

Brief report
On
Earth Vikalp Sangam / Global Alternatives Confluence - Malmo sessions
21st and 24th August 2018

Introduction

Two sessions on the proposal for an Earth Vikalp Sangam (EVS) / Global Alternatives Confluence (GAC) were organised during the International Degrowth Conference in Malmo, Sweden. The first gathering on 21st August focused on proposing the idea of the conference and getting the sense of need and feasibility of a EVS/GAC, while the second session on 24th August aimed at getting a few more inputs on what could GAC possibly look like. About 30 to 40 people attended each of these sessions, several of them representatives of various networks, diverse initiatives, groups, and social movements. The sessions had stimulating discussions on what is an alternative, need of the EVS/GAC process, underlying principles that could be used for the process, and a possible structure. The moderators however ensured that these discussions remain open-ended and exploratory, since the idea of such a Confluence is still tentative.

The Vikalp Sangam (Alternatives confluence) India process that started in 2014 was briefly introduced. The aim of VS process is to provide a platform to constructively challenge the current ‘development’ paradigm, and bring together practitioners, thinkers, researchers of alternative initiatives to learn from each other, build alliances and collectively evolve alternative practices, concepts and futures that are ecologically sustainable and socio-economically equitable.

A brief background to the need to have a similar confluence at the international level was put forth. Recognising that there are various alternatives that exist in other parts of the world as scattered movements with common threads, the GAC could enable to bring these threads together. Also to understand, how different movements are trying to reconceptualise democracy, who controls the economy, what are the values and principles of transformative alternatives.

Questions posed for discussion:

1. How would an EVS/GAC add value to existing regional and global processes and networks?
2. How will it link to these existing regional or global processes, and especially the World Social Forum?
3. What are the key principles for a GAC, e.g. democratic, flexible, inclusive, etc?
4. What kind of structure (or unstructure!) would best meet these principles?
5. What sorts of initiatives would the GAC be open to; what is a systemic/transformational alternative, how to distinguish these from superficial, ‘false’ solutions?
6. How will a GAC be resourced?
7. What are the next steps?

Discussion points

Some of the key discussions points that came up:

1. Concerns were raised with regards to actually defining the GAC and its feasibility and the purpose. It would be worthwhile to come up with a mission statement that could be circulated amongst networks.
2. In general, participants supported the need for the process to build solidarity and critical mass to bring about systemic changes.
3. Alternatives to not just capitalism but also to patriarchy, racism, neo-colonialism, casteism, anthropocentrism, productivism, were necessary to bring on board. The process to be mindful of historical and contextual specificities.
4. Some participants also cautioned to ponder upon the inclusivity of the process i.e. how to be inclusive while being discriminating so as to bring in maximum diversity of movements and initiatives while not getting sidetracked by superficial 'solutions' that do not challenge current systems.
5. Hence the question: what will be the organising and working principles of this process? How to ensure it remains truly democratic and horizontal, while also focused and heading in some direction? (see below, suggested principles)
6. On the question of whether the process should be independent or be part of the World Social Forum, several responses emerged:
 - There is a crucial need to keep the WSF alive, even in its present weakness and despite criticism; it still attracts a huge amount of people, and is a great space to sharpen the critique of our system since different perspectives and different movements around the world gather during WSF. The EVS/GAC could add a focused element of transformative/systemic alternatives to the WSF.
 - It would also enable the most diverse contributions from different territories without excluding people because of lack of resources etc.
 - But, WSF is not an advocacy platform which can be very constraining. Also, participants were uncertain about the role of the global council in WSF and their control in decision making.
 - The general opinion was that the EVS/GAC actively participate in the WSF and other such platforms, but also establish its own identity. .
7. Some participants strongly felt the need to be grounded in local level actions and not become an elite gathering. Hence, to demonstrate the connections between various processes happening at various levels, there is a need to ensure that it is an open space of participation for the local communities, individuals, and organisations. There could also be an active effort to promote the exchange of cultures and communities.
8. The process at the early stage could focus on facilitating the documentation and sharing of these initiatives across the world. This could mean formulating the narratives around the alternatives through stories. It could be an online platform at the start.
9. The idea to also focus on social media platforms and innovative use of various open source means of communication in determining the shape of the social movements was also raised.
10. In terms of feasibility, some participants felt that the initial GAC gathering could be at the regional or continental level, building up to the global, which need not be frequent.
11. For the process itself, the important question is - How do we make sure all processes of the EVS/GAC (discussions, organisation, relations to each other, decision-making, etc) are as coherent as possible with the alternatives we want to bring about?

Some suggested principles

- Inclusive
- Process oriented and collaborative
- Open-minded
- Sharing and caring- earth care, people care.
- Self-reflection and self critical
- Non –hierarchal, non- racial, non-masculine so that it could be a safe space for creation.
- Trust building amongst the groups
- Direct democracy.
- Sense of community and ownership of the process.
- Dynamic process that evolves with changing times.
- Sympathetic communication, love, respect and kindness

Follow up

To keep the conversation and process going, a core team was formed, consisting of: Marta Music (who will peg the core team to start with), Vasna Ramasar, Enric Duran, Tonny Nowshin, Siri Kjellberg, Adam Kajka, Shrishtee Bajpai, Ashish Kothari.

The listed tasks for the core group (these are not fixed, they are meant to evolve along the process)

- Connecting with networks
- Finding network representatives
- Something more concrete on GAC process for people to work on
- Formation of a working group.

Additionally several participants volunteered to spread the idea in their networks, and inform the core team of responses. In small groups during both sessions, participants also listed other networks and global processes to which the EVS/GAC could link.

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