

Social Forum in the Mountain Kingdom of Southern Africa

AS interns at Action Support Centre we had the opportunity to attend the Southern Africa Social Forum (SASF) held from October 7-9, 2009 in Lesotho. The theme of this 5th edition of the forum was Southern Africa's "Peoples Unity Against Economic Crisis and Oppression."

SASF is an annual platform aimed at providing space for consolidating civil society perspectives on the sub-region's burning socio-economic, political and cultural issues prior to the Africa Social Forum. SASF takes stock of various political, economic, legal, and social developments of the sub-region and devises a means by which governments and civil societies tackle these issues for a better Africa.

The forum hosted delegates from many countries in the region and was especially interesting to us as we had just been dealing with social movements and their effects in our internship class. Thus it enabled us to critique and to contribute to panel discussions from an informed and learned point of view. The objective of ACTION was to ensure that solutions were brought up in each seminar and that not only problems were discussed.

The forum included seminars on youth, women's rights, the global economic crisis, land and governance, and other issues. I attended sessions on youth in decision-making and unemployment, and on constitutionalism, good governance and electioneering in SADC. In the youth seminar, the major challenges highlighted were how to tackle government and draw attention to the youth's problems. Lance, a fellow intern, was able to highlight the importance of using the media, research, and mass mobilization to draw attention to a specific cause and to gather support from elsewhere, ideas that we had discussed broadly in the internship class. In addition, during the good governance seminar, which mainly emphasized solidarity within the region, I emphasized that there was no point in taking a certain stand against bad governance when another country would undermine that stance.

Lesotho was an amazing place to visit. As interns and as "staff" from ACTION we were able to bond and get to know each other, as well as connect with the other social movements that attended. Although I question whether such small grassroots forum of government, have a real impact and effect on policy, it was an interesting experience and definite learning opportunity.

The ACTION Support Centre supports organizations working in the fields of conflict and development.

Through mobilization, building organizations, advocacy, facilitating training and initiating innovative forms of capacity building it has built a strong network movement that amplifies the voices of communities and links them to policy makers at different levels.

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