

Dakar WSF: 11 thematic axes or 21 actionable themes?

In this note I shall compare the eleven thematic axes which have been proposed by the organisers for the WSF in Dakar with an earlier proposal, namely, the twenty-one actionable themes which were introduced by the WSF-IC for the “4th day of activities” of the Nairobi WSF in 2007.¹ My recommendation will be to use the 21 actionable themes rather than the 11 thematic axes to “give a structure to the physical space of the WSF”, to “distribute the self-organized activities” and to “facilitate the communication between organizations, networks and movements, groups and campaigns”, in view of “reaching greater convergence and articulation between them”.

The WSF-IC, the African SF, and the organising committee have proposed 11 thematic axes:

1. For a human society founded on common principles and values of dignity, diversity, justice, equality between all human beings, regardless of genders, cultures, age, disabilities, religious beliefs, health status, and for the elimination of all forms of oppression and discrimination based on racism, xenophobia, caste system, sexual orientation and others.
2. For environmental justice, for universal and sustainable access of humanity to the common goods, for the preservation of the planet as source of life, especially land, water, forests, renewable energy sources and biodiversity, guaranteeing the rights of indigenous, traditional, native, autochthonous and original peoples, their territories, resources, languages, cultures, identities and knowledge.
3. For the applicability and effectivity of all human rights – economic, social, cultural, environmental, civil and political rights – particularly the rights to land, food sovereignty, food, social protection, health, education, housing, employment, decent work, communication, cultural and political expression.
4. For the freedom of movement and establishment of all, especially migrants and asylum-seekers, trafficked people, refugees, indigenous, original, native, autochthonous and original peoples, minorities, people under occupation and people in situations of war and conflict, and for the respect of their civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights.
5. For the inalienable right of people to the cultural patrimony of humanity, for the democratization of knowledges, cultures, communication and technologies, valuing the common goods, for visibilizing subjugated knowledges, towards the ending of hegemonic knowledge and of the privatization of knowledge and technologies, fundamentally changing the system of intellectual property rights.
6. For a world freed from the values and structures of capitalism, of patriarchal oppression, of all forms of domination from financial powers, transnational corporations and unequal systems of trade, colonial and debt domination.
7. For the construction of a social, solidary and emancipatory economy, with sustainable patterns of production and consumption and with a system of fair trade, putting at the heart of its priorities the fundamental needs of peoples and the respect for nature, ensuring systems of global redistribution with global taxes and without tax havens.
8. For the construction and expansion of democratic, political, economic structures and institutions, at a local, national and international level, with the participation of the people in decision-making and in the control of public affairs and of resources, respecting people’s diversity and dignity.
9. For the construction of a global order based on peace, justice and human security, the rule of law, ethics, sovereignty and self-determination of peoples, condemning economic sanctions and in favor of international rules for the arms trade.
10. For the valuing of the histories and the struggles of Africa and the diaspora and their contribution to humanity, recognizing the violence of colonialism.
11. For collective reflection on our movements, the World Social Forum process itself and our perspectives for the future²

1 The 21 actionable themes were prepared by the Content and Methodology Commission of the WSF-IC at its meeting in Nairobi 16-18 December 2006. See

<http://www.wsflibrary.org/images/2/28/Note_of_Information_Fourth_Day_Activities_WSF_2007.pdf>

2 Quoted from the website of Ciranda, <<http://www.ciranda.net/fsm-2010-wsf/article/dakar-abre-consulta-publica-sobre-4562>>.

The above-mentioned 21 actionable themes from the Nairobi WSF in 2007, on the other hand, are the following:

- * Alternative economies
- * Children
- * Culture
- * Debt, taxation and public finance
- * Dignity, human being diversity, discriminations
- * Education
- * Environment and energy
- * Food sovereignty, peasants and land reform
- * Gender issues and women struggles
- * Health
- * Housing and human habitat
- * Human rights
- * Knowledge, information and communication
- * Labor and workers
- * Migration
- * Peace and war
- * Political institutions and democracy
- * Trade and transportation
- * Transnational corporations
- * Water
- * Youth³

The first and simplest difference, is that between numbers. Considering the big size and complexity of the WSF events, would not 21, still a reasonably small number of themes, be preferable to 11?

Secondly, one notes the wording of the 11 thematic axes: they are “for” things, which are put in elaborate definitions. All in all, the 11 thematic axes sound like a minimal political programme. The 21 actionable themes, for their part, are not programmatical. They are just analytical categories, objects which are to be acted upon.

In order to proceed with the comparison, I shall analyze the 11 thematic axes *by* the 21 actionable themes. This means that I have taken each actionable theme and looked whether and how it is covered, either in whole or in part, by one of the thematic axes. Thus I have arrived at the following table of correspondences.

See Table 1:

3 Quoted from the website of the WSF Library Project of the Kenya Library Association and the NIGD; see <http://www.wsflibrary.org/>. The project is using the 21 actionable themes to classify documents on social forum activities

TABLE 1: Thematic axes analyzed by actionable theme

ACTIONABLE THEMES (2007)	THEMATIC AXES (2004/2010)
Alternative economies	7. For the construction of a social, solidary and emancipatory economy , with sustainable patterns of production and consumption and with a system of fair trade, putting at the heart of its priorities the fundamental needs of peoples and the respect for nature, ensuring systems of global redistribution with global taxes and without tax havens.
Children	(1. For a human society founded on common principles and values of dignity, diversity, justice, equality [...] age [...])
Culture	5. For the inalienable right of people to the cultural patrimony of humanity [...]
Debt, taxation and public finance	6. For a world freed from the values and structures of capitalism, of patriarchal oppression, of all forms of domination from financial powers, transnational corporations and unequal systems of trade, colonial and debt domination. 7. [...] global taxes [...]
Dignity, human being diversity, discriminations	1. For a human society founded on common principles and values of dignity, diversity , justice, equality [...] 10. For the valuing of the histories and the struggles of Africa and the diaspora and their contribution to humanity, recognizing the violence of colonialism.
Education	3. For the applicability and effectivity of all human rights - [...], education , [...]
Environment and energy	2. For environmental justice, for universal and sustainable access of humanity to the common goods, for the preservation of the planet as source of life, especially land, water, forests, renewable energy sources and biodiversity, guaranteeing the rights of indigenous, traditional, native, autochthonous and original peoples, their territories, resources, languages, cultures, identities and knowledge.
Food sovereignty, peasants and land reform	2. For environmental justice, for universal and sustainable access of humanity to [...] land [...]) 3. For the applicability and effectivity of all human rights - economic, social, cultural, environmental, civil and political rights - particularly the rights to land, food sovereignty, food [...],
Gender issues and women struggles	1. For a human society founded on common principles and values of dignity, diversity, justice, equality [...], genders [...]
Health	3. For the applicability and effectivity of all human rights - [...], health [...]
Housing and human habitat	3. For the applicability and effectivity of all human rights - [...], housing , [...]
Human rights	3. For the applicability and effectivity of all human rights - economic, social, cultural, environmental, civil and political rights - particularly the rights to land, food sovereignty, food, social protection, health, education, housing, employment, decent work, communication, cultural and political expression.
Knowledge, information and communication	5. For the inalienable right of people to the cultural patrimony of humanity, for the democratization of knowledges , cultures, communication and technologies, valuing the common goods, for visibilizing subjugated knowledges, towards the ending of hegemonic knowledge and of the privatization of knowledge and technologies, fundamentally changing the system of intellectual property rights.
Labor and workers	3. For the applicability and effectivity of all human rights - [...] employment, decent work , [...]
Migration	4. For the freedom of movement and establishment of all, especially migrants and asylum-seekers, trafficked people, refugees, indigenous, original, native, autochthonous and original peoples, minorities, people under occupation and people in situations of war and conflict, and for the respect of their civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights.
Peace and war	9. For the construction of a global order based on peace , justice and human security, the rule of law, ethics, sovereignty and self-determination of peoples, condemning economic sanctions and in favor of international rules for the arms trade.
Political institutions and democracy	8. For the construction and expansion of democratic, political , economic structures and institutions , at a local, national and international level, with the participation of the people in decision-making and in the control of public affairs and of resources, respecting people's diversity and dignity. (11. For collective reflection on our movements, the World Social Forum process itself and our perspectives for the future)
Trade and transportation	6. For a world freed from the values and structures of capitalism, of patriarchal oppression, of all forms of domination from financial powers, transnational corporations and unequal systems of trade , colonial and debt domination.
Transnational corporations	6. For a world freed from the values and structures of capitalism, of patriarchal oppression, of all forms of domination from financial powers, transnational corporations and unequal systems of trade, colonial and debt domination.
Water	2. For environmental justice, for universal and sustainable access of humanity to the common goods, for the preservation of the planet as source of life, especially land, water , [...]
Youth	(1. For a human society founded on common principles and values of dignity, diversity, justice, equality [...], age [...])

Key observations:

- Four of the actionable themes ('human rights', 'knowledge, information and communication', 'migration', 'political institutions and democracy') directly overlap with five of the thematic axes (3, 5, 4, 8). So far so good.
- 'Alternative economies' also seems to correspond to thematic axis 7, while 'debt, taxation and public finance' seems to correspond to thematic axis 6. But, on closer inspection of the wording of thematic axis 6 and 7 one is led to ask if there is any difference between them.
- 'Education', 'food sovereignty and land reform' , 'health', 'housing and human habitat' and 'labour and workers' are all listed as parts of thematic axis 3, which is about 'human rights', itself an actionable theme. However, nutrition, shelter, school, employment and medicare are *not only* human rights. Each one of these objects or areas is, in fact, an “actionable theme” or a “thematic axis” in its own right. Therefore, would it not be smarter to distinguish between these areas of analysis and strategizing, and to reserve separate physical space for each one of these them at the WSF event, rather than to lump them together as human rights?
- 'Water' is combined with environment and energy in thematic axis 2. Yet 'water' has been one of the key themes or axes of the WSF events since the beginning. So why not give it a distinct physical space at the Dakar WSF?
- 'Children' and 'youth' are only indirectly referred to by axis 1, which says that people must be treated in accordance with certain principles regardless of age. Would it not be practical to have an own space for 'youth', considering 1) that there will be a youth camp, which is a kind of separate space, anyway; 2) that 'youth' also is a theme in its own right, to be acted upon both by the youth itself and by the rest. And, why not reserve space for the theme 'children', too? One is also tempted to ask whether the 21 actionable themes would need to be completed with a 22nd one, about old people and their pensions.

The issues of continuity and documentation. Finally, I would like to stress the need to settle for a relatively fixed set of themes, or axes. Yes, the world changes from one year to another , but the basic needs and problems do not seem to go away. The above-mentioned 21 (or 22!) actionable themes provide, in my view, a reasonably complete coverage of the persistent social and economic issues of human life. I therefore would like to recommend that we use them to organise the physical space of the WSF events. There is, however, a second and equally important aspect to this decision on a relatively permanent set of themes, namely, the aspect of the continuity of the WSF process is the sense of its “memory”. The events and the whole process of the social forum need to be documented, and this in itself requires a permanent and well organised effort. And this is a big problem. Because, when somebody asks you to show the archive and the library of the social forum, what can you give as answer? The documentation of the social forum has hardly begun; see, for instance, the rudimentary results at <http://www.wsflibrary.org> ! For the solution of this problem, too, it would be wise to stick to the actionable themes. This would allow us to build the documentation of the social forum, and its external memory -- its archive and library -- in the appropriate, systematic fashion, together with the professional archivists and librarians, and *within their institutions*, the world's archives and libraries. Let's not separate the world's social forum from the world and its memory from what Arthur Schopenhauer called the memory of mankind, namely, the library.