Global Public-Private Partnerships – Privatization of Multilateralism?

Joint workshop at the World Social Forum 2007 in Nairobi
23 January 2007, 17:30-20:00

In recent years, a new form of multilateral cooperation has gained increasing importance. A concept of global governance which emphasizes networks between state and private actors steadily appears to be gaining weight in international political discourse. In this new paradigm of international cooperation, “global partnerships”, “multistakeholder initiatives” and “global public policy networks” are perceived as the future of international cooperation.

The root causes of this tendency are manifold and include both general dissatisfaction on the part of governments, international organizations and NGOs with the groaning pace of the cumbersome global negotiation process, and the lack of will and capacity on the part of many governments to engage in binding financial commitments to achieve global agreements, or to translate such existing commitments into practice. “Partnerships” with business and civil society are thus held up as the way to achieve what governments and international organizations cannot manage alone. In the last years, the number of global public private partnerships has risen sharply and continues to grow. In this context, “global partnerships” are becoming the “new mantra” shaping the discourse on global politics. According to the proponents, there is no alternative to these new models of multilateral cooperation. The new partnership approach, however, has by no means escaped criticism. Concerns have been raised about the overwhelming influence of private business and the technocratic and profit-oriented approaches it encourages.

The workshop therefore intends a critical assessment of these developments. It wants to trace the scale and scope of global “partnerships”, and to discuss the limits, risks and side effects of this paradigm shift in international politics.
Workshop Panelists

Moderator: Thomas Manz (FES Germany)

Introductory Input: Jens Martens (Global Policy Forum Europe)

Panel Discussants:

Samuel Ochieng, Consumer Information Network, Kenya
Roberto Bissio, Social Watch, Uruguay
Daniel Mittler, Greenpeace International
Chee Yoke Ling, Third World Network
David Boys, Public Service International