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During the summer and early fall of 2004, Partners of the Americas' Center for Civil Society worked with organizations across the United States to convene six public forums on pressing issues addressed in the Summits of the Americas. Hundreds of people participated in the events, which were held in San Antonio, Texas; Kansas City, Missouri; Davis, California; Chicago, Illinois; Boston, Massachusetts; and Raleigh, North Carolina. The Summits of the Americas are a mechanism for regional policymaking in the Americas on social, economic, and political issues that impact the lives of millions of people. The work that governments do in the Summits to advance development in the Americas is difficult. It must be complemented by an active civil society that provides feedback on how civil society organizations (CSOs) and citizens understand the issues facing the region. CSOs can also help governments identify needs, prioritize issues, and devise potential solutions. The Summit forums contributed to this effort by providing a space for students, Partners volunteers, artists, teachers, former Peace Corps volunteers, CSO members, government officials, concerned citizens, and others to dialogue and deliberate about a range of important issues facing the Americas and the world.

Although all of the forums fostered dialogue among civil society participants on Summit-related issues, each forum was tailored to the interests of the community where it was held. Some of the forums featured speakers, and some incorporated small group discussions or public deliberation. In San Antonio and Chicago, participants focused on several issues, including the environment, education, and the role of the United States in the Americas. The speakers and participants at the forum in Raleigh honed in on one topic: the complex question of immigration. Participants in Boston and Kansas City deliberated on possible options for dealing with global issues such as armed conflict, health, human rights, and economic development. And, in Davis, a moderator guided participants in a deliberation on the problem of global hunger. All six forums began with an introduction to the Summits of the Americas. Opening remarks also provided an overview of the status in the United States of the democracy-related commitments made by the president at the last Summit of the Americas, which was held in Quebec in 2001.

A brief word about deliberation. Partners believes that deliberation is important when political decisions have to be made because it engages people in considering the advantages as well as the tradeoffs of different policy choices. In deliberation, people discuss a common problem by considering multiple points of view and weighing the costs and benefits of various options for action. Deliberation is not a partisan debate but, rather, collective reasoning about choices people can accept. Public deliberations can inform governments about the public's views on issues, which can be invaluable to decision makers as they formulate policy solutions.

While it would be a challenge to glean shared recommendations for action from conversations on such seemingly disparate issues as trade, education, hunger, and immigration, recognizing commonalities in what the participants value was not difficult. Even though the dialogues did not all address the same issues, five common themes emerged as things people valued: human rights, equality, responsibility, cooperation, and education. To be sure, they were not always in agreement about the exact contours of these categories, and some stressed certain aspects over others. But, in general, the forum participants valued these concepts as essential to any approach to international relations.¹ This report will highlight these common themes and provide a summary of each of the forums.

The Summits of the Americas

Since 1994, the Summits of the Americas have brought together the region's leaders to discuss common concerns, develop a shared vision, and seek cooperative solutions for the social, economic, and political development of the hemisphere. While presidents and prime ministers only come together in a Summit every four years, the Summit process is ongoing. Between Summits, governments work to develop strategies for implementing commitments adopted at previous Summits and negotiate the mandates and declarations to be signed by their countries' leaders at the next Summit.

There have been three Summits of the Americas: Miami, Florida, in 1994; Santiago, Chile, in 1998; and Quebec, Canada, in 2001. In addition, a Summit on Sustainable Development took place in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, in 1996, and a Special Summit of the Americas was held in Monterrey, Mexico, in January 2004. The fourth regularly scheduled Summit of the Americas will be held in Argentina in November 2005.

CSOs throughout the Americas play an important role in the Summits. The participation of CSOs enriches the Summit process by giving voice to the diverse points of view held in civil society and by providing governments with policy recommendations. In addition, by monitoring Summit commitments at the national level and pressuring for implementation, CSOs hold governments accountable, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of the Summits of the Americas and contributing to democratic governance in the region.

The Work of Partners' Center for Civil Society on the Summits

Organizing public forums on Summit-related issues is one aspect of the work of Partners' Center for Civil Society to raise awareness about the Summits of the Americas, spark dialogue among citizens and CSOs, and hold governments accountable to their Summit commitments. Partners' Center for Civil Society will convene online deliberative forums in the spring of 2005. Open to CSOs from the hemisphere, these forums will focus on Summits of the Americas-related themes, with the goal of providing input to governments in the fourth Summit of the Americas. In an effort to encourage civil society/government collaboration, Partners' Center for Civil Society also cohosts regular meetings that bring together representatives from CSOs, academia, international organizations, labor unions, and U.S. and other government agencies. At these meetings, representatives dialogue on Summit-related issues, the implementation of Summit commitments, and priorities for future Summits of the Americas.

In addition, in order to monitor national-level fulfillment of Summit commitments, Partners' Center for Civil Society cofinanced a consortium of CSOs from 21 countries in the region. These CSOs assessed the level of implementation at the national, subregional, and hemispheric levels of five democracy-related commitments agreed to by the heads of state at the 2001 Quebec Summit of the Americas: access to information, freedom of expression, access to justice, local government and decentralization, and civil society participation. Based on assessment findings, consortium members are developing national-level advocacy strategies to ensure the implementation of government commitments.² With funding from the OSI Development Foundation, Partners' Center for Civil Society conducted the assessment in the United States and published a U.S. national report, as well as a shorter report highlighting key findings. Both the full report and the executive summary are available on Partners' Web site at www.partners.net.

Why They Came

While Partners' Center for Civil Society and its collaborators convened the forums to provide a space for open dialogue and deliberation, forum participants cited various reasons for attending. Many wanted to move beyond the “buzz-words” in the news and listen to “real people’s opinions.” As one participant commented, deliberating with others brought out “viewpoints that I never would have thought of.” The issues on the table in the forums were complex, and participants valued the time the forums provided to reflect, rather than just react. One person summed it up: “We’re trying to make sense of competing concerns.” But the competing concerns were not just between people but also within them. Some participants wrestled with their own tough choices. One woman from Wisconsin felt torn over the issue of the Free Trade Area of the Americas. Working in Ecuador, she saw farmers struggling to make their living; growing up in a farm state, she also understood the hard life of farmers in the United States. But beyond talking, many people came to the forums because they see themselves as actors. They recognize that global issues “spread beyond the local community but also impact the local community.”

“This is what democracy is about.”



ORGANIZING PARTNERS:

*Alamo Community College District,
San Antonio College*

COLLABORATOR:

Texas Partners of the Americas

*“There are political boundaries,
but we can’t say that this is Mexico’s air
and this is the United States’ air.”*

The forum in Texas was held on June 24, 2004, at San Antonio College, where about 70 students, professors, community members, Partners volunteers, and CSO representatives gathered to hear a panel of three speakers address economic development, education, and the environment in the Americas. The panelists were from the North American Development Bank, Georgetown University’s Cooperative Association of States for Scholarships, and the Lyndon B. Johnson National Historic Park. Following the panel, the audience was invited to comment and ask questions.

While each speaker addressed a different topic—economic development, education, and the environment—they pointed to connections among the three. One was a recognition of the many ways in which the countries of the Americas are mutually dependent. We may live inside political borders but, according to one of the speakers, with the environment, there are no boundaries. For this reason, when it comes to the environment and the world’s finite natural resources, we must think of ourselves as one community. The countries of the Western Hemisphere are not only connected by the air we breathe but also by economic forces, or trade, said another panelist. Latin America is an important market for the United States, he continued, because U.S. companies export a growing number of goods and services to the region and import key resources, such as oil.

*“Better-educated people know
their rights and can hold their
government accountable.”*

The panelists also pointed to the cross-cutting nature of the issues discussed. Education, for example, impacts the over-

arching objectives of the Summits of the Americas: social, economic, and political development. Better education means both greater economic success and stronger democracies, said a panelist. Small business owners must be able to do basic math and accounting, and citizens need to understand their rights so they can hold their governments accountable. Furthermore, according to another speaker, the environment impacts and is impacted by the Summit objectives. As we think about economic development in particular, he said, we have to consider the environmental costs.

“We need to think about Latin America as individual countries and not as an undifferentiated region.”

There are many ties between the United States and the countries in the Americas. One of the more visible signs of this is the growing number of Latino immigrants in the United States. Still, one speaker observed a disconnect between the views held by U.S. citizens and citizens of other countries in the region. In the United States, experience with Latin America most often comes from the news, where stories covering earthquakes, drugs, and kidnappings dominate, masking the day-to-day realities of the different countries. The citizens and governments of much of the Americas are dealing with incredible poverty and crime, he said, and the United States must begin addressing these and other issues before they become crises.

At the Special Summit of the Americas in January 2004, the hemisphere’s presidents and prime ministers agreed to promote micro, small, and medium enterprises. One speaker said that to facilitate this kind of entrepreneurship and general economic growth in Latin America, property rights, banking regulations, and tax laws must be clear. In addition, the processing of remittances, or the money immigrants in the United States send to their families in other countries, must be made easier because they are a large source of income for Latin American countries.

After the panel discussions, forum participants voiced concern about the role of the United States in other countries. They wondered if the U.S. government, U.S. businesses operating abroad, or even U.S. programs to train foreign teachers exert undue influence on the affairs of sovereign nations. One person questioned the efficacy of the Summits themselves, commenting that Summit promises lead to raised expectations and then, ultimately, disappointment when commitments are not achieved. Another remarked on the role of government: “It needs to be reemphasized that government is very important and that business can’t solve all of our problems.”

“The Summits are very idealistic. What about all of the promises made that haven’t been fulfilled?”



Human Rights

“All individuals are valuable.”

MOST PARTICIPANTS AFFIRMED THE CONCEPT OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS BASED ON “INTRINSIC HUMAN VALUE.” SOME SAW RIGHTS PRINCIPALLY IN TERMS OF FREEDOM; OTHERS FOCUSED ON THE FULFILLMENT OF BASIC NEEDS, SUCH AS FOOD AND HEALTH CARE. BUT DELIBERATION CENTERED ON THE ABILITY TO AGREE ON OR GUARANTEE SUCH RIGHTS WORLDWIDE.

Some felt that universal standards are necessary to protect human rights, and others questioned the viability of being able to apply such agreements. “We have the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” one man pointed out, “but what about enforcement?” For many, the possibility of being able to “establish a common sense of morality” across cultures was difficult to imagine. “When you value people making choices for themselves, it’s hard to favor [a universal standard],” said a participant.

ORGANIZING PARTNERS:

*Missouri Partners of the Americas,
Kansas City Consensus*

COLLABORATORS:

*Kansas City Public Television,
Kansas City Public Libraries,
University of Missouri,
Kettering Foundation*

Held in the newly renovated Kansas City Public Library in downtown Kansas City on July 26, 2004, “The Summits of the Americas and Global Governance” forum drew about 30 students, teachers, Partners volunteers, community members, and professionals for an evening of deliberation on problems that reach beyond borders. With the assistance of experienced moderators and the Kettering Foundation’s “Tackling Problems beyond Borders” issue book, participants in the Kansas City forum considered the benefits and drawbacks of four options

for action related to global problems: 1. Address natural threats, such as disease and pollution, 2. Protect people from armed aggression, 3. Secure universal human rights and democratic participation, and 4. Ensure fair competition in the world market. Given the world’s limited resources, participants struggled with the costs and benefits of these choices.

*“Are we part of the world,
or do we just care for our own?”*

Among the most prominent threads of discussion that unfolded from the four choices was the notion of the interconnectedness of the United States with the rest of the world. Many forum participants felt that Americans’ sense of being part of the world had atrophied since the mid-twentieth century and that it now must be revived. Specifically, participants emphasized that an understanding of the country’s privileged position should be accompanied by an appreciation of the responsibility such a stature entails.

In particular, participants focused on the power and responsibility of pharmaceutical companies. Devastating diseases such as HIV/AIDS may not yet be curable, but some of the participants felt that large drug companies should use their resources to provide free or low-cost drugs to those who cannot otherwise afford treatment. Some disagreed, pointing out that each new drug requires years of development and that if drug companies cannot recoup their investments, they will not continue to engage in research.

“Can we agree with certain rights?”

Do people have a right to medicine if they are ill? How do we deal with religions and cultures that encourage oppression? Participants addressed these and other difficult rights questions when they considered the need for a universal code of human rights, one of the possible actions suggested in option three. Agreeing that all people are valuable, as participants delved deeper into the issue, they uncovered tension between valuing individuals and valuing communities. They also found tension between allowing people to make choices for themselves and requiring minimum standards of conduct. “As soon as you draw a line, someone’s outside of it,” concluded one man.

“There are ways business is conducted that aren’t very good practices. There’s no accountability.”

Responsibility also resonated with participants in option four: create fair competition in the world marketplace. One man said, “If companies work in a region, they should treat the region and people with consistency.” Disagreement centered on the role of free trade, with some contending that “trade is the only thing that leads to development,” and others more skeptically insisting that “economic interests answer to no one.” Concern about the accountability of companies may have been tempered when one man pointed out that “the European Union took on Microsoft.” Whether or not accountability should be imposed externally (from the government or from citizens) or if companies must hold themselves to a higher standard was not resolved. According to one participant, companies should be free to do as they please as long as governments do not offer them special tax breaks.

“We need an integrated approach, and different countries need different things.”

After considering the options presented in the issue guide, weighing the costs and benefits, the participants came to the conclusion that they could not select just one problem to address. They decided only an integrated approach that considers the particular needs of different countries will work. The forum ended with participants circulating a sign-up sheet for those who wanted to continue the conversation over e-mail.



Equality

“The root problems are power, access,
and control of resources.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF EQUALITY ECHOED IN THE WORDS OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE FORUMS. MANY ACKNOWLEDGED THE GROWING DISPARITY BETWEEN THE RICH AND THE POOR AND IDENTIFIED POSSIBLE MEASURES TO NARROW THE GAP. WHILE PARTICIPANTS SEEMED TO AGREE ON THE NEED FOR EQUAL ACCESS TO MARKETS, THEY DID NOT AGREE ON EXACTLY WHAT EQUAL ACCESS WOULD LOOK LIKE.

They considered: should there be completely free trade, or should nascent markets in growing economies be protected until they can compete? Is it right for countries to subsidize domestic industries to make them more competitive?

Unequal access to resources, including capital, health care, education, and housing, was identified as a barrier to bridging the rich/poor divide. The lack of equal respect for all ethnic and racial groups was foremost in the minds of some participants. They remarked that the media perpetuates stereotypes of people from other countries as backward and brands certain groups as people to fear. Other forum participants thought of equality in terms of participation. For them, development must involve—as equal partners—the very people it is designed to help. One man emphasized the need for developing countries to have an equal voice in trade decisions with the more developed nations. Similarly, “experts,” according to one person, should listen to “other voices.”

ORGANIZING PARTNER:

ACDI-VOCA

COLLABORATORS:

*International House of Davis,
University of California Cooperative Extension,
National Issues Forums*

On July 27, 2004, near the campus of the University of California, Davis, a group of about 25 concerned citizens gathered to consider the problem of world hunger. Specifically, they reflected on “America’s Role in Feeding the World,” as the issue book that guided the conversation is titled.³ With the help of a moderator, students, professors, CSO members, professionals, and other interested individuals weighed the benefits and tradeoffs of three options for tackling world hunger: 1. Research, development, and education, 2. A total commitment to end hunger/food is a human right, and 3. Open competition to foster a market solution.

For the forum participants in Davis, world hunger is not only an agricultural problem but also, fundamentally, a political issue. Participants acknowledged that agricultural research has made great strides over the past century. The core causes of chronic hunger (as opposed to crisis-induced food shortages) are more often a lack of access and control over capital and other resources than a result of unproductive land. One person brought the issue close to home: “There are hungry people in Davis because they don’t have jobs or because they aren’t paid a living wage. People don’t want to look at it because it’s much bigger than providing meals.” Participants also identified political instability as another major factor in situations of chronic hunger. “Look at East Africa,” said one. Another contended that more money is spent on war than on hunger alleviation: “The United States spends less than 1 percent of GNP [on foreign aid]. If we had enough resources available, we could do a lot of things.”

“We need to address the root of the problem. Why is there hunger?”



“If markets weren’t protected in the United States and the European Union, other countries would be able to export products [to them].”

According to forum participants, inequality of access and control is also accompanied by inequality of participation in development and governance. Participants identified investment in local agriculture education institutions and grassroots development, including outreach to the rural poor, as necessary for combating hunger and malnutrition. Partnerships between universities, aid organizations, and beneficiaries are important, said one participant, but the beneficiaries must have an ownership role. Some felt that developing countries must have a stronger voice in international trade, and one suggested that the votes of developing countries in the World Trade Organization should be weighted. Another participant added that all countries must be democracies so that “the people are in power.”

The participants also considered the role of the market in alleviating world hunger. They reflected on free trade and on the fairly new practice of “fair trade.” Some questioned whether or not truly free trade is possible in the current international environment, where some countries have a lot of resources and others, very few. “Trade implies reciprocity. By definition, people who are resource poor don’t have anything to give back,” said one participant. Another claimed, “The free market and fair trade are antithetical. In free trade, there is no room for heart or justice.” A participant questioned the larger efficacy of the fair trade movement: “We’re going in the wrong direction to talk about consumers being able to make a difference in hunger.” Many participants were concerned about the agricultural subsidies the United States and the European Union provide their farmers which, in the words of one, “make it so other countries can’t compete.” One person recognized that truly free trade would mean the end of subsidies and would provide developing countries access to new markets.



Responsibility

“[We] need to recognize our interconnectedness and our responsibility to one another.”

WHETHER TALKING ABOUT HUNGER, IMMIGRATION, OR EDUCATION, THE NOTION OF RESPONSIBILITY WAS A PERSISTENT THREAD LINKING PARTICIPANTS' COMMENTS WITHIN AND BETWEEN FORUMS. RESPONSIBILITY WAS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT IN REGARD TO TWO TOPICS: THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES IN THE WORLD AND THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUALS IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS.

Forum participants saw the United States as a powerful force in the international arena, with both positive and negative consequences. They believed that this elevated status brings certain responsibilities. Many expressed a strong sense of identification with people outside national borders, understanding problems in other countries as shared and therefore requiring the attention of the international community. This sentiment was reflected in a wish to see the United States as a leader in addressing global problems, including those that may fall beyond the government's immediate priorities. Some participants also felt that in order for this to happen, an awareness of the United States as part of the world and its responsibility to use its stature to help other countries must be reestablished in the country's national identity. Leaders in the United States, several participants suggested, should dedicate more resources to foreign aid. Others believed the United States should focus on greater cooperation with other countries.

The United States' actions are not limited to the government. Individuals, too, must play their part. As one woman put it, "We have a Bill of Rights but no bill of responsibilities. We need to focus on responsibilities." Participants identified various ways for individuals to become more engaged, including learning about global issues. They identified newspapers as just one of the ways to gain access to information about what is going on in the world. Studying a foreign language and getting to know another country through short-term volunteerism are also powerful means for increasing understanding, according to participants. One woman underscored the need to establish ties with people from other countries: "We hear how international issues impact us personally, but it can go both ways." She then asked, "If we have personal relationships across borders before international problems flare up, how can these personal relationships be used to address the international situation?"

ORGANIZING PARTNERS:

*Illinois Partners of the Americas,
ACDI-VOCA*

COLLABORATOR:

National Peace Corps Association

On August 6, 2004, as part of the National Peace Corps Association's 25th Anniversary Conference, close to 30 Partners volunteers, returned Peace Corps volunteers, and others participated in a "Public Forum on the Summits of the Americas." Two panelists opened the forum. The Consul General of Brazil in Chicago provided the Brazilian perspective on the Summits, and a speaker from the Multilateral Investment Fund of the Inter-American Development Bank talked about the role of remittances in Latin America. After the presentations, forum participants engaged in small group discussions focusing on the following questions: What issues do you think should be priorities in the Americas?

Why? To what extent and how should the United States be involved in the Americas? What do you see as the role of individual citizens in the U.S. relationship with the rest of the Americas?

*"There needs to be more
awareness-raising of Latin America
in the U.S. press."*

Participants identified narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor in Latin America as one of the top priorities in the region. They considered several strategies. Acknowledging the role of CSOs in offering services to the poor and in holding governments accountable, they concluded that more assistance should be offered to "start-ups" as well as to established CSOs in the region. According to forum attendees, the U.S. media should increase coverage of the Americas in order to raise awareness of the key issues in the region among U.S. citizens and elected representatives. Other priorities participants named that are closely related to inequality and poverty reduction include bridging the digital



divide, reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS, increasing the level of dialogue between governments and civil society, and leveraging remittances sent by immigrants to their home countries.

Many of the Chicago participants were involved in volunteer activities related to the Americas, were former Peace Corps volunteers in the region, or both. Not surprisingly, they expressed strong support for volunteerism as a way for individuals to make a difference in Latin America. The participants noted additional ways for people to become involved, including accessing newspapers from the region via the Internet and studying one of Latin America's many languages. They also saw potential for the National Peace Corps Association to convene a meeting of returned Peace Corps volunteers, members of Congress, and CSOs with the purpose of devising strategies for addressing issues in the Americas.

“[We should] encourage more short-term volunteerism in other countries, so people can gain a new understanding of the issues.”

“There is a need to develop alternative forms of communication to promote and educate people about the Summit.”

The group also considered the Summits of the Americas. They pointed to the importance of concrete and actionable Summit declarations. While affirming the spirit of Summit commitments, forum participants also called them “too global, too diffuse, and most likely unattainable.” They were also struck by the fact that they could not name any specific initiatives or programs that have resulted from the Summit process, and they determined that more must be done to inform citizens about Summit goals and achievements. Recognizing that governments in the hemisphere change and that with new leadership come new priorities, participants emphasized the need to maintain continuity between Summits in terms of Summit objectives and strategies for accomplishing them. Finally, they felt that U.S. participation in the Summits makes it difficult for the agenda to be “neutral.” The United States should focus “more on cooperation and project-specific successes,” they said.



Cooperation

“We need to break down the artificial boundaries between us.”

BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE IN THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF CITIZENS IN THE WORLD, FORUM PARTICIPANTS VALUED INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION. AS ONE WOMAN PUT IT, “WE HAVE WAY MORE IN COMMON. NATIONALISM GETS IN THE WAY. WE HAVE TO COOPERATE.”

Supporting international cooperation is also a practical approach for many forum participants. They acknowledged the role of communications technology in facilitating greater cooperation across borders. And several thought of strengthening international organizations as a way to make military engagement less attractive. Some saw working with other nations as strategic: “You have to recognize that you won’t always be the strongest and the most powerful.” Still, others were skeptical, questioning the effectiveness of international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, though they saw hope in reforms that make these bodies stronger and more participatory. While participants largely understood cooperation to be between countries in the international arena, some thought of it in terms of building networks and reaching out across sectors to foster collaboration between business, government, and civil society.

ORGANIZING PARTNER:

Massachusetts Partners of the Americas

COLLABORATORS:

New England Center for Civic Life at

Franklin Pierce College,

Liz Lerman Dance Exchange,

Gravity Arts,

Americans for the Arts'

Animating Democracy Initiative,

Kettering Foundation,

Lesley University

The Boston forum on August 14, 2004, brought together about 30 Partners volunteers, concerned citizens, and artists to not only deliberate on global challenges but also to take part in a workshop on how the arts can impact inter-American and international issues. Using the Kettering Foundation's "Tackling Problems beyond Borders" issue book to guide the deliberation, the participants considered the first two options: 1. Address natural threats, such as disease and pollution, and 2. Protect people from armed aggression.

"[Nature] highlights our interdependence and the need to work together because the environment knows no boundaries and doesn't discriminate."

Environmental issues are an opportunity for the world to cooperate, participants agreed, both because the environment does not "distinguish among cultures" and because it is something we all have to face. Individuals are important in the effort to address natural problems, in

particular, the way they relate to their surroundings. Several participants pointed to a need to change how people think about and interact with the environment, and they underscored the importance of education in this endeavor.

“In Colombia, the conflict keeps people from meeting their basic needs.”

Participants’ opinions on armed conflict differed. In situations where innocent people are suffering rights abuses, some felt force is necessary. Using Darfur and Rwanda as examples, one man stated, “The reality is that people who are being subjected to violence have to respond and have to defend themselves.” Others were skeptical, insisting that there are other ways to resolve conflict. As one participant put it, “Force doesn’t ensure anything except more force.”

Concern about inequality and discrimination emerged from the discussion of armed conflict. Participants were troubled by the designation of the “enemy,”

and what they saw as a tendency, particularly by the media, to falsely label people of color and the poor as the “bad guys.” Many of the participants spoke from experience. As one woman said, “Being from El Salvador, I feel discrimination and stereotyping very personally.” Said another, “I never feel safe because of who I am in this country.”





Education

“There has been a lot of research, but development and education, especially in the developing world, that’s the stumbling block.”

EDUCATION IS A THEME THAT CROSSCUT ALL OF THE TOPICS DISCUSSED IN THE FORUMS. PARTICIPANTS UNDERSTOOD EDUCATION BROADLY—INCLUDING FORMAL AND INFORMAL INSTRUCTION AS WELL AS ACCESS TO INFORMATION THROUGH THE NEWS AND OTHER SOURCES.

Several participants pointed out that the Internet can provide alternative sources of information about issues that are not covered in the traditional news media. Forum participants recognized that knowledge is not the solution to all problems, but acknowledged that it can lead to greater self-sufficiency and further understanding. They gave several examples of the power of education. Learning more effective agricultural techniques, for example, can help farmers increase their output. Sensitization programs can move public servants, such as the police, to build better community relations. In addition, more international programs in schools can expose students to the complexities of the larger world. Finally, some thought of education as a flexible approach to assistance, one that provides information and tools that can be adapted to local needs. In the words of one participant, “A lot of these problems can’t be addressed by a global approach. What works in the United States won’t necessarily work somewhere else. So we need to share information.”

ORGANIZING PARTNER:

International Visitors Council/

World Affairs Council of Raleigh/Durham

COLLABORATORS:

El Pueblo,

North Carolina Partners of the Americas

In Raleigh, on September 27, 2004, a panel of four local speakers and about 80 interested participants gathered to share information and perspectives, learn from each other, and grapple with concerns and tough questions about immigration in the United States. From students and CSO leaders to law enforcement officers and state officials, the town hall meeting in Raleigh attracted a diverse group of people. One of the panelists was a retired foreign service officer and the others were from El Pueblo, Duke University, and the North Carolina Justice and Community Development Center.

***“We are and will continue to be
a nation of immigrants.”***

The first speaker reminded the audience that, though the United States prides itself on being a melting pot, it has also always been concerned about immigration. For example, he said, the attention currently being paid to Latin American immigrants has, in the past, focused on newcomers from other regions. Another speaker laid out the goals of immigra-



tion as she sees them: to advance the values of democracy, to promote economic growth, to contribute to national security, and to strengthen American families and communities. In light of these intentions, she and other speakers questioned the effectiveness of U.S. immigration policy.

“We spend so much on immigration control, but thousands come across illegally anyway. We need to find a workable solution.”

Legality was a point of disagreement among the speakers. While several emphasized the need to find a legal solution to the undocumented immigrants in the country, another did not want to “reward illegal immigration,” commenting that amnesty programs, in particular, encourage fraud. For one panelist, the problem was not about whether people are crossing the border legally or illegally but rather about quality of life: “Flows of people cannot be stopped by laws. We have to address the situation in the United States and other countries.”

Members of the audience were interested in addressing the situation and wanted to know what would come after the forum. The audience’s questions also reflected what they perceived as a “broken” system, and they sought the panelists’ recommendations for “concrete actions” to solve the problems. Two panelists suggested temporary worker permits, though one questioned how such programs account for the children born in the United States to temporary workers: “Those children are U.S. citizens,” she said. The same panelist argued for working with different sectors, such as industries that employ illegal immigrants, in reforming the system. An audience member asked in response, “How do we get the rest of us involved in this work? How do we create networks?”

Conclusion

Public forums are an important part of the policy process for several reasons. They can be educational for citizens by providing them with factual information about policy challenges. In the six forums Partners' Center for Civil Society held, surveys revealed that for close to 90 percent of the participants, their understanding of the Summits of the Americas increased after attending the forum. And 87 percent reported greater knowledge of the issues addressed.

Informed dialogue and deliberation can also facilitate the collective examination of policy issues and the consideration of alternative ways of addressing them. Even more, dialogue and deliberation can transform people's positions—they allow participants to not only acknowledge but also seek to understand different points of view. Individual experiences, such as the personal stories the Boston participants told about racism, can be particularly powerful ways of providing insight into others' viewpoints.

Furthermore, the dialogue does not necessarily end with the forum. Most of the participants in the Summit forums expressed the likelihood that they would continue the conversation with others. Participants in Kansas City collected e-mail addresses to begin a listserv on global challenges, the topic addressed in the Missouri forum. And the Massachusetts chapter of Partners of the Americas is planning a follow-on event to the forum in Boston.

In addition to maintaining the dialogue in these and other ways, communicating the results of public forums to decision makers and CSOs—as Partners' Center for Civil Society is doing with this publication—is important because it brings the voices of citizens into the larger policy process.



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¹ It is important to note that the forum participants are not a representative sample of the population of the United States. The results described here are what happened when Partners' Center for Civil Society invited citizens and CSOs to engage with each other on global issues. One or more observers documented each forum, and Partners compiled and analyzed the transcripts for themes that were expressed repeatedly. No point of view presented here was communicated by just one person, just as no perspective highlighted in this report was shared by everyone. Nor do the issues included encompass everything that was touched on in the forums.

² Partners is grateful to the United States Agency for International Development for its support of these Summit-related activities.

³ "America's Role in Feeding the World" was produced by KVIE, the public television station serving Central Valley, California, as part of McNeil/Lehrer Productions' *By the People: America in the World* project.



PARTNERS *of the* AMERICAS

Founded in 1964, Partners of the Americas links U.S. states with Latin American and Caribbean countries in partnerships that use the energy and skills of citizen volunteers, their institutions, and communities to address shared concerns of social, economic, and cultural development. Its work covers areas as diverse as emergency preparedness, agriculture, cultural exchange, domestic violence, and local government strengthening. Partners is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with international offices in Washington, D.C.