

PROEM

Since 2001, when the first World Social Forum happened, it has generated debate and reflection on its nature, what it stands for, its size, money, the gaps, hopes and dangers, strengths and weaknesses, and more. Some questions and some views :

- The Forum is a set of initiatives; a transnational exchange among social movements, NGOs and their practices and knowledge of local, national or global social struggle — brought about by the current phase of capitalism known as neoliberal globalisation.
- The Forum is not about being against globalisation. It is about a different kind of globalisation.
- Is the Forum getting too big for the hosts to handle ? Is it out of control, moving beyond the reach of the centre, with regional, national, local and issue-specific Forums mushrooming worldwide ?
- Is it facing a positive crisis of growth — the choice is between space and movement; of diversity; and a feeling of mutual responsibility ?
- Is the Forum in danger of losing its social profile as major governments and politicians recognise its importance, and come uninvited and invited ? Is there too much focus on big names ? Is more interaction between intellectuals and grassroots people needed ?
- Is it in danger of being overwhelmed by the past of social movements and internationalism ? Are those who seek to give it a nationalist character putting the ‘new global solidarity’ in question ?
- The Forum surfaces tensions between NGOs and radical movements. Many NGOs want civil society to be strengthened to check corporate power, to restore balance in society, and make capitalism more humane. Most radical movements are uncomfortable with this and the Forum, and seek alternatives for themselves — inside, outside and in counter-forums.
- Do protestors at inter-state summits create conflict and uncertainty as to where the Forum is headed ? The direct action of activists and militants are said, by some within the movement, to capture headlines and bring about concrete but short-lived results.
- What is the role of the Forum’s Organising Committee, the International Secretariat, their formation and their powers ? Where exactly does the money come from, who gets it, and what does it pay for ?
- Is the leadership too male, too privileged, too white, and too middle-aged ? Are there gaps between political and social activities, women’s and socialist groups, young and old ?
- Feminist perspectives and women’s presence have been marginalised and ignored within the Forum. Is the struggle against capitalism still to be prioritised over and against others within the Forum ? Is another world possible without women and without feminism ? Will women and feminists make the necessary impact ?
- Once counter-hegemonic globalisation is consolidated and the idea that another world is possible is credible, will this idea be fulfilled with the same level of radical democracy that helped formulate it ? □



SECTION 3 critical engagement :
the world social forum