

Africa in search of a deeper dialogue beyond Addis and Bamako

Reflections on Africa and the Mumbai 2004 World Social Forum

Thomas Deve*

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Introduction

The African presence at the World Social Forum (WSF) in India remarkably improved the continent's chances of becoming a leading and formidable bloc in the global justice movement mobilising under the slogan "Another world is possible".

Armed with two big banners "Africa is not for sale" and "solutions to Africa's problems are in Africa" the African Social Forum (ASF), which is the prime mobilizing entity for African participation in WSF, joined thousands of other activists who thronged Mumbai to register their protests against neo-liberalism and proudly proclaim that the World Social Forum is not an organisation, not a united front platform, but "...an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and inter-linking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a society centred on the human person". (From the WSF Charter of Principles).

This must be viewed against the background that next to the WSF venue, another group known as Mumbai Resistance (MR) was organising a parallel forum in the Bhagat Singh veterinary college, and had announced "...Critiques of the World Social Forum and its antiglobalisation conference have taken an organisational form."

Calling for more militant resistance, as part of their strategy to sharpen the anti-imperialist struggle worldwide, the group reduced WSF to a puppet of the bourgeois state and big business, simply because its charter excludes representatives of national liberation movements.

Most major roads to Nesco grounds, the venue of mainstream WSF activities and all bridges in Goregoan were visibly endowed with MR graffiti and the most appealing of these writings on the wall was "Debate alone cannot change this world".

This expose was an interesting entry into Mumbai and will definitely affect our debates in Africa on the future and role of the Social Forum.

Having been energised and nourished by anti-capitalist sentiments and resolutely positioned to fight neo-liberalism, most popular forces and progressive organisations under the auspices of the African Social Forum who managed to come to Mumbai will have a lot to discuss and write on, given the two tendencies they confronted in India.

But most importantly, they have to put in place concrete programmes of action and instigate debate on what is required for Africa to bid for hosting the World Social Forum in the near future regardless of the fact that MR 2004 now caricatures the global forum as W\$F.

Reviewing the Agenda

The challenges for Africa became clear during the African seminar which was occasionally punctuated by heated debates and fireworks in which delegates sought for a deeper dialogue beyond Addis and Bamako declarations.

The first of these challenges arose when Oupa Lehulere from South Africa's Khanya College requested that the agenda be amended so that the meeting concentrates on how Africa could turn its perspectives against neo-liberalism into practical programmes of action to mobilize and build movements on the ground.

The circulated agenda covered the following:

Overview and objectives of the African seminar by Taoufik Ben Abdallah.

- 1) NEPAD and the African Union (Mohau Pheko and Yash Tandon)
- 2) Cancun and beyond (Dot Keet)
- 3) Debt and International Financial Institutions' policies (Demba Moussa Dembele)
- 4) The farming issue (Ibrahima Coulibaly)
- 5) Peace and conflicts (Bakary Fofana)
- 6) Culture (Aminata Traore)
- 7) The gender issue (Sara Longwe & Elizabeth Eilor)
- 8) Activities of ASF membership (overview of national and sub-regional initiatives undertaken in 2003 or planned for 2004)
- 9) Seminar on the relationships between social movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America with Samir Amin, Mohau Pheko, Aminata Traoré, Walden Bello, Vandana Shiva and Roberto Bissio billed to be some of the speakers.
- 10) And finally, an exchange of views on "the African social movement and the WSF" where WSF organising committee members from India and Brazil would interact with the ASF.

Lehulere argued that this programme should create room for a special discussion of exactly how Africa organises itself, its networks and give each other support in-between the international meetings, World and African Social Forum meetings.

Efforts to debate the issue in the 300-seater hall which was packed to capacity were thwarted by trade unionist Hassan Sunmonu who argued that an agenda presented before him provided the basis for approaching the Mumbai seminar and any other issues people were raising should be restricted to an "African" audience only, adding that preferably, such matters have to be discussed on the African soil.

But some delegates were not satisfied with this response and indicated that Mumbai had attracted a big number of Africans and no such opportunity was available in the near future on the continent, an argument that forced some Steering Committee members to caucus and establish if a venue could be found in Mumbai for such a meeting.

Before this exercise was completed, George Dor from Jubilee South Africa, sought clarification on the matter, but was ruled out of order by Sunmonu, who in turn attracted the wrath of some delegates who felt that he was being too harsh.

Arguing that a chair could not be ruled out of order by the public led to a temporary disruption of the meeting's proceedings, as there was some heckling and walkouts.

"If we cannot be heard here in an open forum, where else do you want us to speak?" murmured some delegates.

One delegate from Kenya jumped to the podium and bawled out "African issues cannot be discussed in Mumbai!!!"

His sentiment resonated with those of the chair and was not ruled out of order despite the agreement that all issues to be raised from the floor were now directed at the ongoing discussion on NEPAD and the African Union.

Mondli Hlatshwayo another delegate from South Africa who had been noted as a contributor to the NEPAD debate by the chair never got round to speak, leaving many wondering whether the chair was panicking over the enthusiasm of South Africans to intervene.

Ironically, the lead resource persons, Mohau Pheko and Yash Tandon on the NEPAD panel were from Southern Africa.

Their presentations and barrages on NEPAD not only exposed weaknesses of the development paradigm the programme is rooted in, but also proceeded to state what should be done.

Solutions offered and action they proposed, ranged from slowing down Africa's integration into the global economy to reorienting economies of the continent so that they satisfy basic needs of the people before placing emphasis on linking economic growth to export performance.

The controversial NEPAD is closely associated with South African President Thabo Mbeki.

"What is wrong with you South Africans?" quizzed one journalist from Kenya.

Efforts to influence the agenda of Mumbai had started well before getting to India.

It has been learnt that Trevor Ngwane from South Africa had written to the African Social Forum Secretariat suggesting that the Mumbai Africa seminar considers some of the main issues that came about during the campaign against the World Summit on Sustainable Development that was held in Johannesburg, South Africa in August 2002.

In addition to his request, he endorsed the strategic proposals made in Maputo, Mozambique binding the African Social Forum to hold a meeting that could deliberate on some of the thorny issues related to mobilising Africa.

“We fully endorse the decision of the Maputo meeting (held in December 2003) that the ASF should, in addition to the seminar, have a meeting to discuss organizational and programmatic issues, namely, the structure and function of the ASF, the role of regions, the role of the Secretariat, programmes to build and support social movements, etc.

“We suggest that this meeting is very important and should be well-advertised to the relevant comrades and be given enough time to deal with ASF matters. This is especially so in the light of the failure of the annual ASF meeting to sit in 2004. We feel that it is very important to discuss how we will practically build the struggle to defend the African masses from neo-liberal attacks in between the international meetings we attend,” the letter noted.

A response from the Secretariat noted the concerns, but highlighted that it was too late to make any amendments because this was an agenda that would be reflected on the registered events and printed version of WSF programme.

Part of the note read, “Regarding the Seminar, as you know, the agenda was discussed in Maputo. We ask speakers to focus on activities that took place on the ground. As for a discussion on the future of the ASF, it was decided in Maputo to have a special meeting on it next April. I agree that these are important issues that we should discuss.”

It is interesting to note that the framework document for the Mumbai meeting spells out clearly that the purpose of the African seminar was “to enable African participants to express their opinions on issues of concern to the continent and exchange their views and experiences. It also aims to make African issues more visible to the media and other components of the world movement.”

The above pronouncement and call to Africa sounded fine before the “washing of dirty linen in public” doctrine was invoked as a way of defending the programme.

Inside the seminar, the presentations proceeded as outlined in the programme and the African seminar was once again running as a “festival of good intentions” which Outtara Diakalia, a delegate from Cote d’Ivoire, felt was stuck in some routine discourse that seemed not to be changing.

“We seem to be having the same discourse. What happened to our action programme and resolutions?” he noted.

If one constantly attends some of these meetings and is exposed to the same speakers all the time, there is need to listen to them much more closely.

When something new comes out, one might miss it because you think you have heard it all before.

As much as the presentations sounded like another round of Addis and Bamako and even the 2003 African seminar in Porto Allegre, they recognised the new issues and challenges coming out of the struggles versus neo-liberalism, the latest triumph being the resistance in Cancun.

There were open calls to set up democratic institutions, challenge dictatorships and most importantly, resist imperialist manipulation of Africa's political leaderships through processes like the African Peer Review mechanism in NEPAD.

For the latter intervention, South Africa was cited as being manipulated by the British and Americans in its handling of the political crisis in Zimbabwe.

Beyond the Issues

The second day of the African seminar proceeded without any incidents.

The seminar focussed peace and conflicts, culture and gender. There was not enough time to deal with report backs which were deferred to day three.

In terms of developing correct and compelling analysis on global trends and neo-liberalism, the ASF has demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that it is a powerhouse and has the resources that can be competently deployed to any space in WSF.

The big challenge it has to confront relates to the leadership issues, mandates and representation of its various entities. This becomes an urgent matter when one considers the fact that it has been accepted that social movements in their diversity should be mobilized with the view of making them a significant player in the process of building "Another world."

The ASF must now demonstrate its willingness and capacity to mobilise mass, people's and social organisations to articulate and work for vibrant progressive political processes through nurturing worker, peasant, youth, cultural, women's movements and dialogue about these ideas with people from across the world.

This process has started and the Secretariat has something to boast of in this respect, but it will always be confronted by representatives of social movements who have openly voiced their disapproval of NGOs playing a leading in the WSF process.

In the few instances that I have witnessed activists discussing this question, one was left in no doubt that Taoufik Ben Abdallah who has offered to house the Secretariat in Enda, Senegal will be subjected to sniper-type attacks and plots until such a time that the ASF is decentralised to an extent that he will no longer be the sole reference point for the pan-African processes.

This explains why a plethora of documents and analysis on ASF will float around and attract no response from the Secretariat because they will have been read as consisting “personal attacks”, a myth which we now seek to debunk as we challenge each other to come out in the open and voice our concerns without fear or favour.

Related to this, it is anticipated that the Secretariat will be mandated and empowered to have enough personnel that can power communication, systematically collect and organise material from various national forums, disseminate alternative analysis, proposals and strategies of resistance to neo-liberalism that have come out of the forums.

The above will be difficult to achieve if our emphasis is placed on fussing and fighting with each other. We need to spend less time on agonising and start to organise. This will be a major challenge to my compatriots in Southern Africa who have remained outside the ASF process, but are always present in the annual WSF.

Hosting WSF in Africa

Inspired by the presence of more than three hundred delegates in Mumbai, brutally frank and explosive exchanges on Africa’s position in the global struggle, some members of the India organising committee and World Social Forum International Council (IC) found it appropriate to declare their readiness to support the continent in the event that its delegates seek to bid for hosting the world event in the near future.

These commitments were made against the background that Mumbai, the venue for WSF 2004, is a cradle of the Dalit (Untouchables) and left movement in India growing out of the bustling streets of the city that have for long provided a platform for democratic ideas, not withstanding the fact that the same city has experienced attempts by fundamentalist parties to erode the social fabric.

In the words of Brazilian activist, Candido Grzybowski, the world needs a world social forum with an African face, guided by democratic processes and free from governments and other forces that might seek to manipulate the exercise.

Grzybowski had the opportunity to seat in a session where African delegates were receiving reports on continental activities inspired by the spirit of the Addis Ababa consensus document which is closely linked the Bamako declarations, embodying the spirit of Africa’s anti-globalisation activism and foundations for launching a struggle versus neo-liberalism.

For a number of activists who have been closely associated with the world and continental Forum processes, the issue of bidding should not be raised within our ranks. They argue that our social movements have not developed the requisite linkages and vibrancy that would match the energy often associated with Porto Alegre and now Mumbai.

Some even fear that Africa's organisational weaknesses will be exposed and cripple the growth of the process in Africa.

Entertaining these fears would have made sense before going to Mumbai, but now it is too late because some social movements and anti-globalisation activists see Africa as another bloc that can move and shake the imperial forts now being spawned the world over.

Why?

The issue had been discussed in the mid-December 2003 Maputo meeting where it was resolved that Profs. Edward Oyugi and Yash Tandon, Sara Longwe and Taoufik Ben Abdallah initiate the discourse in Africa. While some felt that it was too early to take firm positions on the matter, others retorted that the continent must have some direction on how to tackle the subject in case it is raised in Mumbai.

As an initial step to review Africa's capacity, the Secretariat advised that it was working tirelessly to strengthen the continent's representation in the IC. All present agreed with this approach and recommended that many organisations as possible should familiarise themselves with the principles guiding the IC and participate in its meetings so that Africa's voice is strengthened.

It was noted that while a number of people in the ASF steering committee were expected to serve in the IC, many had not attended the organ's planning meetings consistently.

Recognising this weakness, the Secretariat decided to develop south-south linkages whose labour bore fruits when Candido Grzybowski decided to jostle Africa into the hosting bid.

The same concern was addressed in Maputo with specific reference to Africa's social movements representation in the European Social Forum for example.

It was anticipated that further dialogue on this issue was going to be held in Mumbai and iron out some of the problems the Secretariat had identified.

Missing links in the African Seminar

In the presentation, "Overview and objectives of the African seminar", Taoufik Ben Abdallah rushed through his notes and missed the opportunity to present on behalf of the

Secretariat “The state of the African Social Forum” and why it was not possible to hold a continental meeting as has been the case during the last two preparations for WSF.

The information was there. Some of the arguments were put in the document outlining the logic of the African seminar in Mumbai. In practical terms, this was what formed the basis for organising the seminar on the third day and explains to a large extent why the issues that were thrown out on the first day found their way back.

Unfortunately for day one of the African seminar, most of the “matters arising” were often sneaked into panel discussions as either “points of order” or “process issues”. In the end, it appeared like most session chairs did not have the capacity to manage the divergences because they resorted to technicalities to dismiss “dissenting voices” when in fact this was a well orchestrated political programme as was demonstrated on day three.

This gave an initial impression that ASF was heavily divided and a certain group of people were in Mumbai to create chaos and confusion.

Subsequently, those who felt they were being shut out, sought to organise politically against the technical knockouts resulting in a more spirited engagement on day three.

Logistical challenges and space for Africa

Other important things to note at this stage were the logistical challenges encountered by the ASF Secretariat in India.

Despite the fact that there was an advance party in Mumbai to deal with logistics, the hosts left some ends too loose to the extent that at the last minute, Taoufik Ben Abdallah found himself running round like a headless chicken in his efforts to sort out issues like equipment for simultaneous translation which the organisers had promised would be put in place at the earmarked venues.

Absence of translation facilities disrupted the set time schedules and gave the impression that time management was poor.

On two occasions, proceedings had to stop abruptly because the ASF had overshoot its time limit and other groups were demanding to use the same venue.

At the media centre where the Secretariat had secured space to house the editorial team that produced *Flamme d’Afrique*, the ASF daily newspaper, everything was again loaded onto Taoufik’s shoulders and all efforts to offload some of these responsibilities proved futile as the organisers insisted that they needed his physical presence in order for some of the team’s requests to be met.

In future, Africa should just secure its own space and make sure that all facilities are specified and secured well in advance to suit their requirements.

Similar challenges were encountered in Brazil in 2002 where proceedings took longer when we failed to secure simultaneous translation for the three working languages, English, French and Portuguese.

The Action Aid team from Africa had warned us in December during the Maputo strategic planning meeting and insisted that Africa must have its own tent and guaranteed spaces.

And even in Mumbai, they were still asking, “where is the Africa solidarity tent?”

But now with the benefit of hindsight, one does not hesitate to recommend that in future, we must secure our own space for the duration of the Forum in addition to the display stand, which by the way served as a very important reference point for Africa in Mumbai.

What should have been done?

Since we had many people from Africa attending WSF for the first time in Mumbai who were not sponsored by ASF, it would have been prudent to give them a brief history and organisational structure of the ASF on the first day of the seminar.

And for those who were not privileged enough to have a continental picture of ASF activities but were involved since Bamako or Addis, early interventions in this area would have helped those present to appreciate the context in which one section of the Forum was demanding a change in the programme and requesting that the meeting deals with ways of enhancing accountability on the part of the Secretariat and the Steering Committee.

These are not new issues in the history of the Forum.

If we look back to the July 2002 Report of the Steering Committee of the African Social Forum meeting held in Port Shepstone, South Africa, some of these issues were raised and an action-oriented programming guideline was spelt out.

The meeting spelt out criteria and governance issues the ASF is supposed to deal with and how the thematic representatives are expected to feed back to their respective constituencies.

In the hosting of the pan African meeting before going to any World Social Forum, several criteria were outlined for the selection of the organising country and these were stated as:

- “The existence of an organised and dynamic local civil society
- Possibilities for the African Social Forum to interact with the local social movement and strengthen it.
- The existence of good quality logistic conditions
- Access facility by air and affordable transport costs

- And favourable political context that will facilitate, in particular, the organisation of peaceful public events.”

On financing the Forum and participating in World Social Forum: the Secretariat will continue to deploy efforts to mobilise the resources necessary for the organisation of the African Social Forum and support participation to the World Social Forum. However, sub-regional and thematic representatives should take the responsibility of mobilising most of the funds required for that purpose.

Those serving in the organising committee should report on the state of mobilisation and use of funds before rank and file members, their organisation and their financial partners. They should also provide the same information to the Committee.

On organisation of the Forum, it was reiterated that this should be highly decentralised at the level of sub-regions and networks. The sub-regional and thematic heads within the Committee should take their responsibility in the organisation of the next Forum. At the same time, the local social movement should be largely associated with the various preparatory phases.

On mobilising participants to the Forum, this should be done on the basis of an enhanced balance between actors of social movements, sub-regions, and the various thematic networks.

The parameters spelt out here set the foundation for the positions that sealed the 2003 Addis Ababa consensus document where it is acknowledged, “the Charter of Principles and Values ...will be the philosophical and moral basis of our movement. It (The Addis Forum) has also proposed a number of organisational mechanisms with the view to building a more democratic African social movement.”

It is on the basis of these vague “organisational mechanisms” that the Southern African Social Forum almost failed to resolve how to deal with the “delinquent” Addis Ababa six who were nominated to serve on the continental steering committee as the engine of mobilising the region.

The Addis meeting deliberated on a document entitled “African Social Forum - draft operational framework” which was meant to stimulate broad discussions on the frequency of the Forum, governance through a regional committee, which in turn would be serviced by an organising committee backed by a Secretariat.

Among other things, it was proposed that the African Social Forum would consist of:

- Conferences: to be organised by ASF structures
- Thematic workshops and seminars: to be organised by stakeholders
- Cultural events
- Events for specific groups: e.g. youth, women etc.

It would be greatly appreciated if the Secretariat could circulate a full report from Addis or at least portions of it relating to this discussion because this will help us root our post-Mumbai Africa-focussed discussions to articulate what we deem constitutes “organisational mechanisms” referred to in the Addis Ababa declaration.

Unfinished Debates

It should be recalled that in 2003, Mondli Hlatshwayo circulated his reflections on ASF in a piece entitled “The African Social Forum-A tale of two forces” wherein he concluded that:

“...The ASF has two distinct forces. There are those forces that are radical in character. These forces are largely from Southern Africa. They have attracted very few individuals and organizations in Kenya and Ethiopia. It has to be said that these progressive forces were the minority in the ASF.

“Therefore there is a need to strengthen these forces in other regions of Africa particularly in Francophone countries. The other forces are led by NGOs that are not articulating the interests of the toiling masses. These forces were in the majority in the ASF and they often used undemocratic maneuvers to influence the political direction of the ASF. They want to orientate the ASF towards the AU and other government type structures.”

Guess who dared to challenge this?

It was Oupa Lehulere.

And it is instructive to note that he is the one who was perceived to be “pelting” Taoufik Ben Abdallah in Mumbai and very few people knew that he had issues with the ASF Secretariat arising from the way the Addis discourse was handled.

He had sounded the warning shots long back, but unfortunately, his sentiments were wished away and it never occurred to many that he would live to resume the dialogue.

Oupa had this to say early last year,

“Let us not label each other and call each other names. Our mission is clear. It is for the development of African peoples. There are many ways of doing that and so there will always be people from different perspectives.

“To believe that the African Social Forum will be full of grassroots people, only anti-globalization people, only anti-capitalists is to misunderstand the complexity of Africa. So, Let us focus on ideas and how we can move the ideas forward. Yes, of course it is a tale of two forces. Who will win and why? Let us sharpen the discussions from each side and move towards a consensus as in the Calabash African style and not in the roman winner take all!

Let us plan well for the next regional ASF focusing on ideas, issues and consensus on discussions between the different forces (or whatever you want to call them).”

It is clear that he and other like-minded activists would be aggrieved parties if Africans fail to hold the ASF as this is the Forum where they had mobilized their forces to use as a battle ground for winning hearts and minds around political choices and action they are articulating.

As Southern Africans prepared for the Zambia-hosted regional Social Forum which was subsequently held in November 2003, they found themselves confronting the politics of organizing the ASF and indirectly reviving the unfinished business from ASF 2003.

Davie Malungisa from the Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development cautioned stakeholders to plan within the context of WSF principles and noted what he thought was wrong with ASF.

“We need to give due attention to the issue of defining the agenda. It is my belief that the Zambian team only constitute the hosting country and there is need for their decisions to be take in the context of policy definition through the team that was chosen in Addis and ensure that we are not starting an entirely new process divorced from the World and Africa Social Forums. ...**I also hope that the Southern Africa Social Forum is not a proposal about hosting a Conference, like what the Africa Social Forum has been doing in the past two years.** Let’s have a real PEOPLE-BASED regional Social Forum that might one day form the basis of a World Social Forum hosting.”

He argued further that “The Forum, of necessity, must be openly planned for and avoid the cheap and narrow politicking that we are seeing at the Africa Social Forum; we need a sound process that will address our agenda for the NEPAD/AU debate and how we inform and engage our solidarity partners on the way forward. The counting that we need to do is; how many thousands will attend the Forum; mass mobilization, creativity and ideological clarity must define the nature of our forum and its uniqueness will be defined by how we make it a truly Southern Africa Social Forum with some clear messages to the SADC leaders and tell them that never again are we going to sleep whilst they peer review each other and legitimizing human butchery in the region. I will throw in some issues and contradictions in the movement. Solidarity, mobilization and principles is our only way forward. Thanks to Thomas and EPP for introducing this debate, it is better to debate and fail to resolve an issue than resolving an issue without debate; we leave the latter to Mafia and Bushmasters.

“Comrades, let us be brutally honest to offer clear class issues so that we polish contentious points, avoid experimenting while the people we purport to represent are dying from preventable diseases!” concluded Malungisa.

These are very tough and mean words, but ironically coming from people and forces that were to drive serious processes that saw Southern Africa becoming the only region which hosted a regional forum in Africa. It is also interesting to note that their forum broadly

identified the Addis Ababa recommended governance structures as inadequate when it comes to responding to the need to build another Africa within another world order. Hence the deviation from “Another Africa is possible” to “This is our time. Another Africa is in the making!!! in their Forum communiqué.

Back to the African Seminar

Reports on the final day of the African seminar in Mumbai were meant to reflect on social forum experiences of Southern Africa, Niger, Morocco, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, Guinea Conakry, Kenya, Mozambique, Mauritius, Senegal, Sudan and Egypt.

The session was intended to get a sense of how Africa was organising its social forces, relating with the African Social Forum Secretariat processes, mobilisation strategies, and framework of ideas versus those in the World Social Forum charter.

These issues were all going to dovetail into matters related to organisational space and lessons learnt.

Not everybody managed to present.

Realising that time was not on his side, the chair Prof. Edward Oyugi from Kenya, sought guidance from the floor on how best the programme could be changed in order to accommodate guest speakers from India and Brazil who could not stay for long as they had commitments elsewhere.

The good intention backfired.

Others wanted all reports to be made first while others felt that a pattern had emerged from earlier interventions and any other reporting was not going to change the issues, a situation that created chaos.

Finally, the chair managed to create space for the guests to speak.

It was at this point that Grzybowski dropped the bombshell for Africa “Are you ready to host the WSF in 2006?”

After his departure, the subsequent debate on process issues pitted the “South African voice” and their allies against a visibly defined West Africa, but predominantly Francophone bloc.

They accused the Secretariat of being undemocratic and alleged that its programme for Mumbai had veered from the positions and recommendations developed during a consultative process that was held during December in Maputo, Mozambique.

An intervention on the Maputo issues by Thomas Deve helped chart a way forward as he noted that the Maputo process had deliberated on strengthening the African Social Forum

and recommended that a post-Mumbai meeting be held specifically for the steering committee, strategic partners and any other stakeholder in the forum process. This is where issues of ASF frequency, Secretariat and other processes were to be scrutinized.

Dubbed the Africa-wide consultation meeting, the proceedings in Maputo covered “The African Social Forum in the context of Mumbai”, Country and Regional Social Forum Reports (Mozambique, Southern Africa, East Africa, West Africa, North Africa, Central Africa), “Challenges of organising social movements, CSOs and social mobilisation within the African Social Forum”, review of the Bamako Declaration by Charles Mutasa, Addis Ababa Consensus Document by Trevor Ngwane and “Life after Cancun” with special reference to issues arising from the Africa Trade Network 6th Annual Review and Strategy meeting held in Accra, Ghana; Views from India by Pik Murthy, “Collaborative Framework for African CSOs, Social Movements and cooperating partners in Mumbai” and finally, Logistics for the World Social Forum.

Some semblance of order emerged when it was announced that the ASF Secretariat will organise a special meeting in Africa to address these issues some time in April. On a related note, a Mozambique-based association of farmers, UNAC offered to host a southern-Africa review meeting to deal with the same issues in early March.

Whither Africa?

The African Social Forum has grown in stature and can now meet IC criteria required for an entity to be seriously considered to play a leading role in the convening of the annual global meeting that parallels the Davos World Economic Forum.

In my opinion, the main one was the ASF role in strengthening and mobilising social movements in Africa to participate in WSF as part of the process leading to consolidation of the world social movement.

Its processes saw the building of an African space for the formulation of concerted alternatives to neo-liberal globalisation, based on a diagnosis of the latter’s social, economic and political effects.

The Forum helped define social, economic and political reconstruction strategies, including a redefinition of the role of the State, the market and citizens’ organisations.

Armed with two basic documents crafted in Bamako (Mali) in 2002, and Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) in 2003, those pursuing anti-capitalist struggles within the framework of WSF will acknowledge that ASF has opened new avenues to define citizen control procedures to ensure that political change promotes the expression and implementation of alternative, credible and viable responses to corporate-led globalisation.

The Mumbai Africa meeting failed to consolidate this foundation and found itself bogged down in process issues that should have been addressed before all proceedings. In my reading of the programme, some of the concerns should have been captured in the first

session. We would have been briefed of developments in the IC and what issues Africa was chasing in the context of Mumbai.

This would have been the moment to emphasise that after Addis, the ASF recommendations, placed emphasis on the following working themes and strategies: promoting national, sub-regional and thematic forums and making sure that these spaces, initiated in a decentralised and autonomous way, are organised by national and sub-regional social and grassroots movements.

Secondly, it would have been prudent to reiterate that emphasis was now being placed on promoting the participation of organisations of the African social movement in the World Social Forum through activities, alliances and a marked presence, and finally, encouraging alliances between components of the African social movement and international social movements, especially those in the south.

Thirdly, we should also have been told that the African social forum activities being held in the context of Mumbai 2004 have resulted from a number of processes on the continent and scenarios had emerged after organising two Forums in Africa, that our context (distance, local priorities of the movements, multiplicity of agendas both at continental and international levels, poverty) compels us to define a more appropriate pace to link up with the global movement without competing with continental and regional priorities.

Fourthly, the organising committee of the African Social Forum should have outlined how it had come to the conclusion that it was preferable for the global forum to serve as a space for the convergence of decentralised and autonomous initiatives rather than a repetition of continental events.

Good arguments existed to back their decision for not holding the annual meeting, but were not communicated to the rank and file, raising serious questions about how members of the Steering Committee relate with their various constituencies in terms of sharing information and finalising strategies.

While it makes sense to argue that meeting at the global forum in Mumbai minus the continental meeting would meet the goal of strengthening national forums and reflect better the wealth of the social movements of the continent, the Secretariat should have anticipated that others might interpret that to mean that governance structures of ASF must be reviewed to establish whether they were still relevant for the above task.

For those who did not read or see the Secretariat position with regard to mobilising for India, it was outlined that: "Like the 2002 and 2003 editions, African Social Forum activities in Mumbai are intended to consolidate the African expression in the World Forum and give greater visibility to African organisations and movements."

Further, it was hoped that Mumbai will see African visions and perceptions of another world being integrated in discussions on alternatives to neo-liberalism and this also

entailed strengthening alliances built with Brazilians, Latin-American movements and most importantly, give Africa an opportunity to express solidarity with the Asian people and movements in their struggle against neo-liberalism.

As the Mumbai WSF demonstrated, these alliances are now essential since the international context is characterised by the revival of south-south alliances within the framework of international trade talks for example, and by a situation in which multi-lateralism is being questioned.

An interesting development worth noting about Mumbai, was the relatively large presence and role of Africans who were not mobilised under the ASF. Most of them found politics of how the African Social Forum is being organised more exciting than what issues Africa sought to mainstream in WSF.

The WSF organised panels recognised the role ASF has played in the fight to rebuild another world and actively stalling neo-liberal ascendancy. Literally, every African participating in the WSF panels is closely associated with the ASF. The big challenge for such comrades, who are now seen as Africa's ambassadors, is to translate that individual recognition into organic links with mass movements that are active on the ground.

This will help us shape the discourse on the role of intellectuals, NGOs and social movements and perhaps reduce the tension arising from fears that some cooperating partners are now hijacking WSF through sponsoring our ambassadors and placing less emphasis on social movements who in most cases are not well structured to secure adequate funding from cooperating partners or NGOs for that matter.

Finally, in our search for consolidating and entrenching democracy in the African Social Forum, we must make sure that the latter's operations conform with the realistic set of procedures that guide for example, the IC whose work is now organised around six commissions that deal with strategies, content, methodology, expansion, communication and finances respectively. It has been recognised that as the WSF process expands, this opens new opportunities and creates new challenges, which require changes in the linkages and planning of activities. The ASF should embrace new ways of organising and adopt a framework that is necessary to guarantee that it operates and fulfils its responsibility as an open space.

*Thomas Deve (Thomas@mwengo.org.zw) coordinates the Economic Policy Project at MWENGO(www.mwengo.org), an organisation whose mission is to nurture a community of values by strengthening and mobilising African human resources in support of organisations fighting for social justice.