Brazilian Ambassador on Environment, Climate, Energy and Technology, José Antonio Marcondes, stated at the meeting in Iguacu, “Whoever thinks that this COP meeting is simply about reducing emissions they are profoundly mistaken. This is about questioning the very foundations of a development model that has fuelled economic growth as we know it
including the dynamics between rich, poor and emerging countries”.

Creating a narrative that is rooted in a strong analysis makes the process of building concrete campaigning proposals and “asks” - both in policy and practice – easier. This common narrative, when used to strike alliances can provide the needed foundation for organized civil society to be able to capitalize on its collective (bargaining) power. It can provide the glue that unites efforts beyond petty agendas that do more to disperse efforts rather than to advance needed advocacy and political pressure for change. Also critical is to have in place a nuanced understanding of what proposals are emerging around the world to address the issues at hand. In this case, climate change has opened the tracks for the green growth locomotive to roll in with a paradigm that does little to alter the structural causes of poverty, inequality and the vulnerability of the poor to climate fluctuations. Ultimately it’s not only about pointing fingers and knowing what (we) are against and what (we) do not want but more about thinking in clear terms about what we do want and how we plan to get there.

Power analysis

Different from substantive/content analysis, but just as important, is mapping out where power lies and when and how it is exercised. This knowledge should be used to identify opportunities and channels of influence, timing the intervention and targeting them correctly. Usually the aim is to influence people with power since they are the decision makers or at a minimum they have a much greater chance to influence decision makers and therefore outcomes. This point cannot be understated and has been a key component of successful campaigns.

Timing Matters Too

While much effort is directed towards planning events and actions to take place in tandem with international negotiations, when strategizing COP it helps to think in terms of before, during and after. The before is the time to do the analysis, identify the powerbrokers and the channels to influence. The during usually comes in the form of parallel events, forums, debates, sit-ins, negotiations among others. What I think is often neglected and possibly one of the most important parts is the continued activism that happens after government negotiations and commitments are made in the international sphere. This is the time to monitor implementation of commitments, both in terms of policies and budgets. It is a time to help governments ensure that their actions are reaching the
desired objectives by providing shadow input from the citizen and grassroots perspective. Civil society groups and networks can play the important watchdog role helping to crack the accountability nut which is often the main stumbling block to national implementation. If civil society groups are serious about impact beyond the exciting flare of jumping from one international conference to another, thinking critically about follow up action at the national and subnational level is paramount.

**Levels of Action (and how they shape the actions themselves)**

Somewhat linked to the above point on planning action after the international conference/negotiation has concluded is the notion of where action and attempts of influence take place, i.e. at the local, sub-national, national, regional and/or global levels. Since often the arguments around climate change refer to the disproportionate distribution of negative impacts on the poor or costs on the wealthy, it is important to assess to what extent does organized civil society - and the effective participation they seek - represent affected communities or help these communities to represent themselves. While the local level is often closest to the people feeling the most immediate impacts of climate change, strategizing around national level influence is fundamental in the lead up to (i.e. the before) and following international negotiations. This is where civil society can shape the positions of national negotiators before they represent the country abroad and it is also where they can hold them – and government generally – to account when they return. Creating the right linkages from the local and national to the regional and global and rooting this in analysis and messages can help shift the terms of the debate in the direction advocated by effective civil society groups. Given the shift in global power dynamics with less singular power held by nations in the north and increasingly dispersed among emerging countries of the south, regional linkages amongst organized civil society strategies could potentially translate into power shift towards civil society.

**Recognizing your limits and joining with others**

But, no matter how good your analysis and strategy are, it’s always important to be cognizant of your limits and strike alliances and leverage existing work where possible. Some of the most successful campaigns were the result of a combination of all the above factors as well as broad based alliances between a range of groups from media to farmers, indigenous groups to think tanks and faith based organizations, the United Nations, governments and even individuals at the local, national, regional and global
level.

At just about any level and at any time there are formal and informal channels to contribute and influence, there are political and diplomatic avenues as well as direct and indirect means. None of these are mutually exclusive and can all be part of an effective strategy for civil society participation in COP Lima, the lead up to Paris as well as beyond to other international negotiations. While negotiations often boil down to political tradeoffs between governments, knowing what you want your country to represent and seeking the right channels to shape their position nationally and globally in the before, during and after will certainly help translate conference promises into tangible results for people on the ground.

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The World Centre for Sustainable Development (RIO+ Centre)

One of the most important legacies of the Conference was the launching, during the High-Level Segment of the Conference, of the “World Centre for Sustainable Development - RIO+”. Established on June 24th, 2013, the RIO+ Centre works to reaffirm and make actionable the inextricable link between social, economic and environmental policies for the achievement of sustainable development and human well-being.