World Social Forum: Moving forward to a new possible world

Thousands of people around the world are preparing to travel this month to Porto Alegre, Brazil, to attend the Fifth World Social Forum (WSF). Although many may have very specific agendas, all share the common aim of working together on the task of building another possible world.

The fact is that another world is not only possible: it is urgently necessary. The very basis of life on Earth is being threatened by a “development” model based on the unsustainable exploitation of nature. The climate is being destroyed, water is being depleted and polluted, biodiversity is being wiped out while simultaneously subjecting part of it to genetic manipulation, soils are being poisoned and eroded.

At the same time, the prevailing economic model is mercilessly exploiting human societies –described as mere “human resources”- while increasing poverty, unemployment and loss of livelihoods.

It is thus clear that change is necessary, both from a social and an environmental perspective. In that respect, it is interesting to note that there is a growing perception among many of the social and environmental activists that will be attending the WSF about the need of bringing together struggles and issues that have until now been isolated from each other, as a means of strengthening the movement for change. This implies re-analizing the thematic areas from a different perspective, first trying to visualize the “hidden” issues within and then acting to establish links with the relevant organizations already working on them.

For instance, at a first glance, forests may appear to many as a typical environmental issue. However, forests are also a typical human rights issue, particularly where their destruction –or even their conservation- implies the eviction of indigenous peoples or local communities that depend on them for their livelihoods. Forests are in many cases an issue related specifically to women, or youth or forest workers, wherever their exploitation results in differentiated impacts to those social groupings.

Clear links can also be identified with apparently more removed issues and actors. For example, international trade agreements may result in further forest destruction through decreased regulation; international financial institutions will provide funding for logging, dam building, mining, oil exploitation or shrimp farming, which usually result in environmental and social disasters in forest areas; another international financial institution -the International Monetary Fund- may impose structural adjustment programmes which will result in further forest destruction.

The above are only a few examples of a much longer list of issues and actors related to forests and it is clear to us that it is necessary to establish as many links as possible with people working on them. Bringing the issues and struggles together is a step in the right direction and the World Social Forum will certainly provide a good opportunity for moving further forward on that path.